

Who was Sosthenes in the Bible?

Not much is known about the man named Sosthenes in the Bible. There is a quick mention of Sosthenes in Acts and possibly a second mention in 1 Corinthians. Whether these passages speak of one or two men is unknown. Both mentions of Sosthenes involve the apostle Paul's missionary journeys.

In Acts 18, Paul arrives in Corinth, where he meets fellow believers Priscilla and Aquila (verse 2). Being tentmakers as they are, Paul stays with them while he plies his trade and teaches in the synagogue (verses 3-4). Sadly, the Jews reject Paul's message, and so he moves on to preaching to the Gentiles instead. Paul goes to stay with a Gentile Christian named Titius Justus, possibly due to the fact that Justus's home was next door to the synagogue (verse 7). Paul's preaching is more effective here, and Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, along with many other Corinthians, become believers. It may have been that Crispus left his position at the synagogue at this time, for we see a few verses later that Sosthenes is named the leader of the synagogue.

After Paul had been in Corinth about 18 months, the Jews, led by Sosthenes, united in an attack on Paul, bringing him before the Roman proconsul, Gallio. As this city was under Roman rule, the Roman court was the ultimate authority in major disputes. The charge against Paul was that "this man . . . is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13).

Gallio did not feel this particular issue was worth his time: "I will not be a judge of such things," he said, and he ejected the Jews from the court (Acts 18:15). At that point, Sosthenes was seized and beaten as Gallio watched without interfering (verse 17). The text leaves it unclear as to who beat Sosthenes and why. Verse 17 simply says it was

“the crowd there.” Paul D. Gardner, author of *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters*, speculates that one of two things may have happened: 1) the Jews were angered that Sosthenes had been unable to persuade Gallio to try Paul and so made him the scapegoat; or 2) the Greeks outside the court beat Sosthenes because he was a Jew trying to stir up trouble in their city.

The second mention of a man named Sosthenes occurs in 1 Corinthians 1 as part of the salutation of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (verses 1-3). Here, Sosthenes is a brother in Christ and was either a voice in the crafting of the letter or its scribe. If this is the same Sosthenes as the man who opposed Paul in Acts 18, it would be yet more evidence of the transforming power of the gospel. Knowing the power of God and the fact that this Sosthenes was known to the people in Corinth, it is certainly a possibility that they are the same man; however, no one can say for sure.