

Eusebius: *The History of the Church*¹

Book 1 #13 *A Story about the Prince of Edessa*

The story about Thaddeus is as follows: Because of His power to work miracles the divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ became in every land the subject of excited talk and attracted a vast number of people in foreign lands very remote from Judaea, who came in the hope of being cured of diseases and disorders of every kind. Thus it happened that when King Abgar, the brilliantly successful monarch of the peoples of Mesopotamia, who was dying from a terrible physical disorder which no human power could heal, heard continual mention of the name of Jesus and unanimous tribute to His miracles, he sent a humble request to Him by a letter-carrier, begging for relief from his disease. Jesus did not immediately accede to his request, but honored him with a personal letter, promising to send one of His disciples to cure his disease, and at the same time to bring salvation to him and all his kin. In a very short time the promise was fulfilled. After His resurrection and ascent into heaven, Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, was moved by inspiration to send Thaddeus, himself in the list of Christ's seventy disciples, to Edessa as preacher and evangelist of the teaching about Christ. Through him every word of our Savior's promise was fulfilled.

Written evidence of these things is available, taken from the Record Office at Edessa, at that time the royal capital. In the public documents there, embracing early history and also the events of Abgar's time, this record is found preserved from then till now; and the most satisfactory course is to listen to the actual letter, which I have extracted from the archives and translated word for word from the Syriac as follows:

COPY OF A LETTER WRITTEN BY AGBAR THE TOPARCH TO JESUS AND SENT TO HIM AT JERUSALEM
BY THE COURIER ANANIAS

Abgar Uchama the Toparch to Jesus, who has appeared as a gracious savior in the region of Jerusalem – greeting.

I have heard about you and about the cures you perform without drugs or herbs. If report is true, you make the blind see again and the lame walkabout; you cleanse lepers, expel unclean spirits and demons, cure those suffering from chronic and painful diseases, and raise the dead.² When I heard all this about you, I concluded that one of two things must be true – either you are God and came down from heaven to do these things, or you are God's Son doing them. Accordingly I am writing to beg you to come to me, whatever the inconvenience, and cure the disorder from which I suffer. I may add that I understand the Jews are treating you with contempt and desire to injure you; my city is very small, but highly esteemed, adequate for both of us.

¹ Penguin Classics, Translated by G.A. Williamson, © G.A. Williamson, 1965. Revised and edited with new introduction by Andrew Louth, © Andrew Louth, 1989.

² Similar to, but not identical with, the list in Mt. 11:5 and Lk 7:2

[He wrote this letter when the heavenly light had shone on him only a little while. It is desirable also to hear the letter which Jesus sent him by the same letter-carrier. It is only a few lines long, but very impressive. Here it is.³]

JESUS REPLY TO THE TOPARCH AGBAR BY THE COURIER ANANIAS

Happy are you who believed in me without having seen me!⁴ For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and that those who have not seen will believe and live. As to your request that I should come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and on completing it must at once be taken up to the One who sent me. When I have been taken up I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disorder and bring life to you and those with you.

[Note: after this, Eusebius quotes a section of the Doctrine of Addai inclusive: After Jesus was taken up, Judas, also known as Thomas, sent to him as an apostle Thaddeus...“If we have left our own property behind, how can we accept other people’s?”]

³ The bracketed passages are wanting in some M.S.S.

⁴ See Jn 20:29