

After the past two posts, I am now in a position to answer the question that led to this brief hiatus in my discussion of the afterlife, involving the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke. To refresh your memory, here is the question:

QUESTION:

If, in your suspicion, the original Gospel of Luke began at 3:1 and the infancy narrative found in 1:5-2:52 is a later addition, do you think that should be indicated in NT reconstructions and translations in a way similar to how Mark 16:9-20 is often bracketed?

RESPONSE:

Different scholars will have different opinions on this question, in no small measure because the majority of scholars (I would imagine) are reluctant to say that Luke 1-2 were originally lacking from the Gospel. But suppose the majority were convinced? Would they say that brackets should be placed around the story, as happens, typically, with passages otherwise recognized as probably not belonging in the New Testament, such as the ending of Mark's Gospel (Mark 16:9-20) or the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) or the passage that affirms the doctrine of the Trinity in 1 John, called the "Johannine comma" (1 John 5:7-8)?

I think the answer is almost certainly "no," and for a technical but important reason that involves the difference between two widely recognized phenomena whose technical names are "textual corruption" and "interpolation."

These are two different phenomena, and even though the boundaries between them can be blurred and blurry at times, it is important (in most scholars' views) to keep them distinct in one's mind.

A textual corruption is ...

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