



The earliest known complete text of the New Testament is in the Codex Sinaiticus (above), written in Greek. This 4th-century manuscript was found in 1859 in a monastery on Mt. Sinai. Its "codex" form, using separate pages bound with stitching on one side, rather than unwieldy scrolls, helped people read and refer to the Bible more easily. It was also the forerunner of the modern book. The Sinaiticus consists of 346½ sheets of vellum, each 15 by 13½ inches, and besides the New Testament it contains most of the Old Testament up to Ezra.

Rome after the death of the Emperor Claudius in 54. The apostle Peter may also have been there, along with Mark.

During these years news must have reached Paul of the worsening situation in Judea. Events were building toward a tragic climax as hostility between Jews and Romans became more and more open. Jewish intolerance of the Christians was growing as well. After the death of Festus in 62, the Jewish high priest, Ananias, took advantage of the brief vacuum of power to order the murder of James, the brother of Jesus.

Sometime later a harsh fate befell the Christians in Rome. On a hot summer night in A.D. 64 a great fire broke out at the northern end of the Circus Maximus. Fed by the flimsy wares in the surrounding shops and fanned by a strong wind, the flames spread. The fire raged for five days, completely destroying most of the city. Rome's citizens suspected the fire had been set at the order of the Emperor Nero so that he could rebuild the capital on a grander scale.

To direct suspicions away from himself, Nero accused the Christians of Rome of starting the fire. A widespread persecution followed this accusation. Suspected Christians were systematically rounded up, interrogated and executed in cruel public games. Some became human torches to light Nero's pleasure gardens; others were wrapped in animal hides and tossed to wild beasts in the arenas. Peter was probably among the victims of this vicious campaign. He is said

to have been crucified with his head downward because he felt unworthy of dying as Jesus had.

Paul was also caught up in this whirlwind of depraved persecution. Apparently he had been released from house arrest after two years, since no one from Jerusalem had appeared to press charges. He then left Rome and called on churches in Greece and Asia Minor. In Troas on the northeastern shore of the Aegean, foes of Christianity seized Paul and accused him of treason. Once more Paul appealed for trial in Rome and returned to the capital, where he swiftly became another victim of Nero's hatred.

As a Roman citizen, Paul received the courtesy of a trial. He was judged guilty and a few hours later was beheaded outside the city gates, the customary execution for a citizen. Christian friends reverently carried his body and head to a nearby cemetery for burial. His tomb and shrine are today at the Roman basilica of St. Paul's outside the city walls.

The Pharisee from Tarsus had become the most impressive figure of early Christianity, dominating the apostolic age. Martyrdom ended his earthly mission, but his immortal Epistles, the first Christian theological writings, and the dozens of churches he founded survived as foundations of a great universal religion.

---

The story of Paul is told in the Acts of the Apostles 7.58-60; 8-28 and in his Letters.