

Sometimes in my courses on the New Testament my students have trouble understanding why I'm so interested (OK, obsessed) with the small details of the text, rather than the "big picture." Who cares if this or that little detail is a possible contradiction or problem for other reason? What matters is the overall message, right?

Yes, that's right on one level. But on another level (or two or three) the small details really matter. Not only is the big picture made up of very small brush strokes - so if there are problems at the brush-stroke level there are problems with the picture itself - but also sometimes the details are the absolute key to understanding what's happening in the big picture.

And so I illustrate: when a detective arrives at the crime scene of a murder, he might start looking around for clues. A finger print, a strand of hair. And you can imagine the frustration of someone looking on: There's a DEAD BODY surrounded by BLOOD here! Why are you looking for a strand of hair??? It's because looking at the body itself will probably not solve the mystery of who killed the person. The tiny clue will.

I say this in preface to my discussion now of one of the details that I think may have been responsible for keeping the Apocalypse of Peter out of the canon. It seems like a tiny little thing. But it may have had a big consequence.

Yesterday I pointed out that ...

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