

Eusebius, the church historian, wrote around 315 AD that Jesus had exchanged letters with Abgar (Avak-air), the king in Edessa the capital of Armenia. This is not scriptural, but it has all the markings of a historical account with possible scriptural reference in John 12:20-22. Eusebius writes the following:

"At this period Marinus, son of Storage, was raised by the emperor to the government of Phœnicia, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Abgar sent to him two of his principal officers, Mar-Ihap prince of Aghtznik, and Chamchacram chief of the house of the Abahouni, as well as Anan his confidant. The envoys proceed to the town ... The deputies found the Roman governor at Eleutheropolis; he received them with friendship and distinction, and gave this answer to Abgar:

Fear nothing from the emperor on that account, provided you take good care to pay the tribute regularly.

On their return, the Armenian deputies went to Jerusalem to see our Savior the Christ, being attracted by the report of His miracles. Having themselves become eye-witnesses of these wonders, they related them to Abgar. This prince, seized with admiration, believed truly that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and said:

These wonders are not those of a man, but of a God. No, there is no one among men who can raise the dead: God alone has this power.

Abgar felt in his whole body certain acute pains which he had got in Persia, more than seven years before; from men he had received no remedy for his sufferings; Abgar sent a letter of entreaty to Jesus: he prayed Him to come and cure him of his pains. Here is this letter:—

Abgar, son of Archam, prince of the land, to Jesus, Saviour and Benefactor of men, who has appeared in the country of Jerusalem, greeting: — I have heard of You, and of the cures wrought by Your hands, without remedies, without herbs: for, as it is said, You make the blind to see, the lame to walk, the lepers to be healed; You drive out unclean spirits, You cure unhappy beings afflicted with prolonged and inveterate diseases; You even raise the dead. As I have heard of all these wonders wrought by You, I have concluded from them either that You are God, come down from heaven to do such great things, or that You are the Son of God, working as You do these miracles. Therefore have I written to You, praying You to condescend to come to me and cure me of the complaints with which I am afflicted. I have heard also that the Jews murmur

against You and wish to deliver You up to torments: I have a city small but pleasant, it would be sufficient for us both.

The messengers, the bearers of this letter, met Jesus at Jerusalem, a fact confirmed by these words of the Gospel:

Some from among the heathen came to find Jesus, but those who heard them, not daring to tell Jesus what they had heard, told it to Philip and Andrew, who repeated it all to their Master. (John 12:20-22)

The Saviour did not then accept the invitation given to Him, but He thought fit to honor Abgar with an answer in these words:—

Blessed is he who believes in me without having seen me! For it is written of me: 'Those who see me will not believe in me, and those who do not see me will believe and live.' As to what you have written asking me to come to you, I must accomplish here all that for which I have been sent; and, when I shall have accomplished it all, I shall ascend to Him who sent me; and when I shall go away I will send one of my disciples, who will cure your diseases, and give life to you and to all those who are with you.

Anan, Abgar's courier, brought him this letter, as well as the portrait of the Saviour, a picture which is still to be found at this day in the city of Edessa.

After the ascension of our Saviour, the Apostle Thomas, one of the twelve, sent one of the seventy-six disciples, Thaddæus, to the city of Edessa to heal Abgar and to preach the Gospel, according to the word of the Lord."

(Eusebius' text here & here.)

(Note: Armenia became a Christian nation early and suffered persecution in 110, 230 and 287 AD. The Armenian state was the first state to accept Christianity, 301 AD, even before the days of Constantine. Many Armenians moved to Jerusalem in those early days and remain there yet today, the 21st century, in what is called the Armenian Quarter of the Old City Jerusalem. See Armenian Church here.)