

RENAMING IN PAUL'S CHURCHES THE CASE OF CRISPUS-SOSTHENES REVISITED

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Summary

If Crispus was Sosthenes we no longer need to hypothesize that there were two Sosthenes (Acts 18:17 and 1 Cor. 1:1) or two ἀρχισυνάγωγοι (synagogue rulers) who became believers (Acts 18:8 and 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:1). The idea that Crispus was re-named 'Sosthenes' creates a remarkably consistent picture of the individual. Luke presents him as a synagogue ruler who caused many others to become Christians (Acts 18:8), and tells us that the Jews singled him out for a beating (Acts 18:17). The authority that his name carried among the believers in Corinth explains why Paul included him as a co-sender (1 Cor. 1:1). Paul named him 'Sosthenes', meaning 'saving strength', because, through his power and influence, he secured the viability of the fledgling Christian community in Corinth. This style of naming is in keeping with other examples.

1. Introduction

Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14) is introduced in Acts as the synagogue ruler (ἀρχισυνάγωγος) who became a believer. A few verses later (Acts 18:17) Sosthenes is given the same title, and we are told that he was beaten. It was the opinion of John Chrysostom¹ that Crispus and Sosthenes were one and the same person, and this suggestion has recently been taken up by Augustine Myrou.² This Crispus-Sosthenes question is important, not only for our understanding of Acts 18, but also because of its implications for Pauline chronology.

¹ Homilies in Acts 39, 1-2; PG 60, 227-79.

² A. Myrou, 'Sosthenes: The Former Crispus (?)', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1-4, 1999): 207-12.

The majority of commentators, however, assume that Crispus and Sosthenes were distinct. The purpose of this paper is to explore whether the Crispus-Sosthenes hypothesis makes better sense of the data, or whether the majority assumption is preferable after all.

Acts 18:8-17 is our main text. Various interpretations of the passage are possible, but two principles can be used to decide between them. Firstly, we should favour interpretations that have precedents elsewhere in Acts. Secondly, we should show preference for hypotheses that allow the passage to read smoothly, and appear both consistent and historically plausible to a first century writer and reader. This second principle is applicable whether or not one views Acts as historically reliable, for even fiction works best when the majority of its details sound believable.

2. Sosthenes in Acts 18 and 1 Corinthians

2.1 Acts 18:17

We read that all of them (πάντες) seized Sosthenes and beat him. Who did Luke intend to portray as the beaters, and what motive did he intend to imply? The majority of commentators seem undecided on the issue. The ambiguity of the text is illustrated by the fact that some ancient copyists felt the need to amend the text by adding the words οἱ Ἕλληνες after πάντες, while a smaller number added οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι. These variant readings reflect the same interpretive decisions as modern commentators have made, and in broadly the same proportions.

So, of those who give an opinion, the majority of scholars conclude that Sosthenes was beaten by gentiles.³ A difficulty here is that there has been no mention of such a group. How was the reader to realise that gentiles were meant? Those who believe that gentiles were

³ E.g. W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (4th edn; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1898): 259; E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971): 536; W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Vol. 2; 4th edn; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912): 391-92; F. W. Gingrich, 'Sosthenes', in G. A. Buttrick, ed. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962): 428; William P. Dickson, 'Sosthenes', in J. Hastings, ed. *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Vol. 4; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898-1904): 607; R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Methuen, 1901): 331; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1965): 375.

responsible tend to see the beating as an anti-Semitic act of mob violence, but this does not explain why Sosthenes is singled out.

It is natural to take 'all' (πάντες) as referring to the aforementioned Jews who had made a united attack on Paul (18:12), for no other group has been mentioned. If so, what would be the (implied) motive for the beating? It is often suggested that Sosthenes had led the attack on Paul and was beaten for his poor performance. If this were Luke's intent, however, we would expect some explanation of this in the text, but none is given in any of our manuscripts. Furthermore, throughout Acts 18:12-16 it is clear that the case against Paul was being made by a group of Jews and Luke does not emphasise the role of any individual.

A minority view is that Sosthenes was a believer (but was not Crispus) and was beaten by the Jews.⁴ The obvious problem with this view is that we are not told by Luke that Sosthenes was a believer. However, it does provide an implied motive for the beating: the Jews have grievances against the new believing community and, having failed to secure their charges against Paul, they turn, perhaps in frustration, on his high profile associate. The view that Sosthenes is presented as a Christian is supported by the fact that attacks on Paul and his companions are commonplace in Acts, whereas Luke shows little interest in attacks on non-Christian Jews. The Thessalonica narrative (Acts 17:1-9) provides a particularly close parallel to the Corinth story (Acts 18:1-17). In both passages we have Paul preaching in the synagogue, the conversion of many, the Jews becoming jealous, and a failed attack on Paul. In 17:6-7 the mob turn on Jason, a companion of Paul, when they fail to get hold of Paul himself. Then in 17:9 we learn that the authorities failed to side with Paul's camp. If Sosthenes is taken to be a believer, he parallels Jason, and the indifference of Gallio to the beating parallels the failure of the Thessalonian authorities to support Paul. If, on the other hand, Sosthenes was a non-Christian Jew, then we have in Acts 18:17 a

⁴ A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1963): 103-04; classes him as a Christian sympathiser, as does I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002): 299. Louis F. Hartman, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963): 2285 proposes that Sosthenes might have been a Christian. G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983): 366-67 argues that Sosthenes was a Christian, and that the story originally had Sosthenes, not Paul, as the one accused before Gallio.

situation that is unprecedented in Acts. Therefore, the beating suggests that Luke may be presenting Sosthenes as a Christian.

Let us now look at the context of the beating of Sosthenes to see if it gives us any further clues. Gallio had no interest in judging the case that was presented to him, as he saw it as an internal Jewish dispute (18:15), so he gave the responsibility back to the Jews. The words ‘see to it yourselves’ (ὄψεσθε αὐτοί) in 18:15 can be seen as an encouragement to the Jews to enforce their decisions themselves. The beating of Sosthenes therefore fits its context if it is understood as a punishment by the Jews of Paul’s most influential supporter. The beating can be viewed as a quasi-judicial punishment similar to the thirty-nine blows that Paul himself endured on five occasions (2 Cor. 11:24).⁵ It can be seen as a relatively orderly affair, and as something to which Gallio had given his tacit approval. That the beating of Sosthenes concerns the Jew-Christian conflict is supported by the statement that Gallio showed no concern (18:17), for 18:15-16 indicates that the object of Gallio’s indifference is the dispute between the Jews and Christians. Gallio showed no concern for the Jew-Christian conflict – neither during the trial, nor when Sosthenes was beaten. If, on the other hand, Sosthenes is not to be seen as a Christian, then we have a beating at which Gallio does not hint his approval, and which is not anticipated by anything in the prior text.

The fact that the beating occurs in front of the judgement seat suggests that the beaters knew that they had Gallio’s tacit approval, at least. It is hard to believe that an unanticipated, illegal beating would take place immediately after the hearing and in front of the judgement seat in apparent defiance of Roman authority. It is therefore unlikely that Sosthenes was a non-Christian and was beaten by the Jews, as some believe. After Gallio expressed his impatience with them and drove them from the judgement seat, it is unlikely that they would choose to beat Sosthenes in his presence and risk incurring his wrath. Why would they not find a secluded spot? It is also unlikely that the beaters were gentile bystanders. The proconsul was charged with

⁵ This understanding of the incident is essentially that of A. N. Sherwin-White who wrote: ‘The Jews, bidden by Gallio to see to the matter themselves, seized Sosthenes, one of the Elders of the Synagogue, and beat him before the tribunal. This makes sense if one may assume that Sosthenes was a Christian sympathiser of sorts, and that the beating was that of the formal ‘thirty-nine blows’, administered by the authority of the local Sanhedrin, which had taken Gallio at his word’. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society*: 103-4.

maintaining order and would not tolerate an illegal disturbance in front of the judgement seat, whatever his personal feelings may have been.

It is reasonable to ask why the Jews beat Sosthenes rather than Paul himself. However, if Paul had been within their reach, his Jewish opponents would probably have brought him before a synagogue court or a local secular court, instead of having to bring their case before the proconsul. It may be that, after leaving the synagogue (18:7), Paul had placed himself beyond the jurisdiction of the Jewish authorities for the remainder of his stay in Corinth. It is also possible that Sosthenes, Paul's powerful supporter, had blocked the non-Christian Jews from using the lower courts.

2.2 1 Corinthians 1:1

Someone named Sosthenes is given as the co-sender of 1 Corinthians. Was this Sosthenes the same as the Sosthenes of Acts, or do we have here a coincidence in which the same name happens to appear in both texts. It would certainly not be surprising for Luke to record correctly the name of Sosthenes the brother, for he connects Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, Crispus and Timothy with Corinth, as does Paul. Nor would it be surprising if Sosthenes, like Prisca and Aquila (1 Cor. 16:19), had moved from Corinth to Ephesus.

The inclusion of Sosthenes as a co-sender of 1 Corinthians suggests that he was a very prominent believer and that his name carried weight in the church of Corinth. This agrees well with our information on the Sosthenes of Acts 18:17 who, as a synagogue ruler, would have been influential and, if our analysis above is correct, was prominent enough in the church to have been singled out for a beating. Thus, the Sosthenes of Acts 18:17 and that of 1 Corinthians 1:1 are linked not only by their name, but also by the fact that both are plausibly Corinthian believers of some prominence.

The name 'Sosthenes', while attested, accounts for only 0.028% of recorded names in Greek.⁶ It is therefore highly likely that we are looking at one Sosthenes. The reference to Sosthenes as a believer in

⁶ *The Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* has now been published in five volumes (I, II, IIIA, IIIB, and IV). These contain some quarter of a million names, of which only 69 are called Sosthenes, including our own NT character. These 69 cases are widely dispersed in both time and space (e.g. M. J. Osborne & S. G. Byrne, *The Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

1 Corinthians 1:1 therefore supports the claim that Acts 18:17 *does* present Sosthenes as a believer.

2.3 Sosthenes as a Christian

The considerations presented so far encourage us to explore scenarios in which Sosthenes was a believer. The fact that both Sosthenes and Crispus (Acts 18:8) are described as ἀρχισυνάγωγος makes one wonder whether we are looking at one person. While many hypothesise the conversion of two synagogue rulers, this is highly unlikely. Even if there was more than one synagogue ruler in Corinth, there cannot have been many, and the proportion of the Corinthian population that became Christians before the writing of 1 Corinthians was very small (probably between 0.06% and 0.25%).⁷ Furthermore, Paul indicates that the church of Corinth contained few of high social standing (1 Cor. 1:26), whereas synagogue rulers were invariably of high status.

The problem of the rather abrupt introduction of Sosthenes in 18:17 might also be removed if we can suppose that the reader would have been expected to deduce from the available clues that Sosthenes was the previously mentioned Crispus. This will be discussed later. We will first give some background on name changes and interpret the name ‘Sosthenes’ to see what we can glean about his identity.

3. The Giving of New Names

3.1 Contemporary Jewish Practice

The ancients were given new names for a variety of reasons. Roman adopted sons, such as Gallio himself, took the names of their adoptive fathers; freedmen took the praenomen and nomen of their original owners; and enlisted soldiers took Latin names. Egyptians and Jews often took a Greek substitute name. The giving of new names for religious reasons was widespread,⁸ and we will focus here on Jewish

⁷ The number of believers in Corinth by the time of 1 Corinthians has been estimated at about 50: see B. Blue, ‘Acts and the House Church’ in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* Vol. 2 (ed. D. W. Gill & C. Gempf, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994): 175 n. 219. D. Engels has estimated the population of Corinth to be 80,000 (*Roman Corinth*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago, 1990), while M. E., H. Walbank gives 20,000 to 50,000 (‘The Foundation and Planning of Early Roman Corinth’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 10, 1997: 95-130).

⁸ Two examples are particularly informative. Plutarch (*De ser. Num. Vind.* 24, 564c) describes how Aridaeus receives a vision of a kinsman who names him ‘Thespesius’

practice since both Paul and Sosthenes were almost certainly Jews. In biblical times names were far more than just labels, and new names were often given to mark significant moments in the lives of individuals.

This significance, which was attributed to the name, is further emphasised very often throughout our biblical history in the changes that were made in the names of Abraham (from Abram), Sarah (from Sarai), Jacob (to Israel), Joshua (from Hosea), Gideon (to Jerubaal), Zedekiah (from Mattaniah) and Jehoiakim (from Eliakim); changes which were made to honor or glorify a person's newly acquired position or to predict the role of the individual in the future.⁹

In New Testament times Philo discusses the name changes of Abram, Sarai, and Jacob, and says that they symbolised a betterment of character.¹⁰ In each of these cases the giving of the new name immediately precedes the promise of many descendants (Gen. 17:5, 15-16; 35:10), and the connection is explicitly made by Chrysostom.¹¹

An interesting non-biblical example of a name change is that of Beturia Paulina. Her Latin sarcophagus inscription (3rd/4th c.) from Rome read, 'Veturia Paulla (or: Pauc[u]la), placed in her eternal home, who lived 86 years, 6 months, a proselyte of 16 years, under the name of Sara, mother of the synagogues of Campus and Volumnius. In peace her sleep!'.¹² Konikoff writes, 'Beturia Paulina, who was buried in the coffin, had become a convert to Judaism at the age of seventy,

('Divine one'). Aristides (*Or.* 50.53-54; ed. Keil) describes how the god, Asclepius, instructs him, "He said that it was fitting that my mind be changed from its present condition, and having been changed, associate with God". This is followed immediately by an account of how Aristides is named 'Theodorus'. For a discussion of name changing see G. H. R. Horsley, 'Name Change as an Indication of Religious Conversion in Antiquity', *Numen* 34 (1987): 1-17.

⁹ A. J. Kolatch, *The Name Dictionary* (New York: Jonathan David, 1982): 314.

¹⁰ Philo, 'On the change of names' (*De Mutatione Nominum*) 70.

¹¹ *Homilies on Genesis*, homily 40: "God said to Abraham," the text goes on, "Sarah your wife will not be called Sarah; instead, Sarrah will be her name." As in your case, he is saying, I indicated by adding a syllable that you would be father of many nations, so likewise also I am adding a letter to Sarah, for you to learn that now the time has come for the promises made of old by me to come into effect."

¹² B. Brooten, 'Female Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue', *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series* 40 (2000): 215-23.

adopting for the occasion the additional name of Sarah'.¹³ Clearly Sarah the 'mother of the synagogues' was named after the matriarch of the Old Testament, who was named in her old age in anticipation that she would become the mother of nations (Gen. 17:15-16). Paulina therefore seems to have been given a new name following her conversion and the name was chosen to reflect her prominent position in synagogue leadership. There are strong parallels here with the proposed Crispus-Sosthenes.

Another non-biblical example is that of Simon ben Kosiba who was named 'Bar Kokhba' (meaning son of the star) by Rabbi Akiva. The name signified his supposed messianic role and is probably a reference to Numbers 24:17.

Also in keeping with this practice, church leaders in New Testament times often received new names to reflect their role in the creation or maintenance of the believing community. Simon was given the name 'Peter', meaning 'rock' or 'stone', and in Matthew 16:18 we read, 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church'.¹⁴ There are parallels here with the case of Abram-Abraham,¹⁵ who received his new name in anticipation of his becoming the founder, not of the church, but of a nation. Consider also the other two members of Jesus's inner circle, James and John, 'to whom he gave the name Boanerges,¹⁶ which means Sons of Thunder' (Mark 3:17). Then in Acts 4:36 we hear of 'Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name

¹³ A. Konikoff, *Sarcophagi from the Jewish Catacombs of Ancient Rome* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1986): 11-14.

¹⁴ Paul generally uses the name 'Cephas', but switches to 'Peter' only at Gal. 2:7-8, where he describes Peter's role as leading apostle. By using Cephas's Greek name, 'Peter', the significance of which would be more readily understood by the Greek speaking addressees, Paul acknowledges Cephas's unique role as the foundation stone of the Jewish Christ-believing community. Paul's switch from 'Cephas' to 'Peter' and back is not arbitrary but demonstrates that Paul and his readers recognised the significance of the renaming of Simon.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the parallels see W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew, vol. II* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000): 623-24. Chrysostom compares the naming of Peter, James, and John with that of Abraham, Sara, and Israel. He then mentions the cases of Isaac, Samson, Joshua and John (the Baptist), and writes, 'Those in whom virtue was going to shine from their earliest youth received their names from that time, while the name was given afterwards to those who were destined to be famous later.' *Homilies on John*, homily 19 (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, vol. 14).

¹⁶ The significance of the name is disputed but it may well reflect the role of James and John in the Jesus movement. Eusebius interprets: 'Thunder here refers to the preaching of the gospel. For as a heavenly shout occurs like a voice of thunder ...' (*Commentary on Psalms*).

Barnabas'. Luke interprets 'Barnabas' as υἱὸς παρακλήσεως, which means 'son of exhortation' or 'son of consolation', anticipating the prominent role that he was to have in the Jesus movement. Manaen (Acts 13:1) is given in the list of prophets and teachers, and his name means 'comforter'. The suitability of his name and the close parallel with the case of Barnabas, makes one suspect that 'Manaen' may have been a new name, though this cannot be proved. A more assured example is Ignatius of Antioch, who presents himself as 'Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus' (Ἰγνατίος, ὁ καὶ Θεοφόρος) in the opening line of all his letters. From this we know that he was also known by the name Theophorus ('the bearer of God'). He is an example of a prominent Christian with a Latin name who received a Greek name, so he provides a close parallel to the proposed Crispus-Sosthenes. The case of Ignatius Theophorus shows that religious bi-names in the early church were not restricted to those of Palestinian origin.¹⁷

Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus, whose name seems very appropriate for one who may have sponsored the publication of the texts, and this creates the suspicion that he was not born with that name.

New names were, in general, given by a superior to an inferior, and this raises the question of whether Paul gave new names to some of his converts. I am not aware of any study of this, though it is a critical issue, not only for the Crispus-Sosthenes question. Paul saw himself as the spiritual father of his addressees and the giving of new names would be in keeping with this role. Furthermore, Paul demonstrates an interest in the meaning of names (Phlm 10-11, Rom. 16:12).¹⁸ It is therefore plausible that Paul gave new names to some of those under his authority.

3.2 'Sosthenes' as a new name

The name 'Sosthenes' is Greek. It is formed from the words σωτῆρ and σθένος, and it has been interpreted as 'saviour; strong; powerful',¹⁹

¹⁷ For a discussion of his double name, see W. R. Scheedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985)

¹⁸ The rather negative meaning in Greek of the name 'Saul' may have prompted him to abandon it in favour of the name 'Paul', see T. J. Leary, 'Paul's Improper Name', *NTS* 38 (1992): 467-69.

¹⁹ R. D. Hitchcock, *Hitchcock's Bible Names Dictionary* (New York: Johnson, 1874).

‘saving strength: strong saviour’,²⁰ ‘safe in strength’,²¹ and ‘of safe strength’.²² The name would therefore be appropriate for a powerful individual who had become a believer and had led others to the faith. Such a naming would fit the pattern of the other namings mentioned above, in which individuals are named for their role in the creation or development of the believing community. The σθένος (‘strength’) of Sosthenes brings to mind the case of Cephas, whose name also represents strength. It is possible, then, that Paul gave Sosthenes his name in much the same way that Jesus named Cephas. In both cases the name would signify strength employed in the establishment of the believing community. These parallels therefore indicate that ‘Sosthenes’ may have been given his name after conversion.

While the exact role of the ἀρχισυνάγωγοι (synagogue rulers) is disputed, all seem to agree that they had high status and influence.²³ This fits nicely with the meaning of the name ‘Sosthenes’. As synagogue ruler he would have had ‘strength’ (σθένος). All this supports the suggestion that ‘Sosthenes’ was named following his conversion.

To test this suggestion further, we must turn to 1 Corinthians 1:1. Sosthenes is given there as a co-sender. The practice of naming co-senders is particularly Pauline, but he is very selective in its use. He affords this honour only to Timothy, Silvanus, and Sosthenes. It is noteworthy that even Prisca and Aquila and Apollos are not given as co-senders in 1 Corinthians. Turning to the other letters, Timothy is a co-sender of Philippians, and of 2 Corinthians, while Timothy and

²⁰ J. B. Jackson, *A Dictionary of the Proper Names of the Old and New Testament Scriptures* (New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1909).

²¹ M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978).

²² M. F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody, 1957).

²³ Rajak stresses their role as benefactors, which is clear from the epigraphic evidence, and underplays their religious role. Rajak writes that the title of ἀρχισυνάγωγος ‘had far more to do with patronage and philanthropy than with the cultic life of the synagogue’ (T. Rajak, ‘The Synagogue within the Greco-Roman City’, in Steven Fine, ed., *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, London & New York: Routledge, 1999: 161-73). Levine is critical of Rajak and asserts that ἀρχισυνάγωγοι not only funded the synagogues, but also had religious and administrative duties (L. I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue, the First Thousand Years*, New Haven & London: Yale University, 2000: 390-402). All are agreed that they had considerable wealth and status. Rajak and Noy list nine inscriptions that give ἀρχισυνάγωγοι as donors. They range from the first to the sixth centuries (T. Rajak and D. Noy, ‘Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue,’ *Journal of Roman Studies* 83, 1993: 75-93).

Silvanus are co-senders of 1 Thessalonians. In each case Paul includes as co-senders those who were part of his missionary team to the city in question. A further piece of evidence is the fact that Timothy is not a co-sender of the letter to Rome, which he had not visited. The significance of all this for our present discussion is that it indicates that Sosthenes may have been influential in the conversion of Corinthians. If Sosthenes was indeed important in the establishment of the Corinthian church, that could explain why he was included as co-sender of 1 Corinthians. Furthermore, his role in encouraging defections to Paul's camp might also explain why the Jews selected him for beating.

Therefore Acts 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 1:1 are consistent with the suggestion that Sosthenes indeed had 'saving strength', and we have seen that if he was named for this reason, such a naming would be in keeping with known cases of renamings.

4. Crispus in Acts 18

Acts 18:17 introduces Sosthenes rather abruptly. At 18:8 we were told that Crispus was the synagogue ruler, but now we are informed that Sosthenes is the synagogue ruler. The reader is left wondering why Sosthenes now has the title. Is Luke presenting him as a successor of Crispus, or as the ruler of a different synagogue, or as another official of the same synagogue? Why has Luke given no explanation? We should expect to read a phrase like 'another synagogue ruler' (consider the brothers in Matt. 4:18, 21), or a mention of the succession of Crispus by Sosthenes along the lines of Acts 24:27. There is no case anywhere in the New Testament where a second individual with the same title is introduced into the same passage without explanation. The manner in which Acts presents the two synagogue rulers seems strange, even if synagogues could, on occasion, have more than one ruler/leader.²⁴ The abruptness of the introduction of Sosthenes has

²⁴ Horsley shows that more than one ἀρχισυνάγωγος could co-exist in the same synagogue, but it is not clear how common this practice was. This issue has little bearing on the Crispus-Sosthenes question. G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity. A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1979*, vol. 4 (North Ryde, New South Wales: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1987): 218-19.

been noted by Donfried,²⁵ Luedemann,²⁶ and Hurd,²⁷ who use it to argue that Acts 18 consists of a conflation of stories from two of Paul's visits to Corinth. Proponents of this view date the Gallio incident to a later visit by Paul to Corinth. This seems unlikely. Sosthenes was already a believer when 1 Corinthians was written, and he had already left Corinth. It is therefore very difficult to date the incident of Acts 18:17 to after the writing of 1 Corinthians. Therefore the Gallio incident probably belongs to Paul's first visit to Corinth.²⁸ In any case, the problem of the abrupt introduction of Sosthenes would not be entirely solved by the conflation theory. Why would Luke not remove the abruptness? Instead of turning to conflation theories, we should instead look for the explanation within parallel cases.

There is only one other passage in the New Testament where a title is repeated and attached to a different name. This is the case of Bar-Jesus Elymas (Acts 13:6-8).²⁹ We are to understand that Elymas was the aforementioned Bar-Jesus and the repetition of the title μάγος is the only direct indication that the same person is in view. The phrase 'for that is the meaning of his name' (οὕτως γὰρ μεθερμηνεύεται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ) does not link Elymas to Bar-Jesus, for Luke is telling us that Elymas means μάγος, not Bar-Jesus.³⁰ The case of Bar-Jesus

²⁵ K. P. Donfried in D. N. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992): 1020.

²⁶ G. Luedemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Fortress, 1984): 159.

²⁷ J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965): 31.

²⁸ Even if Paul's second visit to Achaia was before 1 Corinthians, it was either very short, or did not include Corinth, for the letter gives no hint of such a visit.

²⁹ Thanks to Stephen Carlson for drawing my attention to this parallel. Other cases where Luke abruptly gives a new name to a character whom he has already mentioned are Claudius Lysius (Acts 23:26) and Simeon (Acts 15:14).

³⁰ The Western Text gives ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ in place of ΕΛΥΜΑΣ. Zahn suggests that this was the original reading and argues that ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ could be a translation of Bar-Jesus (T. Zahn, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lucas*, vol. 2, Leipzig: Erlangen, 1921: 413-19). He points out that Josephus mentions a Jewish Cypriot μάγος called Atomos (Antiquities 20.142), which could be an alternative form of the name ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ. However, this does not explain the existence of ΕΛΥΜΑΣ in the majority of manuscripts. ΕΛΥΜΑΣ is the harder reading, is better attested, and should be accepted. If the originators of the western text knew the works of Josephus, then the variant 'ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ' might well have arisen as a result of the case of Atomos. Alternatively, if they did not use Josephus, we should conclude that there was an individual called ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ Bar-Jesus who became a μάγος and then received the name Elymas (which we should take to mean μάγος, as Luke says). The original text would then have read 'ΕΛΥΜΑΣ', and the western corrector would have replaced this name with ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ, which would have been another name by which the historical μάγος had been known. In any event, we can be confident that Luke did not intend his readers to understand ΕΛΥΜΑΣ or ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ to mean Bar-Jesus. Strelan argues convincingly

Elymas therefore gives us an important clue about Luke's naming style, and suggests that by repeating the title 'synagogue ruler' in Acts 18:8 and 17, Luke may be indicating that the same person is intended. Therefore, by equating Crispus with Sosthenes we remove the coincidence of two persons in the same passage being given the title of synagogue ruler, and we conform the text to Luke's established style.

Next we observe that Crispus became a believer, and this fits with our findings on Sosthenes. The fact that the name Sosthenes is given after Crispus is also consistent with the suggestion that Crispus was renamed after becoming a believer.

In Acts 18:8 we read that Crispus, the synagogue ruler, became a believer, together with his household. It is to be assumed that the household of Crispus followed his lead. We then read that 'many of the Corinthians hearing became believers' (πολλοὶ τῶν Κορινθίων ἀκούοντες ἐπίστευον) and it is probable that this wave of conversions was due to the influence of Crispus. Since synagogue rulers had high status and influence, it is no coincidence that the conversion of Crispus is followed by that of others. Inscriptions show that synagogue rulers were major benefactors of synagogue building projects.³¹ We can assume that Crispus, if he was a benefactor of the synagogue before he became a believer, would have funded the fledgling Christian community afterwards. In Acts 18:7 Paul leaves the synagogue and goes to the house of Titius Justus, and it is quite possible that Crispus funded the use of this building. Thus Blue writes, 'Crispus likely had the financial means to secure a house which would have accommodated a group of Christian believers'.³² It is not immediately clear whether the implicit object of the 'hearing' in Acts 18:8 was Paul's preaching or the news that Crispus had become a believer. Did Luke intend to convey that Corinthians believed after hearing Paul, or after hearing of the conversion of Crispus? In any case, the timing of the conversions represents a further point of agreement between Crispus and Sosthenes. We have seen that the meaning of the name 'Sosthenes' would be very appropriate for a powerful individual such

that Elymas was named after Elam, the son of Shem, who may have been seen as the archetypal magician (R. Strelan, 'Who was Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-12)?', *Biblica* 85, 2004: 65-81).

³¹ T. Rajak and D. Roy, 'Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 75-93.

³² B. Blue, 'Acts and the House Church': 176-77.

as Crispus who had played a part in the formation of the believing community. If Luke indeed meant that Corinthians became believers following the conversion of Crispus, then he might well have expected his readers to make the link with the meaning of the name ‘Sosthenes’, as the ancients were very conscious of the meaning of names.

It is a common theme in Acts that those who played a role in the spreading of the faith faced opposition. Only with the Crispus-Sosthenes hypothesis can we see this theme played out in this passage: Crispus is the big catch who results in a wave of conversions, and is later beaten. In view of the precedents elsewhere in Acts, the beating of Sosthenes makes most sense if Luke has already presented him as important to the establishment of the believing community (18:8). In Acts 18:8 Luke sets the stage for the attack that follows in 18:17. These links between Crispus and Sosthenes are internal to Acts, and require no particular view of the historicity or otherwise of the text.

In Acts 18:8 Luke links the conversion of Crispus with that of the others that followed, and we have no reason to doubt this information.³³ If this is accepted, it is probable that Crispus was held in high regard in the Corinthian church, for he had taken an early stand in support of the faith, and many of those in the church had come to the faith in response to his lead. This provides a link between him and the Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians 1:1 because the authority that his name carried would make him an ideal choice as co-sender. Our information on Crispus and Sosthenes is therefore highly consistent.

Crispus is a Latin cognomen and means ‘curly’ or ‘quivering’. Myrou suggests that it might have been considered an unsuitable name for the new convert. This is very plausible because ‘those who considered a cognomen to be undignified might seek to suppress it’.³⁴ Myrou interprets ‘Sosthenes’ as ‘steady in strength’ and ‘Crispus’ as ‘unsteady’. He therefore sees the giving of the new name ‘Sosthenes’ as a conscious reversal of the meaning of his original name.³⁵ This is an attractive suggestion at first sight. However, Latin cognomina were often given to describe physical features of individuals, so the name

³³ There is no evidence for any ‘Lukan tendency’ to associate conversions with prominent converts of Paul. We are not concerned here with the *number* of Corinthians who became believers, but rather with the *timing* of their conversions.

³⁴ J. N. Adams, ‘Conventions of Naming in Cicero,’ *The Classical Quarterly* NS 28 (1978): 146-66.

³⁵ A. Myrou, ‘Sosthenes: The Former Crispus (?)’ (see note 2).

'Crispus' would probably have carried the meaning 'curly' in the sense of 'curly haired', not 'unsteady'. Myrou seems to have overlooked the suggestion, argued here, that Sosthenes was named because of his role in the creation of the church in Corinth.

5. The Use of More than One Name for the Same Person in the Same Text

If Crispus was indeed renamed Sosthenes, then both Luke and Paul are consistent in calling him 'Crispus' when referring to his baptism, while using 'Sosthenes' for later references (Acts 18:8, 17; 1 Cor. 1:1, 14). They both avoid anachronisms and use the correct name in each context. Some may nevertheless find it surprising that Paul and Luke should use two different names for Crispus-Sosthenes in the same text. However, the practice of switching from one name to another was common in the ancient world,³⁶ and is not unprecedented in the New Testament. Examples are 'Cephas' and 'Peter' in Galatians; 'John' and 'Mark' in Acts; and 'Timothy' and 'Titus' in 2 Corinthians.³⁷ In any case the juxtaposition of the two names, Crispus and Sosthenes, was not a hindrance to Chrysostom, who readily equated them.

How was the reader to know that Sosthenes was Crispus?

We have seen that the Corinth narrative of Acts works well if we understand Luke to mean that Sosthenes was Crispus. However, Acts does not explicitly state that Sosthenes was Crispus and there is nothing that would lead the modern ear to equate the two on a first hearing. Could Luke really have expected his audience to identify Sosthenes as Crispus? The following points need to be born in mind when making a judgement on this matter.

Firstly, the audience would not have been surprised to hear a switch in names for the same person in the same text, because this practice was not at all unusual in the ancient world (see above). The switch between Cephas and Peter in Galatians is one such example.

³⁶ Harold Axtell wrote: 'Some men who had both nomen and cognomen are given the one at one time, the other at another, often for no apparent reason,' and gives numerous examples. H. L. Axtell, 'Men's names in the writings of Cicero', *Classical Philology* 10 (1915): 386-404.

³⁷ On Cephas and Peter, see D. Allison, 'Peter and Cephas: one and the same', *JBL* 111 (1992): 489-95. On Titus-Timothy see my own paper: R. Fellows, 'Was Titus Timothy?', *JSNT* 81 (2001): 33-58. Still further examples of the practice in ancient literature are given in those two papers.

Secondly, by repeating the title of ἀρχισυνάγωγος with the article Luke might well have thought that he was giving a substantial clue that the same person was in view. He might never have anticipated alternative interpretations, such as the idea that Sosthenes was the successor of Crispus.

Thirdly, Luke may have thought that the name ‘Sosthenes’ would have confirmed the identification for the reader. The ancients were very conscious of the meaning of names, and Luke’s audience would probably have been familiar with the early Christian phenomenon of the giving of new names. This would certainly have been the case if Theophilus himself received his name after becoming a Christian, or if Acts was written for Antioch’s Christian community, which had many leaders with double names, including Simon-Peter, Joseph-Barnabas, and Ignatius Theophorus. The reader would have suspected immediately that Sosthenes was a new name. If Chrysostom was able to understand the passage, there is no reason to suppose that Luke’s audience, who were familiar with the first century conventions of renaming, would not have also identified Sosthenes as Crispus.

The fact that Luke did not feel the need to explain the switch of names from Crispus to Sosthenes might indicate only that the giving of new names was common in Luke’s community. In the subsequent centuries new names were sometimes given to Christians upon conversion, but the practice does not appear to have been as common.³⁸ Therefore, it would not be surprising if copiers of Acts failed to realise that Sosthenes was Crispus, and this would explain why some of them found the text of 18:17 inadequate and felt the need to amend it. Thus the Crispus-Sosthenes hypothesis disambiguates Acts 18:17, while simultaneously explaining why later copyists were confused by it.

6. Conclusion: Review of the Competing Interpretations

This paper has laid out the reasons for equating Crispus with the Sosthenes of Acts, equating the Sosthenes of Acts with the Sosthenes

³⁸ G. Horsley, ‘Name change as an indication of religious conversion in antiquity’; R. S. Bagnall, ‘Religious conversion and onomastic change in early Byzantine Egypt’, *American Society of Papyrologists. Bulletin (Lam)* 19 (1982): 105-23.

of 1 Corinthians, and equating the Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians with Crispus. Thus we have a triangular structure of arguments in which any two names are linked, not only by the arguments that connect them directly, but also via the third.

We have explored three competing understandings of the Sosthenes of Acts 18:17: a) he was a non-Christian; b) he was a Christian but was not Crispus; c) he was Crispus. These interpretations will now be summarised.

6.1 Sosthenes as a non-Christian in Acts 18:17

Acts 18:17 records the beating of a non-Christian, which is unprecedented in Acts. It is not clear who beat Sosthenes or why. The natural reading of the text is that the Jews did the beating, but the motive is obscure. Whoever is to blame, it is surprising that Luke does not explain why Sosthenes was singled out, as there is no hint in the text that the attack on Paul had been led by an individual. Nor is it clear why the beating takes place in front of the judgement seat. It is surprising that we find the name 'Sosthenes' at 1 Corinthians 1:1. Are we looking at two people who coincidentally have the same name? Alternatively, did Sosthenes, in an extraordinary twist in the plot, later become a Christian? In the first case we have the coincidence of two Sosthenes, while in the second we have the coincidence of two Christian synagogue rulers (Crispus and Sosthenes).

6.2 Sosthenes as a Christian in Acts 18:17 (but not to be equated with Crispus)

We are to understand that Sosthenes was punished by the Jews after Gallio told them to see to it themselves. It makes sense that the beating was in front of the judgement seat, and that the incident is recorded by Luke. Sosthenes later moved to Ephesus where he became a co-sender of 1 Corinthians. However, it is hard to explain why Luke does not record the conversion of Sosthenes. Also, it seems unlikely that there would be two Christian synagogue rulers in Corinth (Crispus and Sosthenes). Furthermore, if Sosthenes had that name from infancy, it is a strange coincidence that the meaning of the name matches our information on Crispus.

6.3 *Sosthenes as Crispus*

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, became a believer. With the moral authority and financial support that Crispus supplied, the viability of a church in Corinth was assured, and many others followed his example and became believers. He was then appropriately named ‘Sosthenes’, which means ‘saving strength’. The non-Christian Jews brought Paul before Gallio, who was not concerned with this internal Jewish dispute, and he told the Jews to see to it themselves. On this prompting, the Jews seized Sosthenes, whom they must have seen as the most prominent defector, and beat him. The beating was appropriately in front of Gallio. Sosthenes later moved to Ephesus. Paul included him as co-sender of 1 Corinthians because of the authority that his name carried due to his importance in the establishment of the Corinthian church.

The third option avoids the coincidences and problems that burden the other two, and is to be preferred. The various references to Crispus-Sosthenes create such a consistent picture of the individual, that the burden of proof is shifted to those who wish to split him into two people.

Furthermore, when Acts 18 is read in the light of this Crispus-Sosthenes hypothesis, the Gallio incident becomes an integral part of the chapter and should be dated to Paul’s first visit to Corinth. This supports traditional Acts-based chronologies of Paul’s life. The information on Crispus-Sosthenes given in Acts 18 is in good agreement with that given in Paul’s letters, and this provides a small, but significant point in support of Luke’s historicity.

Excursus: Other Possible Cases of Renaming by Paul

The hypothesis that Paul was a name-giver does not rest on the case of Crispus-Sosthenes alone.

Gaius-Titius-Justus-Stephanas³⁹

The house of Stephanas is described as the firstfruit (ἀπαρχή) of Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15), and the implication is that they were the first of many – a sign of more to come. In Acts, though, this role is played by

³⁹ I am grateful to Stephen Carlson for originating this theory with me.

Titius Justus (Acts 18:7), and the name 'Stephanas' does not appear. Conzelmann comments,

Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15), is not mentioned here at all. If our passage were from an 'itinerary,' such an itinerary would have to be judged unreliable and highly abbreviated.⁴⁰

However, the problem disappears if we conjecture that Paul named Titius Justus 'Stephanas'. The name 'Stephanas' is Greek, is rare in that form, and means 'crowned' or 'crown bearer'.⁴¹ The crown is a Pauline concept (1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19) so it is plausible that he honoured his first Corinthian convert with this name. Paul conferred great honour on those who believed first (see Rom. 16:5, 7).

As many have noted, there are good reasons to equate Titius Justus with Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23). Both were early converts who played host to Paul, and Gaius Titius Justus would be a complete Roman name.

The equation of Stephanas with Titius Justus and/or with Gaius is strengthened by the fact that he also had a house, and this cannot have been common in a community where few were of high social standing (1 Cor. 1:26). Also, 1 Corinthians 16:15 says that the household of Stephanas appointed themselves to the service of the saints and this is just what we might expect Paul to write about the household of Gaius/Titius Justus, that had played host to Paul and/or the church. Heinrici pointed out that Paul's commendation of the household of Stephanas can be explained if the church met in the house and if it was open for the hospitality of travelling Christians.⁴²

Equating Stephanas with Gaius explains why the name does not appear in Romans 16.

1 Corinthians 1:14 reads 'I thank God that I baptised none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were

⁴⁰ H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987): 152.

⁴¹ It is perhaps an abbreviation of Stephanephoros.

⁴² 'Nimmt man aber an, das Haus des Stephanas, wie es zuerst dem Evangelium in der römischen Provinz Achaja eine Heimstätte bot, blieb allen Heiligen Geöffnet, die ersten Gemeindeglieder versammelten sich in ihm (S. 23), die zureisenden Christen fanden in ihm Gastfreundschaft und Förderung; vergegenwärtigt man sich, dass seine Glieder sich frei und opferwillig all der Mühwaltung unterzogen, die ein in dieser Weise offenes Haus mit sich brachte, dann versteht man, weshalb Paulus für ein solches Beispiel Nachachtung wünscht und fordert, dass solchen Männern wie Stephanas ein Vorrang eingeräumt und Willfährigkeit erwiesen werde.' C. F. G. Heinrici, *Das Erste Sendschreiben des Apostel Paulus an die Korinther* (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1880): 568.

baptised in my name'. This now comes into clearer focus. On our hypothesis neither Crispus (Sosthenes) nor Gaius (Stephanas) were in Corinth at the time of writing. The only ones whom Paul baptised personally happened not to be among the addressees at the time and it is for this reason that no one could claim that they (the addressees) were baptised by Paul. By naming Crispus and Gaius, Paul points to the fortuitous fact.

The evidence linking Stephanas to Gaius Titius Justus is not as strong as that linking Sosthenes to Crispus, but it does add weight to the suggestion that Paul did indeed give new names. The fact that Paul (unusually) baptised Crispus and Gaius himself shows that he personally was their father in the faith and had an exclusive responsibility for them. This may explain why they were given new names and others were not.

Titus-Timothy

I have previously argued that the Titus of Galatians and 2 Corinthians also held the name 'Timothy'.⁴³ It is possible that Paul named Titus 'Timothy', perhaps meaning 'He who honours God'.

Onesimus

Onesimus (Phlm 10), like Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17), is described as Paul's son. His name means 'useful' and may have been given to him by Paul himself.

Sopater

Sopater, son of Pyrrhus (Σώπατρος Πύρρου, Acts 20:4) is unique in Acts in that his father's name is given when it is not needed to distinguish him from any other individual. Sopater is a shortened form of Sosipater which can be rendered 'saver of his father', so we have the very real possibility that Sopater had been given his name because he had brought his father to the faith. This style of naming would parallel that of Sosthenes, whose name also reflects his role in 'saving'.

⁴³ See R. Fellows, 'Was Titus Timothy?' *JSNT* 81 (2001): 33-58. It was common Jewish practice to give similar sounding names (e.g. Abram-Abraham, Sarai-Sarah, Hoshea-Joshua, Saul-Paul, Silas-Silvanus, Jesus-Justus).