In this work of historical fiction, Paula Gooder presents an imaginative telling of the life and ministry of Phoebe. While Gooder does not offer an introduction to the book, she does provide helpful comments in the endnotes. She states that her purpose in writing this story is not simply to provide an entertaining novel, but also to inform readers of the reality behind the NT text (225). Gooder sparks the imagination of her audience by disclosing scholarly information concerning the Greco-Roman world through the medium of narrative. Stating that she does not necessarily expect her audience to agree with her depiction, Gooder hopes this work will nevertheless encourage readers to think carefully and critically about the world behind the NT (226).

Drawing on Rom 16:1–2, Gooder depicts Phoebe as both deacon and patron, acknowledging the controversy surrounding each of these terms in the endnotes. While the word typically translated “deacon” can also be understood as “servant,” Gooder maintains that Phoebe was indeed a leader in the church at Cenchreae: in the narrative, Phoebe compares herself to the deacons Stephen and Philip (209, 231). Gooder envisions Phoebe as serving the church both by ministering to widows and by proclaiming the gospel. Gooder also provides a discussion of Phoebe as a benefactor or patron, noting that scholars have often assumed that women could not be patrons in the way that men could, though recent evidence suggests otherwise (232). In keeping with this evidence, Gooder characterizes Phoebe as a freed slave who became a patron after relocating to Cenchreae (250).

Reflecting scholarly consensus, the author also presents Phoebe as Paul's deliverer of his letter to the Roman Christians. She notes that this duty did not only consist of physically carrying the letter to Rome, but it certainly also meant representing the author in appearing before Aquila's when they are mentioned together in the NT, explaining that most consider this the result of either Priscia's elevated social status or her prominence among Christians (246–47). In the narrative, Gooder allows each to remain a possibility (8). Likewise, Gooder makes Junia's status as an apostle abundantly clear. At various points, Phoebe comments on Junia's apostleship, mentioning that her "reputation as an apostle was well known even in Corinth" (38).

Concerning both Prisca and Junia, Gooder gives voice to debates about the appropriate ministries of women in the early church and in society. The character Herodion first raises objection regarding Junia. Junia enters the narrative just after she and Andronicus have been imprisoned for preaching and teaching in a temple (31). This episode draws consternation from Herodion, who seems to reluctantly accept the leadership of women in private church gatherings, but argues that women should remain in the privacy of their homes and cause no disturbances (33). Another character, Patrobas, picks up this argument, stating that, “in proper Roman society women stay quietly at home” and Christian women should do the same lest they threaten the respectability of Christianity (36, 178–79). Each time the public actions of Prisca and Junia are criticized, they do not openly debate their critics, but rather ignore them and continue acting as prominent leaders and preachers. Instead of verbally defending their positions of leadership, Junia and Prisca continue to demonstrate their effectiveness as ministers of the gospel through their actions.

While Gooder offers an imaginative perspective on these women and their role in the early church, certain aspects of her narrative are less appealing. For instance, the story she crafts for Phoebe, while conceivable, is rather melodramatic. Phoebe's various experiences are certainly plausible (especially in the life of a slave), but Gooder has included such an extreme spectrum of trials in Phoebe's story that it feels as though she is attempting to tell the story of every slave through a single character. Gooder attempts to build suspense by withholding information about Phoebe's past, but does so with little subtlety, making the constant barrage of trials both wearisome and cliché. Furthermore, the characters Prisca and Junia are almost indistinguishable. There is often tension between them, but it generally arises out of the array of stereotypical "outspoken woman" traits that both possess; in this case, Gooder's portrayal of strong female leaders falls just short of the mark.

While some readers may find aspects of this narrative lacking, Gooder vividly depicts the world of the early church and daily life in first-century Rome, especially for women within (and without) the church.