

Stephen Carlson has graciously agreed to do a few more posts on his work on Papias. Remember, Papias is that (very?) early second century church father who is later said to have written a five-volume work called the Exposition of the Sayings (or Oracles) of the Lord. We don't have the book any longer, and don't really even know what was in it. But several church fathers mention it and give a few quotations from it, some of them very intriguing indeed (including an alternative account about how Judas Iscariot died!).

In this post Stephen continues his explanation - based on a new book he is just now finishing up for publication. For my money, this is the most interesting one yet, dealing with an intriguing question: just what kind of book was this that Papias produced? (The other fascinating question that has no definitive answer - don't know if Stephen will be dealing with this - why didn't anyone preserve the book for posterity???)

The Genre Question

In this post, I would like to address the genre question: what kind of work did Papias write? Answering this question is important because if we knew what Papias's goal was for his work, it can provide us with some context to appreciate better the remarks of his about Mark and Matthew that I mentioned earlier. It can also situate him within early Christianity and help us better understand how early Christianity developed, at least in Asia Minor of the early second century, and in Papias's case how some of the texts and traditions which have survived were viewed from that early period. Since there is so little evidence of Christianity from this early period, Papias's writings are precious for the historian of early Christianity indeed.

When we look at scholarly opinion for guidance about the nature of Papias's work, however, we find that their views are all over the map, though some are more popular than others. The main reason for this is ...

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