

Jeff Cate, “Learning from the Scribes: Using Variant Readings and Marginal Comments as Interpretive Tools for John’s Apocalypse”

John’s Apocalypse was transmitted through hand-written copies for fourteen centuries before the age of printing dawned. Whether intentional or accidental, changes occurred in the text as new copies were made. These variant readings—regardless if pertinent towards establishing the initial text or not—are significant because they provide insight as to how texts were understood or misunderstood by readers. The variant readings and marginal comments can become a pedagogical tool for modern readers to see interpretive issues that arose in the minds of ancient scribes and readers of these texts. Textual changes in John’s Apocalypse can be shown that affect how protagonists and antagonists were understood in conflict. In chapters 1-3, several seemingly minor changes heighten the authority of the son of man speaking to the recipients. In other places, manuscripts cast antagonists such as Jezebel in a more negative light. Marginal comments show how scribes and readers struggled to interpret difficult apocalyptic symbolism such as that of “the beast.” Manuscripts and their peculiarities can function as an effective pedagogy to visible illustrate critical issues to be considered in an apocalyptic text. The audience will participate in sample exercises. Session takeaway will consist of a handout with teaching and resource suggestions.