

SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY (1851 – 1939)

William Mitchell Ramsay was an atheist professor teaching at the University of Edinburgh. Under the influence of German scholars he was convinced that the New Testament was not historical. Conventional wisdom was that stories about Jesus were merely exaggerated myths written down generations after all witnesses were dead. Rather than confine his convictions to the faculty lounge, however, he dared to travel to the Holy Land and personally prove the Bible to be wrong.

Perhaps Ramsay chose to scrutinize Luke because he made so many statements that were specific. For example, consider this quotation: **“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.”** (Lk. 3:1, 2). The fact that Luke was so specific made him vulnerable. Not only does Luke give specific times, but also specific names, specific countries, and specific titles. Conventional wisdom, for example, indicated that Lysanias was the ruler of Chalcis, not Abilene. Ramsay’s on site investigation, however, proved that Luke was right and his critics were wrong.

This became a pattern that Ramsay experienced over and over. In Acts 14 scholars felt Luke was wrong in saying that Lystra and Derbe were cities of Lycaonia. Ramsay went there and proved again that Luke was right. In Acts 17 scholars again felt Luke was wrong to use the Greek word “politarchs” to describe the rulers of Thessalonica. Ramsay went there and found a list of “politarchs” inscribed in stone. He also vindicated Luke’s use of “temple wardens” in Ephesus, “proconsul” in Cyprus and the “first man of the island” in Malta. In all Luke named 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands, and numerous rulers without a single error. After more than 25 years investigating Luke, Ramsay never found him to be wrong about anything. As a consequence he shocked the intellectual world by becoming a Christian. Ramsay was later honored with doctorates from 9 universities and was eventually knighted for his contributions to modern scholarship. Ramsay found it was easier to “say” the Bible was wrong than to “prove” the Bible was wrong.

There is a long list of skeptics like Sir William Ramsay who tried to prove the Bible wrong and discovered evidence that led them to become Christians. **Lew Wallace** was an unbeliever until he began to do research and writing. In 1899 he came to “a conviction amounting to absolute belief in God and the divinity of Christ.” As you know he wrote the famous Christian novel “Ben Hur”. Atheist **Aleksandr Tsarevich Solzhenitsyn** converted to Christ and was awarded a Nobel Prize for exposing Soviet brutality. He is famous for writing *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *The Gulag Archipelago*. **Lee Strobel** was an unbelieving journalist for the Chicago Tribune. He set out to disprove the Bible, but ended up becoming a Christian. He is now famous for the “Case for Christ” series. **Josh McDowell** set out to write a paper in college to expose Christianity as a myth. He also became a Christian. He too has written many books in defense of Christianity such as “Evidence that Demands a Verdict”. **J. Warner Wallace** was an atheist homicide detective in Los Angeles. He specialized in cold cases where no living witnesses or DNA was available. He became a Christian by examining the evidence for Christ in the same way he examined evidence as a cold case detective. One of his books is even titled “Cold Case Christianity”. This list of converts could easily be expanded.

Apologist Frank Turek likes to ask unbelievers a question something like this: “If the evidence was present to substantiate the claims of Christ would you become a Christian?” Unfortunately, many will not! The problem, therefore, is rebellion against God and not a lack of evidence. The demons believe and tremble but they do not obey (Ja. 2:19). When Jesus was raised from the dead the guards saw the stone rolled away and an angel who looked like lightening. They were so afraid of him that they became like dead men. When they reported this to the chief priests and elders, however, they were given a large sum of money to lie about it (Matt. 28:2 – 15). Those who “won’t” see are worse than those who “can’t”. Certainly we need more men of intellectual integrity like Sir William Ramsay!