Here is another post by Stephen Carlson on that mysterious figure named Papias, an early second century writer who claims to have had information from reliable witnesses about the authors of the New Testament, and who may indicate that the “John” who wrote the Gospel is different from the “John” who wrote Revelation. Or does he? If the *apostle* John did not Revelation, should it be in the New Testament? Puzzling and hard to figure out — but here is what Stephen says about it.

Stephen Carlson is the author of *The Gospel Hoax* and *The Text of Galatians and Its History*.

What Papias Says About His Own Work

In our last post, we looked at the title of Papias’s work, *Exposition of Dominical Oracles*, and surveyed the considerable scholarly controversy about the nature of Papias’s work. Many scholars take the position that it was a commentary on the sayings of Jesus, perhaps with some narrative elements, but others contend that it was a commentary on at least the Gospel of Matthew, or a commentary on Revelation, or a commentary on Messianic passages in the Old Testament, or a narrative of Jesus’s words and deeds much like the Gospels. All of these options fit the basic meaning of the term “oracles” (*logia*), whether as inspired utterances of a divinity preserved from antiquity, or, as in first-century Jewish and Christian usage, the scriptures of the Old Testament, and eventually for later Christians like Irenaeus and Eusebius, all of scripture collectively. Since the title is suggestive of a large range of possibilities, in this post we look at what Papias has to say about his own work.

We are fortunate that the fourth-century church historian Eusebius quotes a large paragraph from Papias’s prologue, but to understand what is going on with this quotation, we first have to contextualize what Eusebius is trying to accomplish with it. Eusebius’s interest in Papias does not lie in the subject matter of Papias’s book, but rather in his witness to the writings that will make up the New Testament, an issue of fundamental importance to Eusebius. This why, for example, Eusebius gives Papias’s statement on the writings of Mark and Matthew, as well as mentioning that Papias made testimonies from 1 John and 1 Peter, but it is the apostolic status of the Revelation of John that interests Eusebius the most. Aware that there is a dispute over the authorship of the Apocalypse, Eusebius marshals Papias as evidence for the existence of more than one “disciple of the Lord” named John. In particular, this is what Eusebius tells us *(Church History* 3.39.1-5):

To see what the fourth-century Eusebius says about Papias, and why it’s significant for understanding the origins of the New Testament, you will need to belong to the blog. Joining is easy and cheap, and gives you huge bang for your buck. And remember, every penny goes to charity. So join!