

Scribes

Isaiah 9:6-7

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD, Almighty will accomplish this.”

The role of the Scribe is to add an authenticity to the devotion the Jewish people had for their religion. Having a young male child or two as students adds more authenticity to the purpose of the Scribe. In this Walk the synagogue also serves as a “buffer” after exiting the tax tent. By using it here it allows our guests to get refocused on the purpose of our Walk.

BACKGROUND: “In a nation obsessed with the Law, dominated by the Law, committed to the Law, and held together by the Law, it was inevitable that there would develop a body of men dedicated to its study and interpretation. It is easy to see how they would become the most respected and revered citizens. This group included copyists, editors, students, teachers, and commentaries. They were called Scribes. Ezra was the Scribe *par excellence* (Ezra 7:6,10ff, Neh.8:1ff). His successors were those described by Daniel as the “the wise men” (Dan11:33, 12:3). They became the teachers of Israel.

The Synagogue probably originated in the cottage meetings in Babylonia. We know that the “elders of Judah” sought out the prophet in his house (Ezek 8:1, 20:1ff). It is likely they also met in their own homes to discuss their problems, continue their worship, and seek understanding of God’s purpose, as the early Christians did (Col 4:15). In those days of the New Testament there were 600 synagogues in Jerusalem. Where the Temple

was! There were several in Damascus (Acts 9:2). Every town, village, and hamlet in Palestine had its synagogue. There were hundreds and hundreds of them throughout the Roman Empire. Attached to the synagogue was the school. Attendance was compulsory for all boys between the ages of 6 and 16 years. The teachers were Scribes.

Like Ezra himself, the Scribes were originally priests and Levites (Ezra 7:12, Neh.8:7, 13; 2 Chron 34:13). But pious laymen, particularly of the wealthier classes, began to study the Law for themselves. At first, the priests were the official interpreters of the Law. The laymen acknowledge this. Gradually they formed a relatively independent school of Scribes. The fact they were finding some opposition to the Jewish religion it made them increase their devotion to the Law and become more narrow, nationalistic, and exclusive. They were acclaimed as leaders of those who were zealous for the Law. The people held the Scribes in great honor...They were usually addresses as “Rabbi”. This means either “My Lord” or “My Great One”. No wonder Jesus forbade His followers to accept the title! (Matt.23:8). They were given seats in the Sanhedrin. They gained official stature. They assumed a new character. Beginning as men of sacred letters, they ended as lawgivers and judges.

Tid-Bit Information: Bethlehem is a small village, 5-6 miles south of Jerusalem. Land is hilly—with lots of rocks. Temperature can be 25 to 75 degrees. May through October no rain and December through March is the rainy season. On the road to Bethlehem you would see scrubby trees—oak, cedar, olive, and myrtle are some. Most people walk to Bethlehem from Jerusalem on a narrow winding road. One could possibly travel 15 miles on a good day. They would never travel on the Sabbath. Roads from Jericho to Jerusalem were very treacherous, steep, narrow, and lots of places for robbers to hide. In Bethlehem you could find many beggars too. Just east of Bethlehem you can see the white and chalky wilderness of Judea.

CENSUS: the Romans started the census system shortly before Jesus’ birth. They require registration every 14 years. People were required to return to

the place of their birth to get their property registered so Rome would know how much tax would be charged. The Roman soldiers would be intolerant of the fanatical Jews—but tolerant of the quiet Jew. They can compel anyone to carry their burden for one mile. **Jewish Marketplace:** Narrow streets, noisy, aggressive sellers, smelly. Bartering is the way to buy—don't walk up and pay the first price. Food in the marketplace comes in from local areas. Spices and citrus fruit are shipped in and more expensive. Have olive oil for lamps, cooking, and medicine, bread, vegetables, and fruit. No corn around in the 1st century. **CUSTOMS:** Business as property transfers, marriages, etc. was transacted at the village gate. The Elders sat on benches there. The **SYNAGOGUE** is a place of learning. Scribes are experts of law and instruct in the synagogue. Priests serve in the Temples ONLY—there was no Temple in Bethlehem. Women didn't have equal rights—only in work. They worked in the fields alongside men. Women and girls were not forbidden in synagogue but were held to the back. Houses were small but always had a guest room—even tents had guest rooms. Animals often housed under or near houses—often goats and sheep come into the city at night. A farm would be the size of 4-6 acres. Most families kept a goat or two to milk, a few sheep for wool, and one or two donkeys or oxen as draft animals. Chickens or other fowl were in the courtyard. **COINS OF THE TIMES:** Roman coins—silver **denarius** (plural is denarii) was wages for 1 day of common labor. Greek coins—**drachma** is about the same as a denarius. Double drachma was used for paying the Temple tax. (No temple in Bethlehem) so this is why they would need money changers. Jewish coin—**lepta** (translated the same as mite) is small in value (fraction of a penny) It would take about 80 lepta to equal 1 denarius. **Shekel** is an Old Testament term and it is possible to be used as a weight of silver or gold (4-5 oz). Herod had his own coins too. In Old Testament times people bought either by exchanging goods or by paying an agreed weight of silver or gold, for instance, a shekel is a weight, not a unit of currency. **Talent** was equal to 3,000 shekels.

NOTE: One of the things a Scribe should not have answers to is questions about the birth of the Christ Child in Bethlehem. They would not have known about this (they are so busy being about the Law). Small talk about there being an usually large crowd in the city tonight, or other banter back and forth with the family regarding their treatment by the soldiers, or purchases they have made, and they might show some interest but not overly excited if the star or the hillside experience is mentioned. Feel free to ad lib, but try to keep it within the context of the Biblical period.

INTERACTION WITH ALL GUESTS AND GUIDES:

All Scribes (and students) will select Biblical names. The Scribes will be looked upon as teachers of the “Law”.

Guides will be reassembling their group (usually quite hyper) outside this tent (Synagogue) A Scribe will be outside the door and will welcome the family inside. The ram’s horn is blown occasionally announcing the approaching of the Sabbath. The Scribe will remind the family that men and boy’s may stand in front and women and girls should stand behind (women and girls are allowed in synagogues only on special occasions).

You may use the sample script as follows, allowing for response. Speak directly to the men (Note: Guides may have instructed their family that the men and boys should talk—Guide will only speak if the males in the family do not—don’t be surprised if women forget).

*****SCRIBES decide who will be speaking the various passages.

SCRIBE: Shalom. Welcome to our Synagogue—the Lion of Judah.

What family do we have here? What city do you come from?

How many days has your journey been?

Have you paid your taxes?

We want you to know about our synagogue. It is a community meeting place, a place of teaching, and a house of prayer and worship. Sometimes it is used as a court of law.

We have _____ here practicing his Hebrew letters in the sand. What have you written _____?

STUDENT: The Holy One (Note: young boys aren't always available-especially late hours.)

SCRIBE: You will notice we have the seven canded Menorah, representing the seven days of creation, on the ark behind the veil. The Torah is kept in the ark when it is not being used and the setup is such that when you look across the Menorah you are looking in the direction of Jerusalem.

_____ will you read to us from the Torah? (One of the Scribes reads a selection from the scroll.)

It would be appropriate for us all to offer a word of praise to the LORD before you continue your journey. Will everyone please say together "PRAISE BE TO GOD, or (HEAR O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD.)

We wish you well as you go on your journey and travel back to your home. Shalom.