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Apocrypha

Apocryphal Letters

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Anonymous (English translation by M. R. James)

M. R. James (1924)

Credits

Author	Anonymous (English translation by M. R. James)
Date	2nd to 13th centuries
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About:

Five texts in letter form, all falsely ascribed to people of the time of Jesus and the apostles, in M. R. James's translation (1924):

The letters of Abgar and Jesus: King Abgar of Edessa, who is ill, asks Jesus to come and heal him, and Jesus answers. Eusebius of Caesarea copied them in the 4th century. They became an amulet throughout the East.

The Letter of Lentulus: a Roman official supposedly describes to the Senate the face of Jesus, his hair, beard and eyes. It is not of the time of Jesus: according to James it can hardly be earlier than the 13th century.

The Epistle to the Laodiceans: a patchwork of phrases from Paul, preserved in Latin, which entered many medieval Bibles.

The Third Epistle to the Corinthians: part of the Acts of Paul (2nd century), with the Corinthians' question and the answer about the resurrection. It belonged to the Armenian Bible. Passages between < > appear only in some manuscripts.

The Correspondence of Paul and Seneca: fourteen notes between the apostle and the Roman philosopher, written in the 4th century.

Source: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Apocryphal_New_Testament_(1924)/Epistles

James's introductions and comments are omitted. In 3 Corinthians, what James prints in small capitals (found only in some manuscripts) is between ‹ ›, and the variants he gives in parentheses with the name of the manuscript are omitted.

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LETTERS OF ABGAR AND JESUS

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1 A copy of a letter written by Abgarus the toparch to Jesus, and sent to him by means of Ananias the runner, to Jerusalem.

2 Abgarus Uchama the toparch to Jesus the good Saviour that hath appeared in the parts (place) of Jerusalem, greeting. I have heard concerning thee and thy cures, that they are done of thee without drugs or herbs: for, as the report goes, thou makest blind men to see again, lame to walk, and cleansest lepers, and castest out unclean spirits and devils, and those that are afflicted with long sickness thou healest, and raisest the dead.

2.2 And having heard all this of thee, I had determined one of two things, either that thou art God come down from heaven, and so doest these things, or art a Son of God that doest these things. Therefore now have I written and entreated thee to trouble thyself to come to me and heal the affliction which I have.

2.3 For indeed I have heard that the Jews even murmur against thee and wish to do thee hurt. And I have a very little city but (and) comely (reverend), which is sufficient for us both.

3 The answer, written by Jesus, sent by Ananias the runner to Abgarus the toparch.

4 Blessed art thou that hast believed in me, not having seen me. For it is written concerning me that they that have seen me shall not believe in me, and that they that have not seen me shall believe and live.

4.2 But concerning that which thou hast written to me, to come unto thee; it must needs be that I fulfil all things for the which I was sent here, and after fulfilling them should then be taken up unto him that sent me. And when I am taken up, I will send thee one of my disciples, to heal thine affliction and give life to thee and them that are with thee.

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LETTER OF LENTULUS

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1 A certain Lentulus, a Roman, being an official for the Romans in the province of Judaea in the time of Tiberius Caesar, upon seeing Christ, and noting his wonderful works, his preaching, his endless miracles, and other amazing things about him, wrote thus to the Roman senate:

2 There hath appeared in these times, and still is, a man of great power named Jesus Christ, who is called by the Gentiles (peoples) the prophet of truth, whom his disciples call the Son of God: raising the dead and healing diseases, a man in stature middling tall, and comely, having a reverend countenance, which they that look upon may love and fear; having hair of the hue of an unripe hazel-nut and smooth almost down to his ears, but from the ears in curling locks somewhat darker and more shining, waving over (from) his shoulders; having a parting at the middle of the head according to the fashion of the Nazareans; a brow smooth and very calm, with a face without wrinkle or any blemish, which a moderate colour (red) makes beautiful; with the nose and mouth no fault at all can be found; having a full beard of the colour of his hair, not long, but a little forked at the chin; having an expression simple and mature, the eyes grey, glancing (?) (various) and clear; in rebuke terrible, in admonition kind and lovable, cheerful yet keeping gravity; sometimes he hath wept, but never laughed;

in stature of body tall and straight, with hands and arms fair to look upon; in talk grave, reserved and modest [so that he was rightly called by the prophet] fairer than the children of men.

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EPISTLE TO THE LAODICEANS

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1 Paul, an apostle not of men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, unto the brethren that are at Laodicea.

2 Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I give thanks unto Christ in all my prayers, that ye continue in him and persevere in his works, looking for the promise at the day of judgement.

4 Neither do the vain talkings of some overset you, which creep in, that they may turn you away from the truth of the Gospel which is preached by me.

5 And now shall God cause that they that are of me shall continue ministering unto the increase of the truth of the Gospel, and accomplishing goodness, and the work of salvation, even eternal life.

6 And now are my bonds seen of all men, which I suffer in Christ, wherein I rejoice and am glad.

7 And unto me this is for everlasting salvation; which also is brought about by your prayers, and the ministry of the Holy Ghost, whether by life or by death.

8 For verily to me life is in Christ, and to die is joy.

9 And unto him (or And also) shall he work his mercy in you, that ye may have the same love, and be of one mind.

10 Therefore, dearly beloved, as ye have heard in my presence, so hold fast and work in the fear of God, and it shall be unto you for life eternal.

11 For it is God that worketh in you.

12 And do ye without afterthought whatsoever ye do.

13 And for the rest, dearly beloved, rejoice in Christ, and beware of them that are filthy in lucre.

14 Let all your petitions be made openly before God, and be ye steadfast in the mind of Christ.

15 And what things are sound and true and sober and just and to be loved, do ye.

16 And what ye have heard and received, keep fast in your heart.

17 And peace shall be unto you.

18 The saints salute you.

19 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirit.

20 And cause this epistle to be read unto them of Colossae, and the epistle of the Colossians to be read unto you.

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THIRD EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

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1:1 Stephanus and the elders (presbyters) that are with him, even Daphnus and Eubulus and Theophilus and Zenon, unto Paul ‹their brother eternal› greeting in the Lord.

1:2 There have come unto Corinth two men, Simon and Cleobius, which are overthrowing the faith of many with evil ‹corrupt› words,

1:3 which do thou prove ‹and examine›:

1:4 for we have never heard such words from thee nor from the other apostles:

1:5 but all that we have received from thee or from them, that do we hold fast.

1:6 Since therefore the Lord hath had mercy on us, that while thou art still in the flesh we may hear these things again from thee,

1:7 if it be possible, either come unto us or write unto us.

1:8 For we believe, according as it hath been revealed unto Theonoë, that the Lord hath delivered thee out of the hand of the lawless one.

1:9 Now the things which these men say and teach are these:

1:10 They say that we must not use the prophets,

1:11 and that God is not Almighty,

1:12 and that there shall be no resurrection of the flesh,

1:13 and that man was not made by God,

1:14 and that Christ came not down in the flesh, neither was born of Mary,

1:15 and that the world is not of God, but of the angels.

1:16 Wherefore, brother, ‹we pray thee› use all diligence to come unto us, that the church of the Corinthians may remain without offence, and the madness of these men may be made plain. Farewell ‹always› in the Lord.

2:1 The deacons Threptus and Eutyches brought the letter unto Philippi,

2:2 so that Paul received it, being in bonds because of Stratonice the wife of Apollophanes, ‹and he forgat his bonds›, and was sore afflicted,

2:3 and cried out, saying: It were better for me to die and to be with the Lord, than to continue in the flesh and to hear such things ‹and the calamities of false doctrine›, so that trouble cometh upon trouble.

2:4 And over and above this so great affliction I am in bonds and behold these evils whereby the devices of Satan are accomplished.

2:5 Paul therefore, in great affliction, wrote a letter, answering thus:

3:1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, unto the brethren which are in Corinth, greeting.

3:2 Being in the midst of many tribulations, I marvel not if the teachings of the evil one run abroad apace.

3:3 For my Lord Jesus Christ will hasten his coming, and will set at nought (no longer endure the insolence of) them that falsify his words.

3:4 For I delivered unto you in the beginning the things which I received of the ‹holy› apostles which were before me, who were at all times with Jesus Christ:

3:5 namely, that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of Mary ‹which is› of the seed of David ‹according to the flesh›, the Holy Ghost being sent forth from heaven from the Father unto her by the angel Gabriel,

3:6 that he (Jesus) might come down into this world and redeem all flesh by his flesh, and raise us up from the dead in the flesh, like as he hath shown to us in himself for an ensample.

3:7 And because man was formed by his Father,

3:8 therefore was he sought when he was lost, that he might be quickened by adoption.

3:9 For to this end did God Almighty who made heaven and earth first send the prophets unto the Jews, that they might be drawn away from their sins.

3:10 For he designed to save the house of Israel: therefore he conferred a portion of the spirit of Christ upon the prophets and sent them unto the Jews first, and they proclaimed the true worship of God for a long space of time.

3:11 But the prince of iniquity, desiring to be God, laid hands on them and slew them, and bound all flesh by evil lusts ‹and the end of the world by judgement drew near›.

3:12 But God Almighty, who is righteous, would not cast away his own creation, ‹but had compassion on them from heaven›,

3:13 and sent his spirit into Mary ‹in Galilee›,

3:14 ‹who believed with all her heart and received the Holy Ghost in her womb, that Jesus might come into the world,›

3:15 that by that flesh whereby that wicked one had brought in death (had triumphed), by the same he should be shown to be overcome.

3:16 For by his own body Jesus Christ saved all flesh ‹and restored it unto life›,

3:17 that he might show forth the temple of righteousness in his body.

3:18 In whom we are saved.

3:19 They therefore are not children of righteousness but children of wrath who reject the wisdom of God, saying that the heaven and the earth and all that are in them are not the work of God.

3:20 They therefore are children of wrath, for cursed are they, following the teaching of the serpent,

3:21 whom do ye drive out from you and flee from their doctrine.

3:22 ‹For ye are not children of disobedience, but of the well-beloved church.›

3:23 ‹Therefore is the time of the resurrection proclaimed unto all.›

3:24 And as for that which they say, that there is no resurrection of the flesh, they indeed shall have no resurrection ‹unto life, but unto judgement›,

3:25 because they believe not in him that is risen from the dead, ‹not believing nor understanding›,

3:26 for they know not, O Corinthians, the seeds of wheat or of other seeds (grain), how they are cast bare into the earth and are corrupted and rise again by the will of God with bodies, and clothed.

3:27 And not only that [body] which is cast in riseth again, but manifold more blessing itself [i.e. fertile and prospering].

3:28 And if we must not take an example from seeds ‹only, but from more noble bodies›,

3:29 ye know how Jonas the son of Amathi, when he would not preach to them of Nineve, ‹but fled›, was swallowed by the sea-monster;

3:30 and after three days and three nights God heard the prayer of Jonas out of the lowest hell, and no part of him was consumed, not even an hair nor an eyelash.

3:31 How much more, ‹o ye of little faith›, shall he raise up you that have believed in Christ Jesus, like as he himself arose.

3:32 Likewise also a dead man was cast upon the bones of the prophet Helisaetis by the children of Israel, and he arose, both body and soul and bones and spirit; how much more shall ye which have been cast upon the body and bones and spirit of the Lord arise again in that day having your flesh whole, ‹even as he arose›?

3:33 ‹Likewise also concerning the prophet Helias: he raised up the widow's son from death: how much more shall the Lord Jesus raise you up from death at the sound of the trumpet, in the twinkling of an eye? for he

hath showed us an ensample in his own body.›

3:34 If, then, ye receive any other doctrine, God shall be witness against you; and let no man trouble me,

3:35 for I bear these bonds that I may win Christ, and I therefore bear his marks in my body that I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

3:36 And whoso receiveth (abideth in) the rule which he hath received by the blessed prophets and the holy gospel, shall receive a recompense from the Lord, ‹and when he riseth from the dead shall obtain eternal life›.

3:37 But whoso transgresseth these things, with him is the fire, and with them that walk in like manner,

3:38 which are a generation of vipers,

3:39 whom do ye reject in the power of the Lord,

3:40 and peace, ‹grace, and love› shall be with you.

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CORRESPONDENCE OF PAUL AND SENECA

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1 Seneca to Paul, greeting

I believe, Paul, that you have been informed of the talk which I had yesterday with my Lucilius about the apocrypha (or possibly the secret mysteries) and other things; for certain sharers in your teaching were with me. For we had retired to the gardens of Sallust, where, because of us, those whom I speak of, going in another direction, saw and joined us. Certainly we wished for your presence, and I would have you know it. We were much refreshed by the reading of your book, by which I mean some of the many letters which you have addressed to some city or capital of a province, and which inculcate the moral life with admirable precepts. These thoughts, I take it, are not uttered by you but through you, but surely sometimes both by you and through you: for such is the greatness of them and they are instinct (warm) with such nobility, that I think whole generations (ages) of men could hardly suffice for the instilling and perfecting of them. I desire your good health, brother.

2 Paul to Seneca, greeting

I received your letter yesterday with delight, and should have been able to answer it at once, had I had by me the youth I meant to send to you. For you know when, and by whom, and at what moment, and to whom things ought to be given and entrusted. I beg, therefore, that you will not think yourself neglected, when I am respecting the dignity of your person. Now in that you somewhere write that you are pleased with my letter (or, write

that you are pleased with part of my letter) I think myself happy in the good opinion of such a man: for you would not say it, you, a critic, a sophist, the teacher of a great prince, and indeed of all—unless you spoke truth. I trust you may long be in health.

3 Seneca to Paul, greeting

I have arranged some writings in a volume, and given them their proper divisions: I am also resolved to read them to Caesar, if only fortune be kind, that he may bring a new (an interested) ear to the hearing. Perhaps you, too, will be there. If not, I will at another time fix you a day, that we may look over the work together: indeed, I could not produce this writing to him, without first conferring with you, if only that could be done without risk: that you may know that you are not being neglected. Farewell, dearest Paul.

4 Paul to Annaeus Seneca, greeting

Whenever I hear your letters read, I think of you as present, and imagine nothing else but that you are always with us. As soon, then, as you begin to come, we shall see each other at close quarters. I desire your good health.

5 Seneca to Paul, greeting

We are much pained by your retirement. What is it? what causes keep you away? If it be the anger of the lady (Poppaea) because you have left the old rite and sect, and have converted others, there will be a possibility of pleading with her, that she may consider it as done on due reflection and not lightly.

6 Paul to Seneca and Lucilius, greeting

Of the subject on which you have written I must not speak with pen and ink, of which the former marks out and draws somewhat, and the latter shows it clearly, especially as I know that among you—that is, in your homes and in you—there are those who understand me. Honour is to be paid to all, and so much the more because men catch at opportunities of being offended. If we are patient with them, we shall certainly overcome them at every point, provided they be men who can be sorry for their actions. Farewell.

7 Annaeus Seneca to Paul and Theophilus, greeting

I profess myself well content with the reading of your letters which you sent to the Galatians, Corinthians, and Achaeans; and may we so live together as you show yourself to be inspired with the divine frenzy (horror). For it is the holy spirit which is in you and high above you which expresses these exalted and adorable thoughts. I would therefore have you careful of other points, that the polish of the style may not be wanting to the majesty of the thought. And, brother, not to conceal anything from you, and have it on my conscience, I confess to you that the Augustus was moved by your views. When I read to him the beginning of the power (virtue) that is in you (perhaps he means your exordium about virtue) his words were these: that he could wonder that a man not regularly educated could think thus. I replied that the gods often speak by the mouths of the simple (innocent), not of those who try deceitfully to show what they can do by their learning. And when I cited him the example of Vatienus the

rustic, to whom two men appeared in the territory of Reate, who afterwards were recognized as Castor and Pollux, he appeared fully convinced. Farewell.

8 Paul to Seneca, greeting

Though I am aware that Caesar, even if he sometimes lapses, is a lover of our wonders, you will suffer yourself to be, not wounded but admonished. For I think that you took a very serious step in bringing to his notice a matter alien to his religion and training. For since he is a worshipper of the gods of the nations, I do not see why you thought you would wish him to know this matter, unless I am to think that you did it out of excessive attachment to me. I beg you not to do so in future. For you must be careful not to offend the empress in your love for me: yet her anger will not hurt us if it lasts, nor do good if it does not [this is nonsense]. As a queen, she will not be angry: as a woman, she will be offended. Farewell.

9 Seneca to Paul, greeting

I know that you are not so much disturbed on your own account by my letter to you on the showing of your letters to Caesar, as by the nature of things, which so calls away the minds of men from all right learning and conduct—so that I am not surprised, for I have learnt this for certain by many examples. Let us then act differently, and if in the past anything has been done carelessly, you will pardon it. I have sent you a book on elegance of expression (store of words). Farewell, dearest Paul.

10 to Seneca, Paul, greeting

Whenever I write to you and do not place my name after yours (see the heading) I do a serious thing and one unbefitting my persuasion (sect). For I ought, as I have often declared, to be all things to all men, and to observe

in your person that which the Roman law has granted to the honour of the senate, and choose the last place in writing (text, reading) a letter, not striving to do as I please in a confused and disgraceful way. Farewell, most devoted of masters. Given on the 5th of the kalends of July; Nero the fourth time, and Messala, consuls (A. D. 58).

11 Seneca to Paul, greeting

Hail, my dearest Paul. If you, so great a man, so beloved in all ways, be—I say not joined—but intimately associated with me and my name, it will indeed be well with your Seneca. Since, then, you are the summit and topmost peak of all people, would you not have me glad that I am so near you as to be counted a second self of yours? Do not, then, think that you are unworthy to be named first on the heading of letters, lest you make me think you are testing me rather than playing with me—especially as you know yourself to be a Roman citizen. For the rank that is mine, I would it were yours, and yours I would were mine. Farewell, dearest Paul. Given on the 10th of the kalends of April; Apronianus and Capito consuls (59).

12 Seneca to Paul, greeting

Hail, my dearest Paul. Think you that I am not in sadness and grief, that your innocent people are so often condemned to suffer? And next, that the whole people thinks you so callous and so prone to crime, that you are supposed to be the authors of every misfortune in the city? Yet let us bear it patiently and content ourselves with what fortune brings, until supreme happiness puts an end to ourtroubles. Former ages had to bear the Macedonian, Philip's son, and, after Darius, Dionysius, and our own times endured Gaius Caesar: to all of whom their will was law. The source of the many fires which Rome suffers is plain. But if humble men could speak

out what the reason is, and if it were possible to speak without risk in this dark time, all would be plain to all. Christians and Jews are commonly executed as contrivers of the fire. Whoever the criminal is, whose pleasure is that of a butcher, and who veils himself with a lie, he is reserved for his due season: and as the best of men is sacrificed, the one for the many, so he, vowed to death for all, will be burned with fire. A hundred and thirty-two houses and four blocks have been burnt in six days; the seventh brought a pause. I pray you may be well, brother. Given the 5th of the kalends of April; Frugi and Bassus consuls (64).

13 Seneca to Paul, greeting

Much in every part of your works is enclosed in allegory and enigma, and therefore the great force that is given you of matter and talent (?) should be beautified, I do not say with elegance of words, but with a certain care. Nor should you fear what I remember you have often said; that many who affect such things vitiate the thought and emasculate the strength of the matter. But I wish you would yield to me and humour the genius of Latin, and give beauty to your noble words, that the great gift that has been granted you may be worthily treated by you. Farewell.

Given on the day before the nones of June; Leo and Sabinus consuls (non-existent).

14 Paul to Seneca, greeting

To your meditations have been revealed those things which the Godhead has granted to few. With confidence, therefore, I sow in a field already fertile a most prolific seed, not such matter as is liable to corruption, but the abiding word, an emanation from God who grows and abides for ever. This your wisdom has attained and you will see that it is unfailing—so as

to judge that the laws of heathens and Israelites are to be shunned. You may become a new author, by showing forth with the graces of rhetoric the unblameable wisdom of Jesus Christ, which you, having wellnigh attained it, will instil into the temporal monarch, his servants, and his intimate friends; yet the persuading of them will be a rough and difficult task, for many of them will hardly incline to your admonitions. Yet the word of God, if it be instilled into them, will be a vital gain, producing a new man, incorrupt, and an everlasting soul that shall hasten from hence to God. Farewell, Seneca, most dear to me.

Given on the kalends of August; Leo and Sabinus consuls.

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