

# Historical Proof?



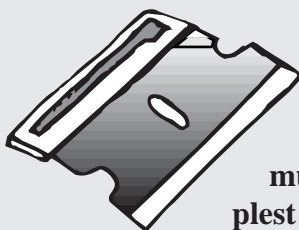
**P**roof, properly speaking, is something found exclusively in the domains of logic and mathematics where one can begin with a premise that is given or self-evident. Based on logical premises, certain present realities can also be proved to our satisfaction by direct observation—whether or not the kettle has boiled, for example. However, if we were to try to corroborate or elucidate an event from history, like say the martyrdom of St. Peter, we cannot travel back in time to observe such an event firsthand. Therefore, unless we can agree on a historical source as absolutely reliable and make it our mutually agreed-upon premise, we cannot expect to *prove* that Peter was martyred in Rome under Nero, nor even that he was martyred at all. Historians and scientists whose work it is to extrapolate information about the past from the data they presently study in their labs and libraries must content themselves with establishing the *likelihood* of a given event having occurred. Like the courtroom attorney attempting to reconstruct a crime scene, we must deal with *varying degrees of probability and doubt*: we have to admit that the best of human witnesses can give false testimony, and that artifactual evidence is always open to multiple interpretations. As scientist, Norman D. Newell observes, we must ultimately settle for those theories about the past that account for “a maximum number of observations with a minimum number of assumptions.”\*

It is the contention of Christian apologists that the gospel records of the Holy Bible best account for the subsequent unfolding of Christian history and the impact of Christianity upon western civilization. Furthermore, Christian historians insist that if we accept as a historical personage a figure like Julius Caesar (which all historians do), then we must accept the historicity of Jesus Christ and the apostles as far more abundantly corroborated. In short, though “proof” is a very subjective thing, by normally accepted standards, if anything at all from history can be proven, the foremost events of the New Testament can!

The question is: do we care enough to study the evidence for ourselves and become convinced?

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\* Newell, Norman D., *Creation and Evolution: Myth or Reality?* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1982), p. 56. This is an application of Ockham’s Razor (see below).

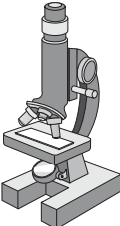




## Ockham's Razor

**A rule in science and philosophy stating that entities should not be multiplied needlessly. This rule is interpreted to mean that the simplest of two or more competing theories is preferable and that an explanation for unknown phenomena should first be attempted in terms of what is already known. Also called law of parsimony. [After William of Ockham.]—*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language***



# Three Arenas For the Quest for Truth

ARENA	THE LAB	HISTORY	THE MIND
EXAMPLES	Math, Technical Experiments	Courtroom Trials, Historical Religions	Mysticism, Philosophy
INITIAL RESULTS	PROOF	EVIDENCE	PERSONAL SATISFACTION
FINAL RESULTS	KNOWLEDGE 	INTELLIGENT FAITH 	BLIND FAITH 

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