

God Lovers

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach”
(Acts 1:3).

“It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first,
to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3).

You find my name in two books of the New Testament. In fact, you can search the entire Bible through and find my name only twice. What is my name?

Do you need another hint? Luke wrote to me in Luke and Acts. You’ve got it. You probably figured out my name by looking at the key scriptures above; an easy give away. My name is Theophilus. You can call me “Theo” for short.

Who am I? That is a more difficult question. Some have argued my name is a general title or term for all believers. The view here is that I am not a real person but a generic “John Doe” or a common day name like “Kofi.”

Many claim that I am a God-fearer—a Gentile proselyte into the Jewish religion—or that the Book of Acts was written to people like me called “God-fearers.” My name, by the way, means “one who loves God”, “lover of God” or “beloved of God.” I am a God-lover!

Others speculate that my name refers to anyone who is trying to learn about God. Luke’s agenda in writing to me (they suppose) was that I might know the certainty of things I have been taught. Luke wanted me to be convinced about what Jesus did on earth, and continues to do through His church.

I have also heard, with interest, that some think I am a Greek gentleman, well educated, and interested in the gospel.

A few people have me penned as a Roman officer and say that the name “Theophilus” was given at baptism. They think I am a secret disciple and my name hides my true identity since it was dangerous for a Roman officer to be a Christian.

The personal and informal way that Acts is written has led most people to believe that I am a personal friend to Dr. Luke.

Some have guessed I am an official in the government who has been warned of the dangers of Christianity to society. The thinking here is that I am associated with a case being brought against Paul. They suppose I was not a believer in Jesus or an inquirer into truth. Lloyd Ogilvie in his masterpiece *Acts: The Communicator’s Commentary* suggests that this theory misses the impact of Luke-Acts as dynamic teaching needed for a new Christian to be grounded in the

faith. That's a thought! Why would a Roman official want to be referred to by a Christian name (and "lover of God" at that)?

He claims, "The style of Luke-Acts is not an argument against false information, but forceful teaching to a receptive learner. Luke warned Theophilus to understand the full story of what Jesus began to do and teach, as well as what He was continuing to do. He desired this "lover of God" to experience the fullness of what God in Christ had done and could do in his life. The same is true for us." Yeah, man. Now you are talking!

He believes that at the beginning of Acts, we are called to live in the skin of Theophilus. There probably is a little bit of Theophilus in all of us, or there should be. We all need to have a desire to know God, look into what He is doing, and to be a part of it. Paul had an intense desire like that. He wanted to know God.

"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Look at how the *Amplified Bible* puts it: "(For my determined purpose is) that I may know Him (that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly), and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection (which it exerts over believers), and that I may share His sufferings as to be continually transformed (in spirit into His likeness even) to His death, (in the hope)" (Philippians 3:10, AB).

Ogilvie further testifies, " I have read Acts hundreds of times in my own devotional time, studied it in the Greek, and written and spoken about it for twenty years, but still feel I have only begun to grasp what it means to my life as a contemporary Theophilus, one both beloved by God and a lover of God."

"So much of the church today is where Theophilus was when he was the first to read the stirring account of Acts. We have been instructed in the things Jesus did, but know far too little about what He continues to do today as indwelling Spirit and engendering power."

John W. Mauck, in *Paul on Trial* supposes that Luke expected me to read his first book and knew it would cause many questions about what happened to Jesus after He ascended into heaven. As I was reading one book John thinks, he (Luke) was writing the other.

I am surprised to find out what so many people think about me. Mauck suggests I am an investigator charged with the responsibility of gathering information for Paul's trial. He thinks I might even be a Roman lawyer hired to represent Paul in court. Luke and Acts were supposedly written to supply me with all the facts of the case.

When it comes right down to it nothing is really known about me. I remain a mystery. That brings me to the reality of the situation, and the main point of this lesson. It does not matter who I am. What counts is that I am a God lover: heart, mind, and soul.

Perhaps, the emphasis should not be on who I am but on what my name means. My name (like many others in the Bible and modern day) identifies a person, and causes him to stand out in the crowd.

- Names may come from prevailing circumstances at the birth of the child.
- Parents look at the meaning of the name. It identifies the character that parents want the child to copy.
- People have the tendency to live up to their name.
- A name could be something to inherit (a heritage).

Who is a lover of God? Someone that...

1. Has God at heart, and in his heart (Acts 13:22).
2. Obeys the Word of God (John 14:21; 21; 1 John 5:3; 20-21). He is a doer of the Word.
3. Conforms his life to the will of God (1 John 2:15-17).
4. Loves others (1 John 4:20).
5. Draws closer to God (James 4:8).

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38).

What a privilege to be “beloved of God”, the focus of God’s affection and the recipient of His loving-kindness. Who can explain it? I can’t. It’s a mystery. One thing is sure. I am a God-lover. What about you?

Study Questions

1. Who did Luke write to in the books of Luke and Acts? _____

2. What is the meaning of his name? _____

3. What does Lloyd Ogilvie claim about the style of Luke-Acts? _____

4. What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 2:2? _____

5. According to Acts 1:3 what is contained in the Book of Acts? _____

6. Who is a lover of God? (Provide three examples used in this lesson) _____

7. What does a name do for a person? _____

8. According to Ogilvie, much of the church today is where Theophilus was when he first read Acts. Explain. _____

9. What is the main point of this lesson? _____

10. What is a God-fearer? _____

Additional Notes
