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SOVEREIGN'S ORB
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'... and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king.'

2 Kings ch.11 v.12

Sosthenes

by Tamar Tephi McKay

Throughout the Scriptures there are many individuals mentioned who seem to be of little importance, or are often read over without a second thought. Perhaps this is because it takes only a few seconds to read of an individual that just appears in three or four verses, whereas with individuals such as Moses, David, and the Apostle Paul we have many chapters of the account of their lives, their trust, and the mighty acts wrought through them. Thus, we think of them more readily and they appear more important. However, those individuals who seem less important, or whose names are only in a few verses, are not insignificant or unimportant.

An example of one such individual is 'Sosthenes'. This name only appears in the Scriptures twice, first in Acts ch.18 v.17 and then in 1 Corinthians ch.1 v.1. In Acts chapter 18 there is the account of Paul in Corinth, where he is brought to the judgment seat and accused of persuading men to worship God contrary to the law. Gallio, the deputy of Achaia, says he will 'be no judge of such matters' and drives them from the judgment seat. We then read, 'Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things'. Now let us ask some questions. Who was Sosthenes? Why was he beaten? What did he do after this?

Sosthenes was the chief ruler of the synagogue, thus making him a man of importance. As chief ruler of the synagogue he would have been very knowledgeable in the law and as a result of his important position it is not unreasonable to assume that he would have been present when Paul is accused of persuading men to worship God contrary to the law. As chief ruler of the synagogue, it is most likely that he was expected to act as the main spokesman/prosecutor against Paul. When Gallio dismisses the case, why then is Sosthenes beaten?

When we look at the name Sosthenes in the *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* it reads, 'He was assaulted in court after Gallio disallowed a Jewish prosecution of Paul, either in anti-Semitic demonstration by Greeks or in Jewish spite against an unsuccessful or lukewarm

spokesman. The latter might indicate pro-Christian sympathy:....'. The latter option is not unworthy of consideration, as by the time Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthian believers, Sosthenes is a believer, as can be told from the phrase 'Sosthenes our brother' in verse 1 of chapter 1.

If the meaning of the name Sosthenes is examined in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, it says, 'from the base of Greek 4982' and this means, 'to save, i.e. deliver or protect (literally or figuratively)'. This meaning of 'to save, deliver, or protect' gives weight to the possibility of him being a lukewarm spokesman against Paul. Whether this was because he was already a believer or because he was moving toward becoming a believer and was almost persuaded to be a believer, is unclear.

If, as his name implies, he sought to save, deliver, and protect Paul from his accusers in Corinth, making him a lukewarm prosecutor/spokesman, it would explain why he was beaten by Paul's enemies. Although it might be argued that this name was given to Sosthenes at birth thus having nothing to do with the situation and that the meaning is purely coincidental, let us not be too hasty to jump to such a conclusion.

There are examples throughout the Scriptures of those whose names given at birth were relevant to their lives at a later age. For example, Jacob and Nabal. Jacob's name means 'supplanter; deceiver', and he definitely was a supplanter and deceiver! He deceived his father into giving him the blessing instead of Esau and he was deceptive in his dealings with his uncle Laban. There is also Esau's testimony in Genesis ch.27 v.36.

'... is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing.'

Nabal, means, 'wicked; fool'. Nabal's foolish and wicked dealings are found in the Book of Samuel, where there is his wife's testimony of him to David.

'Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: ...'.

1 Samuel ch.25 v.25

With the help of these examples, we see that it is not unlikely that Sosthenes' name meaning had relevance to the situation.

Having answered the first two questions let us now look at, 'What did he do after this?' Following the account in Acts chapter 18 one only finds Sosthenes in the first verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

'Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:.'

At first glance it may seem that there is nothing to be learned about Sosthenes from this passage. However, a closer look shows that there is. By opening the letter with, 'Paul ... and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth', a few things immediately become apparent. First, that Sosthenes was no longer in Corinth, and second, that he was with Paul. By sending greetings under his name and Sosthenes', Paul reveals to us that Sosthenes had left Corinth at some point after the time of his beating.

Whether his term as chief ruler of the synagogue had ended, whether he had been removed from it, or whether he had given up the position, we do not know. However, having moved away from Corinth, it is unlikely that he still had the position of chief ruler of the synagogue. The question might be asked, 'What did Sosthenes do after he left Corinth?' Paul's greetings show that Sosthenes went with Paul and it is very unlikely that he went with him just to keep him company. Far more likely is that he accompanied Paul to help in his work of preaching to the lost.

So Sosthenes was willing to leave behind the honoured and respected position of chief ruler of the synagogue to go and share salvation with the lost, thus setting his affection on things above and not on things on the earth. Not only this, but by sending his greetings to the believers in Corinth through Paul's letter, we learn another thing about Sosthenes. Although absent from Corinth, he remembered and still had love and care for the spiritual needs of the believing body in Corinth.

Thus, we see that there is a great deal more to Sosthenes than at first meets the eye. Therefore, the next time you read a name that only appears briefly and seems insignificant or unimportant, take a closer look. There may be more to it than meets the eye, and you may just find that they are not so unimportant or insignificant!
