

Preacher's Pen points

Codex Sinaiticus



In the photo you will see a single page of one of the greatest and oldest Greek manuscripts of nearly all of the New Testament and half of the OT. This beautiful manuscript, called Codex Sinaiticus, is now housed in perfect environmental conditions in the British Library and is considered one of its great treasures. I have enjoyed standing in front of it thinking with amazement about what it represents and how it has survived.

The Story of the Manuscript

In 1833 German Biblical scholar Constantin Von Tischendorf of the University of Leipzig made a journey to the Near East in search of Biblical manuscripts for study. His journey took him to St. Catherine's monastery at Mt. Sinai. There he witnessed the monks there actually burning leaves of Biblical parchments in their oven. He urged them to realize that such manuscripts could be quite valuable and that they should be preserved. On that occasion they agreed to give him some of the leaves that remained in the waste basket of a Greek OT which Tischendorf eventually published.

Many years later under the patronage of the Russian Czar Alexander II Tischendorf revisited the monastery and presented his published text of the Greek OT to the steward. At that moment the steward of the monastery revealed that he too had a copy of the Greek OT. From his closet he

brought forth a beautiful manuscript. Tischendorf, trying to conceal his excitement, asked for permission to view it. The steward agreed; and the excited professor stayed up all night examining its pages. He discovered the codex contained not only much of the Greek OT, but also the complete Greek NT in excellent condition.

This codex, given the name Sinaiticus because of the place of its discovery, was at that time presented by the monastery to the Czar of Russia and was later purchased by the British government on December 25th, 1933 for a sum of 100,000 pounds!

The Significance of the Manuscript

This particular manuscript has been of special benefit to scholars who study the transmission of the NT from the first century to the present. It has been dated around 350 AD and is the oldest complete copy of the NT in existence. Because of its antiquity it has been very influential in helping scholars of the Greek text to determine what is the most likely original reading of the NT writings. In addition, the existence of such a manuscript attests to the reliability of our NT and the process of copying that has brought it down to us. Such discoveries are a part of the evidence that suggests that God's promise through both Isaiah and Peter is true, namely, that "*the word of the Lord abides forever*" (1 Pet. 1:25) —Johnny Felker

