

QUESTION:

Why are scholars almost certain that Peter did not give the general details of Jesus' life and ministry to his companion Mark, who faithfully recorded the details in Greek, in the style found in his gospel? I know you've said that someone such as Peter, aside from not knowing Greek, almost certainly wouldn't have had the ability to build the relatively sophisticated structure of Mark's gospel, but why couldn't Mark have "put form" on Peter's prosaic verbal account ?

RESPONSE:

This is a very good question, and as it turns out it is a bit complicated. The first thing to say is that one has to look for *evidence* if one wants to think, for example, that Mark is recording the traditions given to the author by Peter. The idea that he does so ultimately goes back to Papias.

To begin answering the question, in this post I thought I'd talk about Papias and the tradition of the Gospels. And rather than write it all out from scratch, I've decided simply to reproduce what I say about the matter in my book [Jesus Interrupted](#). I'll have more to say about the question later. So, from my book, as a partial response to the question:

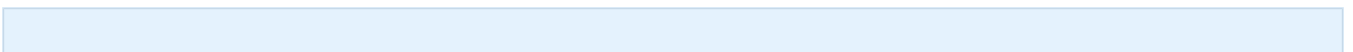
Despite the fact that the evidence indicates that none of the disciples wrote a Gospel, we need to deal with the early church tradition that indicates that some of them did so. How is one to deal with this tradition?

The earliest source of this tradition deals with only two early Christian Gospels, Mark and Matthew. This is an enigmatic source, an early Christian church Father named Papias, who wrote a five-volume work called [Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord](#). Scholars have plausibly dated the work anywhere from 110-40 CE., forty to seventy years after the first Gospel. The work no longer survives: a number of later Christian authorities found Papias's views either offensive or insufficiently sophisticated, and so the work was not copied extensively for posterity. Everything we know about the work comes from quotations of it by later church fathers.

Papias has nonetheless often been portrayed as a useful source for establishing early church tradition, in part because of how he indicates he received his information. In some of the quotations of the [Expositions](#) that survive, he states that he personally talked with Christians who had known a group of people he calls "the elders," who had known some of the disciples, and that he has passed along information that he received from them. And so, in reading Papias, we have access to third- or fourth-hand information: Papias tells us what one-time companions of people who knew disciples told him.

It is this latter kind of third- or fourth-hand information that concerns a much quoted tradition given us by Papias, about Mark and Matthew, authors of Gospels.

FOR THE REST OF THIS POST, log in as a Member. If you don't belong yet, JOIN TODAY!!!



You need to be logged in to see this part of the content. Please [Login](#) to access.



[More on Mark and Peter](#)
[Future Books](#)