

religious reasons was widespread,⁸ and we will focus here on Jewish 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, adopting

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' ('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.

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 Barnabas'. Luke interprets

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' 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. Scheidel, *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 been

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.

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 ETOIMOS in place of EAYMAS. Zahn suggests that this was the original reading and argues that ETOIMOS 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 ETOIMOS. However, this does not explain the existence of EAYMAS in the majority of manuscripts. EAYMAS 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 'ETOIMOS' 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 ETOIMOS 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 'EAYMAS', and the western corrector would have replaced this name with ETOIMOS, 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

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

understand ΕΛΥΜΑΣ or ΕΤΟΙΜΟΣ to mean Bar-Jesus. Strelan argues convincingly 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

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.

was not at all unusual in the ancient world (see above). The switch between Cephas and Peter in Galatians is one such example.

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 Mü hwaltung unterzogen, die ein in dieser Weise affenes 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 Willfähigkeit erwiesen werde.' C. F. G. Heinrici, *Das Erste Sendschreiben des Apostel Paulus an die Korinthier* (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).