



CONSTANTINE TISCHENDORF 1815-1874

How can we be certain after two thousand years or more that our Bible contains what was originally written? Every letter or book in what we know now as our Bible, began as a hand copied manuscript. Those manuscripts which survived the destruction during times of persecution of early Christians, were carefully copied by hand, and recopied for the early church. However, mistakes were always a concern. As time went on, and manuscripts were recopied, these mistakes could be compounded. Therefore it was important to verify the accuracy of modern versions of the Bible.

God used a curious German scholar and a trash pile to reveal His amazing preservation of Scriptural integrity. In 1844, Constantine Tischendorf was touring the East, in search of old manuscripts, that is, documents written by hand. In the library of the monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai he noticed a basket filled with pages of just such an old manuscript. Tischendorf was shocked as these were the oldest Greek writing this seasoned scholar had ever seen. The pages were from the Greek Old Testament. Taking 43 pages out of the basket, Tischendorf asked the librarian about them. To his horror he learned the pages had been placed in the trash basket for fuel, and two basket loads of such papers had already been burned! Though the monks admitted there were more pages of the manuscript, Tischendorf's enthusiasm made them wary, and they would not show him anymore. They did allow him to take the 43 pages he had rescued with him, however, and Tischendorf urged the monks to use something else in their fires!

In 1853 Tischendorf returned to the monastery, but the monks would not show him the remainder of the manuscript. Six years later, he again returned to the Sinai monastery, this time under the patronage of the Russian Tsar, Alexander II, patron of the Greek Orthodox Church. On this visit, a monk took Tischendorf to his room and pulled down a cloth-wrapped manuscript, stored with some cups and dishes. Tischendorf immediately recognized the pages as the remainder of the book which he had rescued from the trash pile. The monastery was finally persuaded to present the manuscript to the Tsar of Russia as protectorate of the Greek Church.

In 1933 the Soviet Union sold the manuscript to the British Museum for 100,000 pounds. The manuscript became known as the *Codex Sinaiticus* or book from the Sinai. It is one of the most important early manuscripts, estimated to be made in the fourth century. Some speculate it may be one of the fifty Bibles the Emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius to prepare after he made Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire. The *Codex Sinaiticus* was enormous help for scholars to check the accuracy of New Testament writings. It is unique because it has the complete manuscript of the New Testament, rather than fragments. The number of old manuscripts found and their antiquity ensure that the Bible accurately reflects the writings of the prophets and apostles.