

## SAINT PHOEBE - THE DEACON

[September 3, Saint's Day]



This first-century woman leader of the early Christian community makes a cameo appearance in **Romans 16:1–2**. Paul graciously introduces her to fellow believers in Rome. Paul's words establish Phoebe's high standing in Cenchrea, her home city located near Corinth, and with him. They assure a ready welcome among like-minded followers of Jesus. Warm, personalized greetings to more than two dozen men and women follow, ending his epistle.

A study of Romans 16:1–2 reveals an amazing woman; one whom Paul treats as a fellow minister, one whom he forthrightly, and with humor, acknowledges as having money.

Paul describes Phoebe via three accolades, nouns translated in the King James Version (KJV) as **"sister," "servant," and "succorer."** The New International Version (NIV) changes the last two to **"deacon" and "benefactor."**

However, Phoebe seems under-recognized today as a full minister. Paul's introduction equates her with other leaders in the early movement; men who traveled, evangelized, planted, and led churches. But translations indicate a gender bias and diminish this woman's influence.

First, the King James Version : "I commend to you Phebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also."

***Now, the more contemporary NIV: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me."***

Paul's appositives show Phoebe probably led the Cenchrean congregation that probably met in her home (Finger 1988:5). She served as a minister like Paul (Ephesians 3:7), Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21), Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), and Timothy (1 Timothy 4:6). She freely gave of her wealth to finance and spread the new faith.

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