

Conservative Christian scholars often claim that the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were recognized as “Scripture” already by the early second century, and for evidence they appeal to the words spoken of that mysterious church father “Papias” (writing in 120 CE? 140 CE?). But when Papias mentioned Matthew and Mark, was he speaking about the books that we now know about? And if so did he see them as Scripture?

Here is the final guest post by Stephen Carlson on Papias, based on research he has been doing for years for a book on this and related questions. As you’ll see, he reaches very different, and intriguing conclusions.

Stephen Carlson is the author of [The Gospel Hoax](#) and [The Text of Galatians and Its History](#).

The Logia of Mark and Matthew

In our last post, we considered Irenaeus’s extensive quotation of Papias for a millennial fertility tradition from the “elders” to the effect that Jesus promised that, in the resurrection, the renewed earth will be so fertile that each grape vine will produce an astronomical amount of wine, and each wheat stalk will produce a similar amount of the finest flour. Before that we also looked at Papias’s preface and noted that he said there were two kinds of material in his work, interpretations of dominical oracles and various traditions supplementing them. When this distinction is applied to the fertility tradition that Irenaeus quotes, it appears that the Jesus saying transmitted by Irenaeus is not so much an oracle and that needed an interpretation, but rather a supplementary tradition via someone named John in support of a messianic interpretation of an Old Testament promise given by Isaac to Jacob in Gen 27. This analysis supports the view that Papias’s dominical oracles are Old Testament promises and prophecies about Jesus Christ. In this post we will now look at how this interpretation fits with what Papias said about the writings of Mark and Matthew.

We have to keep in mind that the reason why we have anything at all about what Papias said about Mark and Matthew is that it served the interest of ...

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