

How We Got the Bible

Lesson 3 - MANUSCRIPTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION

1. Aim: To discuss the importance of manuscripts in preserving the Text of the N.T.
2. II Tim. 3:16 - Inspired of God. How do we know if we have that inspired word?
 - a. Original writings - autographs - no longer exist
 - b. All we have are the manuscripts - hand written copies.
3. We are separated from the autographs by Time and Language. In this lesson we will discuss the time separation.
4. Why study manuscripts?
 - a. Copies of copies of copies - by the time you get several generations of copies you could have mistakes.
 - b. Handwritten copies - either one at a time or a man dictating and several copies made
 - i. Man reading and others copying
 - ii. Word by word - sometimes have to spell it
 - c. To find the oldest and most reliable manuscript is important - This is the only way we can be sure that we have the Bible as it should be.
 - d. To discover the original wording of our Bible, the actual words that the God-inspired apostles and prophets wrote
5. Sir Frederic Kenyon-"It is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God"

Discussion

I. The Value of Manuscripts

- A. New Testament books were written in the second half of the first century
 - 1. Because papyrus is fragile, documents in constant use would have lasted about ten years
 - 2. Consequently, the original copies (autographs) of the New Testament books are lost
 - 3. The early Christians, recognized the priceless nature of the texts, continually made copies of the texts

- B. The term, "manuscript"
 - 1. Manuscript means anything written by hand.
 - 2. In connection to the Bible it refers to a document in the original language or, Greek in our study of the N.T.
 - 3. We want to find the oldest manuscripts available because they would be closer to the original and likely have fewer mistakes.

- C. Determining the age of a manuscript is not easy since most are without dates. How do you find the age of a manuscript?
 - 1. Size and form of letters
 - 2. Spacing of words
 - 3. Number and appearance of columns
 - 4. Punctuation
 - 5. Paragraphs

- D. Primary types of manuscripts:
 - 1. Uncials-printing in capital letters, the oldest
 - 2. Cursives, or minuscules-printing in small and cursive style letters, newer

- E. Men have discovered a large number of manuscripts: more than 5,300
 - 1. 650 uncials, including
 - a. 280 on parchment
 - b. 95 on papyri
 - c. 270 lectionaries - selections of Bible for reading in public
 - 2. The remainder are cursives

- F. The first grouping of manuscripts for circulation of the New Testament
 - 1. The four gospels
 - 2. Acts and the general epistles
 - 3. The letters of Paul
 - 4. The Book of Revelation

- G. The initial writing of manuscripts:
 - 1. Probably cursive, because they were dictated (Rom. 16:22; 1 Pet. 5:12; Gal. 6:11)
 - 2. Later copied in a book hand, i.e., uncial, documents characterized by large letters, no intervening spaces and very few punctuation marks

- H. Two systems of identifying manuscripts:
 - 1. From J.J. Wettstein:
 - a. Capital letters for uncials,
 - b. Arabic numerals for minuscules
 - 2. From C.R. Gregory:
 - a. All manuscripts identified with Arabic numerals,
 - b. However uncials have an initial "0"

II. Three Important Uncials

- A. The Vatican manuscript (B)-Vaticanus
 - 1. Ca. A.D. 350
 - 2. Some history
 - a. Resided in the Vatican Library, Rome, since at least 1481
 - b. Known to Erasmus (1533), but not available for use
 - c. Definitive publication finally made available in 1889-1890
 - 3. The manuscript itself
 - a. A complete Bible,
 - (1) In the O.T. missing only Gen. 1:1-46:28; Psa. 106-138;
 - (2) In the N.T. Missing Heb. 9:14-Rev. 22:21
 - b. The general epistles follow Acts
 - c. 759 leaves of finest vellum
 - d. Each leaf about 10 inches square, with 3 columns of text
 - e. Unfortunately, a later hand copied over fading letters; however, modern technology can read through the newer ink
 - 4. Its value
 - a. One of the best manuscripts for producing a Greek New Testament most like the autographs
 - b. Forms the basis of virtually every modern language translation of the Bible today

- B. The Sinaitic manuscript (a, "Aleph") - Sinaiticus
 - 1. Ca. A.D. 350
 - 2. Almost of equal importance to Vaticanus
 - 3. Named Sinaiticus because it was discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai
 - 4. Given designation Aleph to emphasize its importance
 - 5. More to be said in a moment

C. The Alexandrian manuscript ("A")-Alexandrinus

1. Ca. A.D. 400
2. Some history
 - a. Named for being stored in Alexandria, Egypt for a number of centuries
 - b. Brought to Constantinople by soon to be Greek Patriarch, Cyril Lucar (1621)
 - c. Given to Sir Thomas Roe as a gift for the King of England, Charles I
 - d. Rescued by Dr. Richard Bentley from a disastrous fire (1731)
 - e. Entrusted to the British Museum (1757)
3. The manuscript itself
 - a. Bound in four volumes, containing both Old and New Testaments along with 1 Clement and a portion of 2 Clement (2 uninspired early Christian works)
 - b. 773 leaves
 - (1) Only 10 missing from the OT
 - (2) Matt. 1:1-25:6; John 6:50-8:52; 2 Cor. 4:13-12:6 missing from the NT
 - (3) Each page about 12 ½ by 10 ½ inches with 2 columns of text
 - (4) Writing features date it as slightly younger than Vaticanus and Sinaiticus
 - (a) Larger, heavier letters
 - (b) Certain letters finished with serifs
 - (c) Enlarged letters mark beginning of paragraphs
 - (d) Lines of red ink marks beginning of books
 - c. Its value
 - (1) Excellent text for Acts, the letters and Revelation; poorer quality of readings in the gospels
 - (2) The first of the great uncials discovered, hence given the designation "A"

III. THE SINAITIC MANUSCRIPT

A. The mountain of God, Mt. Sinai

1. Where God called Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6)
2. Where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:20)
3. The location of St. Catherine's Monastery, built as a fortress by Emperor Justinian (ca. A.D. 550)

B. Constantin von Tischendorf

1. Published in 1841 his first critical (i.e., scholarly) edition of the Greek N.T.
2. Successfully deciphered and published the Ephraem manuscript
 - a. A rescript, that is reused vellum, the older text erased and a new text written on top - Palimpsest
 - b. Newer text, sermon of Ephraem of Syria
3. The discovery of Sinaiticus
 - a. Looking for ancient manuscripts at St. Catherine's Monastery in 1844
 - b. Found portions of an ancient biblical manuscript in a trash heap
 - c. The leaders at the monastery viewed his excitement with suspicion
 - d. However, they allowed him to transcribe those pages destined to be burned (portions of Isaiah and Jeremiah)
 - e. Requested that they take care of any remaining text
4. Published his portions of the Septuagint, the OT in Greek, in 1845
 - a. Returned in 1853, only discovered a piece of Gen 24, being used as a bookmark
 - b. Returned in 1859, found a monk who had "read a Septuagint"; was shown a loose volume containing:
 - (1) The OT pages that Tischendorf discovered 15 years earlier
 - (2) Other parts of the OT - The complete NT
 - (3) The epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas (2 books of the Apostolic Fathers)
 - (4) Copied the previously unknown Greek text of Barnabas

(5) Arranged to copy the rest of the codex

5. Arranged to present it as a gift to Russian Czar in 1869

C. The Manuscript Today

1. Purchased by the British Museum in 1933 from the Russian government for £100,000
- ½ million \$ 500,000
2. When arrived at the museum, the men in the crowd took off their hats
3. Originally about 730 leaves; 393 remain with 245 OT and 148 NT
4. Pages about 15 inch square with 4 columns of text
5. Copied by 3 scribes
6. The oldest complete manuscript of the New Testament
7. Portions of The Manuscript reside in four locations:
 - a. The main part of the Manuscript is in the British Library
 - b. 43 Leaves in Leipzig University Library
 - c. Parts of 6 leaves in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg.
 - d. Portions in St. Catherine's Monastery

D. Recent Developments

1. Constantine Simonides fraudulently claimed that he wrote the manuscript in 1840;
later arrested as a forger (1856)
2. Good news
 - a. More than a dozen more leaves were discovered in 1975 underneath the rubble
of a collapsed ceiling
 - b. 4,000 other manuscripts and fragments recovered, too

E. Tischendorf's goal in life

1. "To reconstruct, if possible, the exact text, as it came from the pen of the sacred
writers"
2. From the preface of his pamphlet, When Were Our Gospels Written?

- a. "To clear up... the history of the sacred text"
- b. To recover that text "which is the foundation of our faith"
- c. To defend against those who would "rob the Saviour of his divine character"
- d. Because "if we are in error in believing in the person of Christ as taught in the gospels, then, the church herself is in error, and must be given up as a deception"

Conclusion

1. There are two basic types of manuscripts - Uncial and Cursive - more of cursive
2. Vellum uncials date to about the 4th century A.D. - most valuable
3. The most valuable manuscripts - Vatican, Sinaitic and Alexandrian
4. Constantin von Tischendorf had a large part in finding the Sinaitic manuscript.
5. The British Library houses the Alexandrian and Sinaitic manuscripts.
6. The Vatican has been in the Vatican Library in Rome since 1481.

Sources Consulted

1. How We Got The Bible 3rd Edition by Neil R. Lightfoot
 2. Rocky Whitely Oldham Lane church of Christ Abilene, TX
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Class notes prepared by Arthur Pigman
Evans Church of Christ
515 Gibbs Road
Evans, Ga. 30809
www.evansgachurchofchrist.org
e-mail evanscoc@bellsouth.net