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Apocalypse of Peter

As Himmelfarb states, "the Apocalypse of Peter, the earliest surviving apocalypse to focus on paradise and hell, was probably composed in the second century CE." (98)

There are three different versions of the Apocalypse of Peter:

1. Ethiopic
2. Akhmim (Greek)
3. Rainer

The Apocalypse reveals how the righteous will be rewarded and how sinners will be punished. The text itself provides a warning/threat and reveals that in order to escape eternal torment humans need to avoid sin. Tours of hell were extremely popular among Christians in late antiquity and the Middle Ages (Himmelfarb, 97). This explains why the Apocalypse of Peter was very well-known in early Christianity and how it influenced Christian writers in their compositions and eschatological understanding. The text is full of eschatological concepts that draw from Hellenistic and Jewish beliefs combined with the Christian understanding of death.

Chapters 1-3: Apocalyptic Discourse

- The Apocalypse begins with Peter and the other disciples on the Mount of Olives asking Jesus: "declare to us what are the signs of your coming and of the end of the world."
- Jesus responds with an extensive description about the terrifying events that will take place when the world is destroyed by fire at the last judgment.
- The punishments of hell await the wicked at the Second Coming
- The sinners weep in affliction and sorrow and all who see them weep as well
- Horrendous punishments are applied to the sinners, they are punished according to their wrongdoing (hanging by the sinful limb)
- Cosmic catastrophes are described, the earth is consumed by darkness and fire, the stars melt, waters are turned into coals of fire
- All souls are on Christ's right hand, the righteous and the sinners will be separated

Chapters 4-6: Jesus at the Escathon

- Jesus explains what will take place on the Last Judgment, how all will behold him coming upon an eternal cloud of brightness
- Everyone will be commanded to enter into the river of fire where each person will be judged according to their deeds.
- The unrighteous, the sinners, and the hypocrites will stand in the depths of darkness where they will be punished forever.
- The elect will go to him and avoid the sight of death by the devouring fire.

Chapters 7-12: Punishment

- Punishment takes place at the Last Judgment NOT immediately after death
- All men and women have a place prepared for them.
- There are various places or “pits” in which sinners are punished for their wrongdoings

<i>Sin</i>	<i>Punishment</i>
Blaspheming the way of righteousness (7.1–2 E; 22 G).	Hung from the tongue, fire.
Denied righteousness (7.3–4 E; 23 G).	Pit of burning mud.
Women who beautified themselves for adultery (7.5–6 E; 24a G).	Hung by the hair over bubbling mud.
Men who committed adultery with those women (7.7–8 E; 24b G).	Hung by the thighs (E; ‘feet’ G), head in the mud, crying, ‘We did not believe that we would come to this place.’
Murderers and their associates (7.9–11 E; 25 G).	Tormented by snakes and worms, their victims watching them and saying, ‘O God, righteous is thy judgement.’
Women who conceived children but procured abortion (8.1–4 E; 26 G).	Sit in a pool of discharge and excrement, with eyes burned by flames coming from their children opposite them.
Infanticide (8.5–10 E).	Flesh-eating animals come forth from the mothers’ rotten milk and torment the parents.
Persecuting and giving over the righteous ones (9.1–2 E; 27 G).	Sit in a dark place, burned waist-high, tortured by evil spirits, bowels eaten by worms.
Blaspheming and betraying righteousness (9.3 E; 28 G).	Chewing their tongues, eyes burnt out by fiery rods.
False witnesses (9.4 E; 29 G).	Lips cut off, fire in the mouth and bowels.
Faith in wealth, but neglect of widows and orphans (9.5–7 E; 30 G).	Wearing rags, never ending pain, set on sharp and fiery stones.
Lending money and taking interest on the interest (10.1 E; 31 G).	Stand in a pool of excrement.
Those ‘who cut their flesh’ (not in G), homosexuals and lesbians (10.2–4 E; 32 G). ²¹	Endlessly throwing themselves into an abyss.
Those who made idols resembling animals, such as cats and lions (10.5–6 E; 33 G, which does not specify the nature of the idols).	Makers beat themselves with chains of fire (misunderstood by G).
Men and women that abandoned the commandment (G: way) of God and followed demons (10.7 E; 34 G).	Eternally burning.
Those who did not obey their parents (11.1–3 E).	Slip down rolling into a fiery place repeatedly.
Those who did not obey their parents, who did not follow the teaching of their fathers and did not honour those who were older (11.4–5 E).	Carnivorous birds torture them.
Maidens who did not retain their virginity until marriage (11.6–7 E).	Their flesh is torn apart.
Slaves who did not obey their masters (11.8–9 E).	Chewing their tongues, eternal fire.
Those who do charity and regard themselves righteous (12.1–3 E).	Blind and deaf pushing each other onto eternally burning coal.
Sorcerers and sorceresses (12.4–7 E).	Wheel of fire.

Chapters 13-14: Rewards

- The elect and righteous are perfect in uprightness
- The righteous and the wicked recognize God's righteous judgment through the reward/punishment they receive
- There is no chance of repentance
- The elect and righteous receive the baptism and salvation they pursued
- Jesus rejoices with the righteous and allows them to enter into the everlasting kingdom

Chapters 15-17: The Transfiguration

- The Apocalypse concludes with Peter's description of what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration
- This may have been included in the text to prove the legitimacy of the rest of the vision

Questions

1. Which types of sin does the Apocalypse of Peter make a strong emphasis on? Why?
 - a. Sexual and Speech
 - b. Idolatry
 - c. Murder and Theft
 - d. All of the Above
 - "The prominence of sexual sins and sins of speech in the Apocalypse of Peter and later tours of hell is presumably related to the fact that these sins are largely invisible: murder and theft are sins that almost inevitably come to light, but a community is likely to be unaware of sexual or verbal sins that take place in its midst." (Himmelfarb)
2. How does Peter respond when Jesus shows him how sinners suffer?
 - a. Peter weeps in great affliction and sorrow
 - b. Peter asks what he needs to do to avoid being punished
 - c. Peter says it would be better they had not been created
 - d. Peter is not sure what to say and remains quiet
3. Compare and Contrast the Apocalypse of Peter to 1 Enoch. What are the methods of reward and punishment? What is the role of repentance? What evidence is given to justify the two eschatological realities in these apocalypses?