

# Tischendorf 1815-1874

An Exciting Bible Discovery

## *The Discoverer*

Friedrich Constantin von Tischendorf was born in Saxony, Germany January 18, 1815. He attended Leipzig University and became a distinguished Bible critic. Even as a student he was dedicated to the task of preparing a superior recension (editing) of the New Testament of the Bible.

In 1844 he traveled to the Middle East. And while in Egypt visited Mount Sinai and spent time researching documents at the monastery the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Saint Catherine (the Sacred Monastery of the God-trodden Mount Sinai,) founded in 4<sup>th</sup> Egypt by the Emperor Justinian I. It was the repository of the Codex<sup>1</sup> Sinaiticus.

On his first research visit to the monastery library, Tischendorf discovered the oldest codex<sup>1</sup> leaves he had ever seen in a basket with some damaged fragments. He assumed they were trash to be burned. He was given 43 leaves.

He returned to Sinai a second time, but found nothing, His third visit in 1859 was under the aegis of the Orthodox Tsar Alexander II of Russia. This time he was shown more parchments.

<sup>1</sup> A codex is a book formed from parchment pages, while papyrus is made into a roll of joined pages. Parchment is made from the skin of sheep and or goats.



Friedrich Constantin von  
Tischendorf



St. Catherine's Greek Orthodox  
Monastery, Sinai, Egypt. Founded in  
the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Emperor  
Justinian I



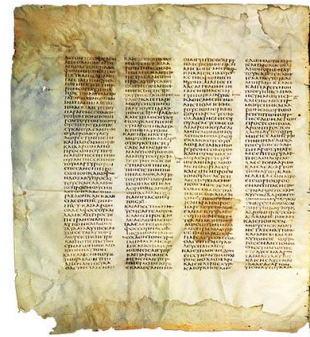
Above Parchment  
Codex. Left:  
Papyrus scroll

## *Two Versions of the Discovery*

The pages he acquired on his first visit he gave to King Frederick Augustus II of Saxony. As professor of theology at Leipzig University, Tischendorf decided to put two of the leaves on display in the university library.

Tischendorf made a third trip to St. Catherine's Monastery. On February 4, the last day of his visit, he was shown the Codex Sinaiticus, a 4<sup>th</sup> century Greek manuscript with the complete New Testament and parts of the Old Testament. The codex is upwards of 900 pages. He procured these for the Tsar for around \$7000. He now had an opportunity to study them. The codex included half of the Old Testament, and the entire New Testament. As a sort of bonus, it included the letter of Barnabas and The Shepherd of Hermas, both popular early second century works.

In 1933 the British Museum purchased the Codex Sinaiticus from the Soviet government for £100,000 or \$500,000.



Above: A portion of the Codex Sinaiticus Shows 2 columns of text per page.

### *Tsar to the Rescue*

Left: Tsar Alexander II who acquired the Codex. He abolished serfdom in Russia.



The British Library's exhibit of their portion of the Codex Sinaiticus

Tischendorf received many honors during his life: The Tsar permitted him to use “von” in his name, a symbol of nobility. He was awarded the right to add “von” to his name. He received an Honorary Doctorate from Oxford University in 1865, and an Honorary Doctorate from Cambridge the same year.

Tischendorff continued his studies and travels. His eighth edition of the Greek New Testament was widely received.

### *Oldest Codices and Fragments*

Although the **Greek Codex Sinaiticus** is considered to be the oldest Bible in the world, the **Dead Sea Scrolls** contain the oldest Hebrew Text. **The Codex Vaticanus** is dated c. 300-325. Fragment **P 52** in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, England, is the oldest example of the Greek New Testament. In this case seven lines from the Gospel of John. This fragment of a codex is dated 100-200 AD.

### *Meaning of the Codex Sinaiticus*

Although subject to many revisions over the centuries, it remains a venerable resource. From a secular point of view, it may be the oldest example of the transition from papyrus roll to the codex, or book form.

### *Where is it Now?*

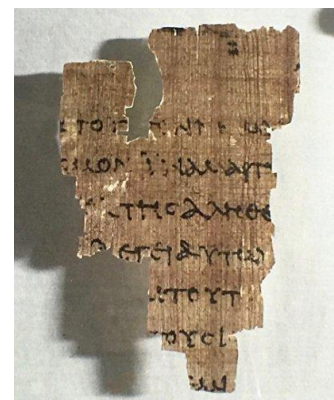
The larger portion is in the British Museum, 43w leaves at Leipzig University, fragments of three leaves in the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg, 12 leaves and some fragments at St. Catherine’s.

### *An Imperial Letter*

In the year 333 The Emperor Constantine I wrote to Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, pointing out that more people were turning to the Christian church and therefore more churches would have to be built. He told Eusebius to order “fifty volumes of Sacred Scripture in well-prepared parchment, easy to read and to carry.” He added that the volumes should be supplied as quickly as possible. <sup>2</sup>

The Codex Sinaiticus may be one of these bibles. Its age, the quality of the parchment and the indication that four scribal hands were used (suggesting the need for speedy production,) make the Codex a possible candidate.

<sup>2</sup> P. R. Coleman-Norton. Roman State and Christian Church, Vol. I, Letter No. 64



Rylands P 52