

This is the second of three posts on the question of whether Bible translations should place the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel in brackets, or assign them to a footnote. For background: read the post from yesterday! Again this is a Blast from the Past, a post I made back in December 2012. .

In my previous post, ostensibly on the genealogy of Luke, I pointed out that there are good reasons for thinking that the Gospel originally was published - in a kind of "first edition" - without what are now the first two chapters, so that the very beginning was what is now 3:1 (this is many centuries, of course, before anyone started using chapters and verses.) If that's the case, Luke was originally a Gospel like Mark's that did not have a birth and infancy narratives. These were added later, in a second edition (either by the same author or by someone else).

If that's the case then the Gospel began with John the Baptist and his baptism of Jesus, followed by the genealogy which makes better sense here, at the beginning, than it does in the third chapter once the first two are added.

But is there any hard evidence that a first edition began without the first two chapters? One of the reasons it is so hard to say is because we simply don't have much hard evidence. Our two earliest manuscripts of Luke, P75 and P45, are fragmentary, lacking portions of Luke, including the first two chapters. We can't say whether they originally had them or not. Our first manuscript with portions of the opening chapters is the third-century P4. But our earliest patristic witness is over a century earlier. As it turns out, the witness is the heresiarch Marcion, and as is well known he didn't have the first two chapters!

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