

TWO SHIPWRECKED GOSPELS

THE *LOGOI OF JESUS* AND PAPIAS'S *EXPOSITION OF
LOGIA ABOUT THE LORD*

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PREFACE

Early Christians produced several books about Jesus in addition to the four Gospels in the New Testament. Some of these documents now survive in whole or in part, some in citations embedded in later writings, and some only as titles. Others are hypothetical reconstructions of lost documents that once may have been sources for later Gospels. This book attempts to reconstruct two lost Gospels, one of which probably was the earliest of all, what scholars conventionally call Q, probably from the German word *Quelle*, “source.” Tragically, no manuscript of this document exists, and there is no uncontested external witness to it, but, as we shall see, it is highly likely that the Synoptic Evangelists (unknown authors we have come to call Matthew, Mark, and Luke) all relied on a document that no longer exists. Although scholars have published several speculative reconstructions of Q on the basis of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark, this volume proposes an alternative methodology for recovering the lost Gospel and produces a text nearly twice as long. To distinguish my reconstruction from others, I refer to it as Q+ or as the *Logoi of Jesus*, its most likely original title.

The second Gospel reconstructed in this volume survives exclusively in citations by later authors. The *Exposition of Logia about the Lord*, a five-volume work by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (in Asia Minor), apparently was a running commentary on three earlier Gospels: those that we know as Mark and Matthew and a third with affinities with Matthew. I will propose that this third Gospel was none other than the lost Gospel, the *Logoi of Jesus*. Papias did not restrict himself to information derived from these books; he supplemented them with lore provided by people who had spoken with Jesus’ followers. Although publications of the Papiian fragments are readily available elsewhere, to my knowledge no one has rearranged them into their most likely sequence and speculated systematically concerning content that is missing in the gaps between them. Papias’s first four books apparently followed the narrative sequence of the Gospel of Matthew; the fifth regaled activities of Jesus’ followers up to his own day, circa 110 C.E. One therefore may consider his oeuvre as an extended Gospel with running commentary.

One can scarcely exaggerate the tragic consequences of these two textual shipwrecks. The *Logoi of Jesus* apparently was the earliest of all Gospels, and the *Exposition* was a trove of oral traditions about Jesus and the earliest known commentary on Mark and Matthew. These alternative reconstructions of the *Logoi of Jesus* and the *Exposition of Logia about the Lord* permit a new solution to the Synoptic Problem, the vexing interconnections among Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I will refer to this solution as the Q+/Papias Hypothesis. The first part of this book discusses the later of these two lost Gospels, because Papias provides precious external evidence that *Logoi* once existed and is not merely a clever scholarly contrivance.