

The Identity of Theophilus

Theophilus, Luke's intended recipient and possible benefactor ([Luke 1:3](#); [Acts 1:1](#)), has been the subject of guesswork for centuries. Those envisioning a Gentile-Luke writing mainly to Gentiles imagine Theophilus as a Roman dignitary. Indeed, calling him "most excellent" does convey he's someone of rank ([Luke 1:4](#); [Acts 24:3](#)), but not necessarily a Roman. The argument that he was Theophilus ben Annas, a deposed Sadducean high priest of Israel (AD 37–41) is stronger; at least it has evidence based on an actual historical figure. His existence is confirmed both archaeologically¹⁹ and in the writings of Josephus.²⁰ Since the archaeological discovery indicates that Theophilus' granddaughter was named Joanna, it's even suggested that this explains why a woman named Joanna is unique to Luke's Gospel (8:2–3; 24:10).²¹

Luke's Concern With the Temple and the Priesthood Explained

The biblical data supports Luke writing to a high priest like Theophilus and a larger Jewish audience as well. His Gospel begins and ends with the Temple. He doesn't bother to elaborate on the priesthood's customs, probably because he didn't have to. He's the only writer to mention that "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" ([Acts 6:7](#)). Jerusalem's centrality and the Tanakh's importance in his writings reflect someone steeped in Jewish Scripture and history. Israel's redemption and the testimony of righteous Israelites figure prominently in Luke's narrative.²² It's been shown that Luke is preoccupied with priestly matters.

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The books of Luke and Acts emphasize themes like the resurrection, assistance of angels, and God's sovereign intervention into human affairs; as if to convince a Sadducee to abandon his party.²³ A Gentile writing to convince Gentiles would hardly take interest in Jewish details like Luke does. If Theophilus ben Annas is Luke's recipient, it underscores the magnitude of Luke's assurance that he'll order a narrative of "things which have been fulfilled among us" ([Luke 1:1](#)). It's a narrative their ancestor prophets had spoken of long ago (24:27).

Source: <https://www.foi.org/2022/09/16/was-luke-really-a-gentile/>