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Question 90 - What is a biblical codex, and what are three of the most important ones?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

90. What is a biblical codex, and what are three of the most important ones?

- A. Codex (plural, Codices) consisted of gatherings, or groups, of pages sewn through the fold along one edge and bound together. Here a little historical background will prove helpful:

H. S. Miller writes:

“In the early part of the 4th century (313 A.D.) there came a great change in matters pertaining to the Bible and the Church. The outstanding persecutions under the Roman Emperors, Nero (64-68), Domitian (95, 96), Aurelius (163-177), Severus (202-211), Decius (250), Valerian (258), Diocletian and successors (303-311), had hindered the circulation of the sacred Book. Diocletian especially had ordered churches demolished and all copies of the Scriptures destroyed. The next emperor, Constantine (313-337), publicly acknowledged himself a convert to Christianity, stopped all persecution, made Christianity the religion of the Empire, became a friend of the bishops and a student of the Scriptures, and even composed and delivered religious discourses. He ordered churches rebuilt and copies of the Scriptures multiplied. He changed his capital from Rome to Constantinople (330), and aimed to make this a Christian city. It is thought by some that the Sinaitic and Vatican may have been two of the 50 copies which he ordered Bishop Eusebius to prepare for public use in the churches of that city. Other causes of this interesting and important change were the adoption of vellum in place of papyrus as writing material, and the use of the codex (book) form in place of the roll form, making it possible to bring together the writings in one volume.

- B. The Sinaitic. (Codex Sinaiticus)

1. Codex letter: Aleph (Hebrew letter aleph).
2. Date: Fourth century (around 340).
3. Contents: The Old Testament (Septuagint translation), including the Apocrypha, and the New Testament complete; also the Epistle of Barnabas and much of the Shepherd of Hermas.
4. Language: Greek.
5. Present location: British Museum, London, England.
6. Property of: The British Government and the Protestant Church
7. Present omissions: About one-half of the Old Testament and of the Apocrypha; Mark 16:9-20; Jn. 7:53-8:11.
8. History: This manuscript, although considered one of the earliest known, was discovered quite recently. It was found in the monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai, whence the name “Sinaitic.” In 1844 Dr. Constantin

Tischendorf, a German Biblical professor and scholar who was giving his life to the search and study of ancient manuscripts, especially Biblical manuscripts, was visiting this convent. He saw in the hall a basket filled with parchment, waiting to be used to light the monastery fires. He was told that already two basketfuls had been burned. Such was the ignorance of these monks. He found in the basket 43 leaves of vellum containing a portion of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. These, considered valueless, he was able to secure. He was shown other portions of the same manuscript but, because he was unable to conceal his joy, the monks, surmising that he had found something of value, would not let him have them. In 1853 he again visited the monastery, but found practically nothing. In 1859, 15 years after his first visit, he again visited the monastery, this time under the commission of the Czar of Russia (Alexander II). He was about to depart without any new discovery, when, in conversation with the steward concerning the Septuagint, the latter remarked that he, too, had a copy of the Septuagint. Tischendorf followed the steward into his room, where the latter brought forth a bundle wrapped in a red cloth. Soon there lay before the eyes of the astonished and overjoyed visitor not only the portions of the Old Testament which he had seen 15 years before, but also the New Testament complete, and some other writings. He was permitted to examine the manuscript in his room that night, and feeling that the occasion was too sacred for sleep, he spent the night in copying. Later he was able to secure it as a "temporary loan," then, in the same year (1859) as a "conditional gift" to the Czar of all Russia, for the purpose of publication. In 1869 it was deposited in the great Imperial Library at St. Petersburg (now Leningrad), in return for some gifts made to the monastery at Sinai. Thus, it became the property of the Russian Government and the Orthodox Eastern Church (formerly the Greek Catholic Church). In 1911 a complete general facsimile of the New Testament, and in 1922 the same of the Old Testament, were published by the Oxford University Press. During the Russian Revolution (1917 onward), the manuscript, with other priceless collections gathered by the Czar, came into the hands of the Soviet Government. In December, 1933, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (U.S.S.R.) sold it to the British Museum for 100,000 (\$510,000 currently). This says the Literary Digest, is "the greatest book purchase on record."

C. The Vatican. (Codex Vaticanus)

1. Codex letter: B.
2. Date: Fourth century (about 350, possibly 325).

3. Contents: The Old Testament (Septuagint translation), with the Apocrypha except the books of Maccabees and the Prayer of Manasses; and the New Testament.
4. Language: Greek.
5. Present location: Vatican Library, Rome, Italy.
6. Property of: The Roman Catholic Church.
7. Present omissions: Gen. 1:1-46:28; 2 Kings 2:5-7, 10-13; Psa. 106:27-138:6; Mk. 16:9-20; Jn. 7:53-8:11; Heb. 9:14 to the end of the New Testament, including the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, and Revelation, but not the General Epistles, which were placed after Acts, and are thus preserved.

D. The Alexandrian. (Codex Alexandrinus).

1. Codex letter: A
2. Date: Fifth century (around 450).
3. Contents: The Old Testament (Septuagint), with the Apocrypha, and the New Testament; also, at the end of the New Testament, 1 and 2 Clement and the Psalms of Solomon.
4. Language: Greek
5. Present location: British Museum, London.
6. Property of: The British Government and the Protestant Church.
7. Present omissions: Parts of Genesis (14:14-17; 15:1-5, 16-19; 16:6-9), I Kings (12:18-14:9, one leaf), and Psalms (49:19-79:10, 9 leaves); also Matt. 1:1-25:6; John 6:50-8:52; 2 Cor. 4:13-12:6. Also a leaf of Clement, the last part of 2 Clement, and the Psalms of Solomon.
(*General Biblical Introduction*. The Word-Bearer Press. Houghton, N.Y. 1952. pp. 191, 192, 195)