

Whatever Happened to...?

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July 2019

The stories in the Bible are full of people—many of them with names we can't even pronounce because their language was so different from ours—but it's easy to forget they were actual living people.

Most of them are mentioned only once; we read their names and never see (or think about) them again. If we do, we can only wonder what happened to them.

But sometimes those names do show up again. That's especially true in the New Testament, because Paul sometimes mentions those people in his letters.

Today's story mentions several of them. It comes from Acts 18:1-18.

Corinth was exactly the kind of city Paul wanted to visit—
a huge seaport in Greece that attracted visitors and businessmen
from all over the known world.

This was a place where he could reach
hundreds,
thousands,
maybe even more with the Gospel!

Slowly his mission team came together.

First he met Aquila and Priscilla,
a husband-and-wife team of tentmakers from Italy.

Paul set up business with them to support himself.

Then past team members Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia.

With this group together he followed his usual plan:

He went to the Jewish synagogue in town and preached about Jesus.

When they rejected him (as they usually did)

he started preaching to the Gentiles (the non-Jews) in town.

That resulted in him staying with Titus Justus,

a Gentile Christian who lived next door to the synagogue.

And while most of the Jews may have rejected his message,

Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, didn't.

He and his entire family became Christians.

And Paul just kept on preaching...

And that's how the new church in Corinth began to grow.

It was growing fast!

Soon God spoke to Paul in a vision.

"Don't be afraid of the Jews," He said. "I won't let them hurt you,
so keep on preaching. *Many of the people here will be Mine!*"

So Paul stayed in Corinth for another year and a half,

preaching about Jesus to everybody who would listen.

Near the end of Paul's stay a new governor took charge.
His name was Gallio,
and Paul's enemies thought they could convince him to put Paul in jail.
But even before Paul started to defend himself,
Gallio said, "I don't have to listen to you Jews.
If this man had committed a crime, that would be one thing.
But I'm not going to get involved in your silly religious arguments."
Then he ran them out of his courtroom...
but not before the mob beat Sosthenes,
the new leader of the synagogue,
right there in front of the governor!
But Gallio just ignored them.

After that, Paul stayed a while longer with the Christians in Corinth,
and then he left them to visit the next stop on his journey.

We know what happened to Paul. In fact, sometimes it seems that
the entire New Testament is about only him and Jesus!
*But many of the people in this story
are also mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.*

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned six different times, always as a couple.
After Paul left Corinth, they traveled and worked with him in several places—
training preachers in Ephesus,
running a house church in Turkey,
and finally returning to Rome.
When Paul wrote to the Romans,
he specifically mentions how they risked their lives for him.

Timothy and Silas traveled with Paul a lot,
occasionally staying behind to help the churches Paul started.

And Crispus apparently stayed in Corinth; in First Corinthians
Paul mentions him as one of only a handful of Christians he baptized there.
(We can only assume that Crispus and Gaius, the two he names,
became church leaders and took over the baptism chores.)

But what of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue in Corinth
who was beaten in front of the governor by Paul's Jewish enemies?

Did Crispus lose his position because he became a Christian
and Sosthenes took his place because he stood against Paul?
Or was it just a normal change of leadership?

Was Sosthenes beaten because
he failed to convince the governor to put Paul in prison
or did the angry mob beat him just because they couldn't legally beat Paul?

The Bible doesn't say. But Sosthenes is mentioned just one more time in the Bible and, while it could be someone else with the same name, it's probably the same Sosthenes because he's mentioned in First Corinthians, in the first chapter and the very first verse, presumably because the Corinthians knew him.

Paul begins his letter this way:

"From Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes..."

We don't know what happened, but I imagine it went something like this:

After the Jews beat Sosthenes

and left him injured on the floor in front of the governor,

Paul ran over to see if he was alright.

Perhaps some of his team were there as well,

waiting to see what the governor would do,

and they helped Paul get Sosthenes to safety and cared for him.

Since the early days of the church,

it has always been the compassion of Christians

that spread the Gospel best.

And I suspect it was Paul's compassion that changed Sosthenes's heart

and even caused him to leave Corinth and join Paul in spreading the Gospel.

It has always been that personal touch, one person connecting to another,

that has spread the Gospel best—

not huge rallies or impressive shows.

Anyone—any of us—can reach out to someone else and show God's love,

and we should never forget that.

That's the way God intended it to be.

And apparently *that's* what happened to Sosthenes.

Don't you love a happy ending?