

It was a long time ago that I started a thread dealing with the question of why the Apocalypse of Peter did not make it into the New Testament but 2 Peter did. I'll give a summary here of where we are in the discussion just now, but if you want the full play-by-play, use the search function to look up Apocalypse of Peter; I've been blogging on it, on and off, since November 11. And it's time finally to bring it to a close.

I've been delaying for a lot of reasons, the two most prominent are that I'm not completely confident in my views and that the matter is complicated and it has seemed like an inordinate amount of work for me to try to make it simple enough to be interesting to someone who isn't completely obsessed with the manuscript tradition of the early Christian writings. I.e., most people!

A brief recap. The Apocalypse of Peter provides an account of a guided tour of heaven and hell, given to Peter himself. He sees the realms of the damned, where the torments reserved for sinners is laid out in gory detail, different torments for different kinds of sin. He then goes to the realms of the blessed and, in much shorter order, very brief indeed, provides a description of the saved in heaven.

The book was reasonably popular in the second and third centuries, and is quoted by Scripture by important Christian church fathers. But its popularity waned and by the fourth century it was widely considered not to be part of Scripture, until it pretty much disappeared from sight, until discovered in modern times. Before the modern discoveries we knew about it only in the surviving quotations of it in church fathers starting with Clement of Alexandria (roughly around 200 CE).

The book appears, at first glance, to be completely orthodox; it was widely known and accepted; its views of the afterlife were widely held in the early centuries (tactile torments for the damned; fantastic blessings for the saved); it was said to be written by the apostle Peter himself; and generally it had all the requisites for being admitted into the canon. So why did it not make it? That's my question.

A fortuitous find of the book - or at least a later, heavily edited version of it (as scholars later realized) - was made in the winter archaeological season of 1886-87, by ...

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