

THE EPISTLES OF JESUS CHRIST AND ABGARUS KING OF EDESSA

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CHAPTER 1

1. A copy of a letter written by King Abgarus to Jesus, and sent to him at Jerusalem by Ananias, his footman, 5. inviting him to Edessa.

1. Abgarus, king of Edessa, to Jesus the good Savior, who appears at Jerusalem, greeting. 2. I have been informed concerning you and your cures, which are performed without the use of medicines and herbs. 3. For it is reported that you cause the blind to see, the lame to walk, do both cleanse lepers and cast out unclean spirits and devils, and restore them to health who have been long diseased, and raise up the dead. 4. All which when I heard, I was persuaded of one of these two: either you are God himself descended from heaven, who does these things, or the Son of God. 5. On this account I have written to you earnestly to desire you would take the trouble of a journey here and cure a disease which I am suffering. 6. For I hear the Jews ridicule you and intend to do you mischief. 7. My city is indeed small, but neat, and large enough for us both.

CHAPTER 2 *1. The answer of Jesus by Ananias the footman to Abgarus the king, 3. declining to visit Edessa.*

1. Abgarus, you are happy, forasmuch as you have believed on me, whom you have not seen. 2. For it is written concerning me, that those who have seen me would not believe on me, but that they who have not seen might believe and live. 3. As to that part of your letter that relates to my giving you a visit, I must inform you, that I must fulfill all the ends of my mission in this country, and after that be received up again to him who sent me. 4. But after my ascension I will send one of my disciples, who will cure your disease and give life to you, and all that are with you.

The first writer to mention these Epistles between Jesus Christ and Abgarus was Eusebius in the early part of the fourth century, and for their genuineness, he appealed to the public registers and records of the City of Edessa in Mesopotamia, where Abgarus reigned, and where Eusebius affirmed that he found them written in the Syriac language. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine and published a Greek translation of them in his Ecclesiastical History.

In the Ante-Nicene Church, Antioch was unquestionably the leading center of the West Syrian Church; however, the upper Mesopotamian city of Edessa became an equally important important locus of Christians in eastern Syria.

According to tradition, SS. Peter, Thomas, and Bartholomew visited and preached in Edessa, but the "founder" of the Edessene *ecclesia* was St. Thaddeus (known as St. Addai by the local Syriac-speaking Christians), as apostle "of the Seventy" and disciple of St. Thomas.

St. Addai was sent by St. Thomas to Edessa in response to King Abgar V's personal petition to Jesus Christ, who had promised to send one of his disciples to him. After a miraculous healing of the king, the entire royal family and many of the nobles were baptized, including some of the pagan who were called chief priests; the city's main altars to the gods Bel and Nabu were destroyed, and a church built. Addai was the first bishop of Edessa, followed by Aggai, a silk merchant who became Addai's closest disciple.

Thus, as the capital of the "first Christian kingdom" of Osrhoene, Edessa came to be known as "the blessed city." However, the non-believer King Abgar VI persecuted the bishop Aggai, who became the Edessene church's first martyr.

Nevertheless, King Abgar VIII, who mounted the throne in A.D. 177, converted to Christianity and ruled righteously -- even being called "a holy man" by the Christian historian Julius Africanus.

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