

McDowell's "The Reliability of the Bible": Comparison of New Testament with Other Ancient Manuscripts; Polemic against Big Bang Theory, Gen 1:1; Col 1:16-17

The second reference quotes a number of sources to illustrate the preponderance of manuscript evidence for the New Testament as compared to that of other ancient authors' works.

McDowell, Josh. "The Reliability of the Bible." Chap. 4 in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 1:39, 41-43:

The historical reliability of the Scripture should be tested by the same criteria that all historical documents are tested.

There are now more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions and we have more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. (p. 39)

THE NEW TESTAMENT COMPARED WITH OTHER WORKS OF ANTIQUITY: The Manuscript Comparison

F. F. Bruce in *The New Testament Documents* vividly pictures the comparison between the New Testament and ancient historical writings: "Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. For Caesar's *Gallic Wars* (composed between 58 and 50 B.C.) there are several extant manuscripts, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 142 books of the Roman history of Livy (59 B.C.-A.D.17), only 35 survive [1-10 and 21-45]; these are known to us from not more than 20 manuscripts of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments of Books 3 and 6, is as old as the fourth century. Of the 14 books of the Histories of Tacitus (ca A.D. 100) only four and a half survive; of the 16 books of his *Annals*, 10 survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two manuscripts, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh. (p. 41)

J. Harold Greenlee writes in *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* about the time gap between the original manuscript (the autograph) and the extant manuscript (the old copy surviving), saying that "the oldest known manuscript of most of the Greek classical authors are dated a thousand years or more after the author's death. The time interval for the Latin authors is somewhat less, varying down to a minimum of three centuries in the case of Virgil. In the case of the New Testament, however, two of the most important manuscripts were written within 300 years after the New Testament was completed, and some virtually complete New Testament books as well as extensive fragmentary manuscripts of many parts of the New Testament date back to one century from the original writings. (pp. 41-42)

Greenlee adds that "since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest manuscripts were written so long after the original writings and the number of extant manuscripts is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the New Testament is likewise assured."

F. F. Bruce says: "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament. (p. 42)

The third reference makes a comparison of the textual variations between the New Testament documents and Homer's *Iliad*:

Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 475:

Next to the New Testament, there are more extant manuscripts of the *Iliad* (643) than any other book. Both it and the Bible were considered 'sacred,' and both underwent textual changes and criticism of their Greek manuscripts. The New Testament had about 20,000 lines. The *Iliad* [has] about 15,600. Only 40 lines (or 400 words) of the New Testament are in doubt whereas 764 lines of the *Iliad* are questioned. This five percent textual corruption compares with one-half of one percent of similar emendations in the New Testament." (p. 43) [See Visual: New Testament Compared with Other Works of Antiquity.]

From these sources we learn that the Bible has far more surviving manuscripts than any other ancient writing the former numbering in the thousands while the latter range from a few to several hundred. The biblical manuscripts enjoy far less textual difficulties, less than one-half of one percent, and far more that are closer in time to the original autographs than of any ancient author.

If the secular world places authenticity and veracity to the manuscripts of the ancient writers then it should do so with even more confidence to biblical manuscripts.

And if the Bible is so well preserved and we believe it to be inerrant, then we may put our faith, trust, and confidence in its testimony regarding all the subjects it addresses.

One of its subjects is the creation of the universe which is of so much importance it is the very first thing mentioned:

Genesis 1:1 - In the beginning [בְּרֵאשִׁית *bereshith*: of the universe, not of the eternal state] **God** [אֱלֹהִים *Elohim* the Godhead] **created** [בָּרָא *bara'*: out of no preexisting materials, i.e., *ex nihilo*] **the heavens** [הַשָּׁמַיִם *ha-shamaim*: the earth's atmosphere and interstellar space] **and the planet earth** [הָאָרֶץ *ha-'ares*].

The member of the Trinity that actually carried out the creative act was Jesus Christ through the omnipotence, omniscience, and impeccability of His undiminished deity:

Colossians 1:16 - By Him [Jesus Christ] **were all things** [τὰ πάντα, *ta pas*: all that exists in the universe: energy, matter, space] **created** [constative aorist passive indicative of κτίζω, *ktizō*: constative contemplates the action in its entirety, passive says it is a done deal, & indicative says it's a fact; same as *bara'* in the Hebrew & *ex nihilo* in the Latin;], **in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers** [four power spheres, whether angels—elect or fallen, or man—believer or unbeliever, trumped by Christ] **all things** [τὰ πάντα, *ta pas*: all that exists in the universe: energy, matter, space] **were created** [consummative perfect passive indicative of κτίζω, *ktizō*: consummative indicates completed action] **through Him** [not by a contingent of angels as taught by Gnosticism], **and for Him** [Jesus Christ owns the universe and the plan of God decrees that He will, commencing with the Second Advent, be Ruler over all].

v. 17 - He is [aoristic present active indicative of ἐμί, *eimi*: an event now occurring but without reference to progress: describes eternal life separate from time] **before all things** [πρὸ πάντων, *pro pas*: ablative of separation from the universe and time] **and by Him all things hold together** [πρὸ πάντων συνίστημι, *pro pas sunistēme*].

The final verb, "hold together," is the intensive perfect active indicative of *sunistēmi*: "to hold together":

Perfect: Intensive, shows continuation of a completed action. The “all things” were created by Christ and they continue to operate within a system controlled and managed by Him.

Active: Jesus Christ produces the action of maintaining all elements of the universe in a system of order.

Indicative: Declarative indicating ongoing fact.

Thus *sunistēmi* emphasizes several divine attributes: (1) sovereignty: Jesus Christ had the authority to create the universe and all things in it, (2) omniscience: He had the knowledge to do it, (3) omnipotence: He had the power and ability to do it, (4) impeccability: He had the integrity to create it in a state of perfection, and (5) immutability: He has the virtue and integrity to insure that the laws of physics He invented will continue to “hold the universe together” until He determines to do with it otherwise.

Now when the proponents of the Big Bang Theory assert (and it remains a theory since no one was an eyewitness of the universe’s creation) that matter was preexisting and extraordinary energy was released from it to form the various items of the universe, then the believer has an inventory of ideas to refute this claim.

Of all the ancient manuscripts, the Bible is by far the best documented. Faith in the veracity of God’s Word enables the believer to rely on its message regarding the creative act. He is told creation was accomplished without use of preexisting materials or the need for an extensive period of time to complete but instead that it was done instantaneously from nothing.

We are further told that Jesus Christ was the agent of creation and that it is by His power and immutability that all the things in the universe maintain a predesigned order and harmony, diminished to some degree by the original sin of Adam (Genesis 3:17-18 cf. Romans 8:18-22) but to be restored by Christ following the Second Advent to its pristine perfection (Isaiah 65:18-25).

The same rationale may be used to document the divine invention of Homo sapiens and its creation out of the “dust of the ground.” We are not a subspecies of angels assigned to this planet nor are we the offspring of amoeba who emerged by the happenstance of chance from its oceans. We are human beings created by Jesus Christ as noted in Genesis 2:7, not the “current model” of what evolution has wrought over billions of years from the surviving fit.