

What is one new thing you learned or idea to which you were exposed?

The reading this week exposed me to the scholarly conversations surrounding the oral character and scribal conventions behind the Hebrew Scriptures. In Raymond Person Jr.'s article, "The Ancient Israelite Scribe As Performer", he argues against some traditional assumptions about scribal literacy and transmission of the text. It is his perspective that "the ancient scribes' understanding of 'word' is larger than our own" (Person Jr. 606). According to Person Jr., these scribes were largely influenced by their own oral culture. What appears as a textual variant to our hyper-literal framework might simply be explained as a differing understanding of what constitutes a 'word'.

Person Jr.'s discussion is part of larger conversation about literacy in ancient Israel. Traditional scholarship tended to emphasize the oral-written dichotomy, treating each stage separately. Recent studies have revealed, however, that claims about Israel's literacy were greatly overstated. Literacy was a relatively late achievement. And even then, it was reserved for cultic and royal institutions. Israel's transition from an oral culture to a written culture was more fluid than previously attested (Quick 8).

What, if anything, troubled you about what you studied this week?

I would not go as far as to say that there was anything troubling about this week's reading. At this stage in my academic career, the complexity of the transmission process is not a new idea. The oral character of the Hebrew Scriptures was a new layer, however, to my experience with the Hebrew Scripture! I am very interested in textual criticism and would love to study these oral elements in greater depth.