

## The Doctrine of the Scribe

In the Old Testament the scribe was originally one who took a count, a muster officer. He was a royal official or "secretary" with cabinet status. He also often served as a treasurer. In the New Testament a Scribe (**Grammateus**) was one who could write numbers and the letters of the alphabet, hence, a secretary or clerk. As such he might be a high official of an important city.

The importance of the Law of Moses stimulated its study and transmission in Israel. At first, this was done by the priests. Ezra was a priest but also an early scribe who studied and taught the law to Israel.

In this manner, the religious and civil law was applied to the lives of the people, and at the same time the interpretations and decisions of the scribes became oral law and tradition themselves.

After the Exile, the law assumed more prominence. The influence of the scribes as teachers and interpreters of the law increased accordingly. By the 2nd century B.C. they were recognized as an honored profession.

In the modern sense they were the religious scholars or theologians. Such a man is sometimes called in the New Testament, a **Nomikos**, "lawyer" or **Nomodidaskalos**, "teacher of the law." Paul's use of the word "scribe" in 1Co 1:20 implies an expert in the law. Thus "lawyer" is an exact synonym for "scribe."

1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

During the time of Christ the scribes exerted a powerful religious influence as teachers, and because of their ability to make judicial decisions based on Old Testament exegesis, occupied important positions in the Sanhedrin.

In the latter capacity they played a major role in bringing on the crucifixion of Jesus. They and the Pharisees, to whose party they mainly belonged, usually opposed Jesus because He exposed their traditions and the false exegesis. Later they persecuted the apostles.

However, a few of them followed Jesus (Mat 8:19). Others helped defend Paul's position against that of the Sadducees (Acts 23:9). Converted scribes would be able to use their knowledge of the Word of God to "bring forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Mat 13:52; compared with Mat 23:34).

Mat 8:19 And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

Acts 23:9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

Acts 23:10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

Mat 13:52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Mat 23:34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

In the time of Christ there were scribes all over the land of Palestine, for Luke speaks of scribes as teachers of the law "who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem." Also there were scribes among the dispersed. Babylonian scribes in subsequent centuries put into writing the great rabbinic formulations known as the Talmud.

The scribes contributed to the ongoing of Judaism in several ways. First of all, they preserved the law. They were scribes in the literal sense and gave much of their time to copying and transmitting the Old Testament Scriptures. In doing this they invented a number of counting devices to guarantee the preservation of the authentic Hebrew text.

Beyond this, however, was their extreme concern to uphold the oral law--the many unwritten legal decisions that touched on every phase of daily life. They adhered strictly to these traditions and lifted them above the written law; for this they were severely reprimanded by Jesus. They dressed in long, flowing robes and always desired the places of eminence. Jesus did not contest their authority but spoke against their example (Mat 23:1-6).

Mat 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

Mat 23:2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Mat 23:3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

Mat 23:4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

Mat 23:5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;

Mat 23:6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;

The scribes also taught the law. As doctors of the law they seated themselves as teachers in the temple and in the synagogues (Luk 2:46).

Luk 2:46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

They were supposed to teach without pay. Rabbi Zadok said: "Make the knowledge of the law neither a crown in which to glory nor a spade with which to dig." But in actual practice the scribes undoubtedly received fees for their services. Finally, the scribes acted as judges of the law. The scribes were granted extraordinary respect from the people. They were honored with and took pride in the title "Rabbi," meaning "my lord" (Luk 23:7).

Luk 23:5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;

Luk 23:6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;

Luk 23:7 they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

As teachers they were to be accorded more honor than that received by parents. It was said: "The honor of thy teacher must surpass the honor bestowed on thy father; for son and father are both in duty bound to honor the teacher."

Much of the information found in the Doctrine of the Scribe has been taken from the Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia.