

# So you are the Scribes!

*Key information to read and discuss:*

**Scribes** - men specially trained in writing, and thus influential as interpreters and teachers of the Law, and agents of the rulers.

"Scribes" did not form their own party, but could belong to other groups (e.g. "the scribes of the Pharisees" in Mark 2:16; Acts 23:9).

Most of their duties involved writing, e.g. producing legal documents, recording deeds, copying scriptures, teaching people, etc.

Since they specialized in the interpretation of the Jewish Law (Torah), "scribes" are sometimes translated and regarded as "lawyers".

But only Luke uses the technical term for "lawyer" (nomikos; 7:30; 10:25; etc.) in some passages where Mark and Matthew have "scribe" (grammateus).

The Gospels usually portray scribes (along with chief priests, elders, and/or Pharisees) as opponents of Jesus who actively sought his death (Mark 11:27).

The Acts of the Apostles also portrays them as opponents of the early Christians (Acts 4:5; 6:12).

But there are a few exceptions: some scribes are neutral (Matt 13:52), or even praised by Jesus (Mark 12:28-34), or rise to defend Paul (Acts 23:9).

From: [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Jewish\\_Groups.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Jewish_Groups.htm)

The *Pharisees* were in many ways the idealists of Jewish society. Most of the *Scribes* (the 'theologians' of the day) were Pharisees.

From: <https://resource.acu.edu.au/gehall/XTOLOGY2.htm>

We see more members of the Israelite power elite in the elders, chief priests, and scribes. The elders acted as community leaders and judges. The chief priests were members of the high priestly families or those acting with the authority of the high priest, while the scribes with whom Jesus argued were probably lawyers and judges. While the scribes interpreted Jewish law, they did not make it, hence their conflicts with Jesus, who claimed authority over the law.

From: <https://uscatholic.org/articles/200908/who-were-the-pharisees-sadducees-scribes-chief-priests-and-elders/>

The Scribes were even stricter than the Pharisees when it came to the interpretation of the law. They were known as lawyers, because they were well educated in the law, which they copied and interpreted. They thought that the law was an exact expression of God's will. Like the other religious groups, the Scribes opposed Jesus. (Matthew 9:2-8) Jesus criticised them for turning away from the spirit of the written law.

From: <https://firstcenturypalestinejl.weebly.com/religious-and-social-groups.html>

**Questions to discuss:**

What are key understandings about the Scribes that your group could point out in your presentation? (Dot point such as 1. We, the Scribes are a powerful group of people. 2. We have the power to interpret the law because we are theologians of our time (so how dare this guy Jesus roam around the country and teach people about the law – he’s not a Scribe! Just who does he think his is! He needs to be put in his place.)

**Interesting things your group could highlight from Scripture:**

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt+13%3A52&version=NABRE> (See the footnotes for an interesting point about the church of Matthew – Scribes clearly are prominent and powerful in Matthew’s community. Highlighting this to the group also points out the value of the footnotes, which can be treasures we need to utilise).

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+12%3A28-34&version=NABRE> (Here the Scribe is praised by Jesus for his interpretation of the law. Notice the similarity with this text and the start of the Good Samaritan text Luke 10:25-28. In the Good Samaritan text the “scholar of the law” is not named but your group could make a claim for this and say it was one of you – a Scribe. In the story of the Good Samaritan the scholar of the law is trying to trip Jesus up and find a way of showing that he doesn’t know the law, but Jesus gives a very clever reply and makes the scholar of the law look foolish (the scholar of the law could have also been a Pharisee). You could use the Good Samaritan text to make a claim that the scholar of the law was a Scribe, and Jesus gave such a slippery response by telling that story that it was impossible to catch him out, but you believe there will come a time when the Scribes will be able to show that you, as Scribes, have inferior knowledge of the law and Jesus has holes in his knowledge – and you’re just waiting to find it!