

## **JESUS QUESTIONED THE SCRIBES**

**TEXT: LUKE 20:39-47**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Our Lord's enemies had come to him with a series of crafty questions designed to discredit him as a teacher of God's Word.
2. First, Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees, but "they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marveled at his answer, and held their peace" (Luke 20:26).
3. Then He was questioned by the Sadducees, but they too could not trap Him. Verse 40 says, "And after that they durst not ask him any question at all."
4. Next, we see that our Lord said to the scribes, "How say they that Christ is David's son?" (20:41). The purpose of this question was not merely to embarrass His adversaries. It was an affirmation of His deity.
5. Charles Erdman said our Lord did not desire to further humiliate his enemies. "In the presence of the people he had already shown them to be ridiculous, contemptible, impotent, and insincere. His real motive was to ask a question, the answer to which would embody the chief of all his claims, namely, the claim that he is divine."
6. First, let us consider: Who were the scribes (20:1, 19, 39, 46; 22:2, 66, 67; 23:10)?

### **I. WHO WERE THE SCRIBES?**

1. Scribes were writers, who did secretarial work for the king, including writing his letters, drawing up his decrees, and managing his finances.
2. The first scribe mentioned in Scripture is Seraiah, who was the scribe for King David (II Samuel 8:17). Later, in II Samuel 20:26 we read that Sheva was King David's scribe.
3. Actually, there may have been scribes even earlier than that. Judges 5:14 says, "out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer."
4. The scribes were responsible for counting the money. Second Kings 12:10 says, "And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told (counted) the money that was found in the house of the LORD."
5. King Hezekiah employed a group of men, whose work it was to put into writing what had been handed down orally. Proverbs 25:1 says, "These are

also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.”

6. There are many scribes mentioned in Scripture. The most well-known scribe is Ezra, who was also a priest. Ezra is described in Ezra 7:6 as “a ready scribe in the law of Moses.”
7. By this time, the title “scribe” no longer referred to an officer of the king’s court, but to a group of scholars who taught and interpreted the law of Moses.
8. By the time of Ezra, the term "scribe" had “attained the meaning of one learned in the Scriptures, one who had made the written law a subject of investigation” (*ISBE*).
9. The scribes became the zealous defenders of the Law of Moses, and the teachers of the Word of God.
10. By the time of Christ, the scribes had developed into a powerful class, holding undisputed authority and supremacy over the people of Israel.
11. They were addressed as “Master” and “rabbi.” That is why our Lord said in Matthew 23, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat...And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 23:1-11).
12. In the New Testament, the scribes are sometimes referred to as "lawyers."
13. When we compare Luke’s account with Matthew and Mark’s we notice that Luke does not record a brief conversation.
14. Matthew 22:35 and 36 (and Mark 12:28) says, “Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” This “lawyer” was a scribe.
15. In Luke 5:17, scribes are referred to as “doctors of the law.”
16. In Acts 5:34, Gamaliel is referred to as a Pharisee, and “a doctor of the law.”
17. Now that we see the background, let us consider our Lord’s interesting question, and His serious warning.

## **II. OUR LORD’S INTERESTING QUESTION**

1. Our Lord answered all their questions, and now He decided to ask them a question (Luke 20:41-44).

2. Our Lord quoted Psalm 110:1, a Messianic prophecy – “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”
3. This Messianic psalm is quoted several times in the New Testament.
4. It is quoted in Matthew 22:44 and Mark 12:36, which are parallel passages.
5. Peter quoted it on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:34 and 35 says, “For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.”
6. Hebrews 1:13 says, “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?”
7. Hebrews 10:12 and 13 says, “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.”
8. It is interesting to compare Mark with Luke. Luke 20:42 says, “And David himself saith in the book of Psalms...”
9. Mark 12:36 says, “For David himself said by the Holy Ghost...” This affirms the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible.
10. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (II Timothy 3:16).
11. Second Peter 1:21 says, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”
12. “For David himself said by the Holy Ghost...”
13. The religious leaders did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Therefore, they did not believe that Psalm 110 referred to Jesus.
14. Perhaps they thought our Lord’s question was an easy one. The promised Messiah would be descended from King David, “the Son of David” (Luke 20:41).
15. “David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?” (20:44). In other words, how could David call his son “Lord”?
16. How could David speak of the expected Messiah as both human (the son of David) and divine (“LORD”)? The only logical answer is the virgin birth.
17. But the religious leaders did not believe that. Even though Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”
18. The religious leaders did not believe in the virgin birth, and they called our Lord illegitimate (cf. John 8:41, 48).
19. This question ended the debate with the unbelieving religious leaders. The scribes could not answer our Lord. W. Graham Scroggie said, “Nothing is so contemptible as proud ignorance.”

20. They were already determined to have Him killed, and had already conceived a wicked plan (cf. 22:1-6).

### III. OUR LORD'S SERIOUS WARNING (20:45-47)

1. This warning was given "in the audience of all the people" (20:45).
2. This warning is also given in Matthew 23 and Mark 12. The warning in Matthew is much longer, covering the entire chapter.
3. The scribes and Pharisees were very proud, and their pride was seen in the way they dressed, and in the way they loved to be greeted in the markets (Luke 20:46).
4. They loved "the highest (best) seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts" (20:46).
5. Matthew 23 is longer, and is a scathing denunciation of the religious hypocrites who were leading the people astray. These religious hypocrites had been hounding our Lord, and would not stop until they succeeded in having Him killed.
6. In these verses, we see that our Lord rejected rabbinical Judaism (usually referred to today as Orthodox Judaism).
7. But these Scriptures are more than a condemnation of Christ-denying Judaism. These Scriptures condemn all false religion.
8. In his commentary on Matthew 23, J. Vernon McGee said, "Here we see the gentle Jesus using the harshest language that is in the entire Word of God. No prophet of the Old Testament denounced sin as the Lord Jesus denounces it. Here in southern California this section was called to the attention of a liberal preacher. He didn't even know it was in the Bible – he had never read the Bible!"
9. H. A. Ironside said, "Who can fail to see in all this, the pretentiousness of clericalism?"
10. As we consider their pride and their hypocrisy, we should note our Lord is condemning all false religion. I saw an article in the newspaper the other day about the Roman Catholic Cardinal Dolan dancing with the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall. How foolish!
11. There are millions of lost Roman Catholics here in the NYC Metropolitan area, and here is this picture of their leader dancing with a silly grin on his face!
12. The scribes and the Pharisees were ritualistic. Our Lord said, "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness" (Luke 11:39).

13. One of the marks of Pharisaism is externalism (Luke 20:45-47).
14. The outside looks clean, but “the inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.”
15. Baptist churches have to be on guard against Pharisaism. Let’s make sure we are right on the inside as well as on the outside.
16. Religious hypocrisy has sent more people to hell than anything else (20:46, 47).
17. False teachers often hide their covetousness under a pretense of piety (Luke 20:47).
18. “Greater damnation” indicates different degrees of punishment in hell (cf. Luke 12:46-48).

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. Thomas Watson was a 17<sup>th</sup> century preacher and author.
2. In 1671, he published a sermon entitled, “The Mischief of Sin.”
3. His text was, “these shall receive greater damnation” (Mark 12:40; cf. Luke 20:47b). He divided his exposition into three parts:
  1. A fiery furnace — “damnation”
  2. The furnace heated hotter — “greater damnation”
  3. The people for whom this furnace is doubly heated — “These shall receive....” Thomas Watson went on to say...

Doctrine: The proposition I intend is this: There are some kinds of sinners who shall be more severely tormented in hell than others. "These shall receive greater damnation."

“In respect of the duration of torment — all shall be punished alike. All reprobates shall lie in hell forever! But in respect of the degree of torment — all shall not be punished alike. Some shall have a more fiery indignation than others, "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy..." (Hebrews 10:29).