

I have been discussing the writings of Papias, his lost five-volume Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord. Scholars of the New Testament have long ascribed huge significance to this work, in no small part because Papias claims to have ties to eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. In my view this championing of Papias is misguided. I say something about that in my new book on Jesus Before the Gospels (or whatever we end up calling it); I will probably be going into a more sustained analysis in my scholarly book that I'm working on next on memory and the historical Jesus.

The excitement over Papias as a link to our eyewitnesses is based largely on the following passage that is quoted from his writing by Eusebius in his early-fourth-century Church History. This was written about 200 years after Papias, but Eusebius had read Papias's book and so could quote from it. In his discussion of the book Eusebius mentions the references to Papias in the writings of Irenaeus, from around 180 CE, just 40 or 60 years after Papias.

Here is what Eusebius says:

There are five books written by Papias in circulation, entitled "An Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord." Irenaeus remembers these as the only ones Papias wrote, as he somewhere says, "And Papias as well, an ancient man — the one who heard John and was a companion of Polycarp — gives a written account of these things in the fourth of his books. For he wrote five books." [cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.33.4]

Thus Irenaeus. But Papias himself, in the preface of his work, makes it clear that he himself neither heard nor saw in person any of the holy apostles. Instead, he declares that he received the matters of faith from those known to them. As he says:

"I also will not hesitate to draw up for you, along with these expositions, an orderly account of all the things I carefully learned and have carefully recalled from the elders; for I have certified their truth. For unlike most people, I took no pleasure in hearing those who had a lot to say, but only those who taught the truth, and not those who recalled commandments from strangers, but only those who recalled the commandments which have been given faithfully by the Lord and which proceed from the truth itself.

But whenever someone arrived who had been a companion of one of the elders, I would carefully inquire after their words, what Andrew or Peter had said, or what Philip or what Thomas had said, or James or John or Matthew or any of the other disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the elder John, disciples of the Lord, were saying. For I did not suppose that what came out of books would benefit me as much as that which came from a living and abiding voice."

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