

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS

The Interpretation of Matthew 24:34, 35

The unequivocal statement made by the Lord Jesus Christ is that **"this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."**

These words have long been a burden to interpreters, and many and varied have been the meanings given to them. A. T. Robertson says that, "these words give a great deal of trouble to expositors," and J. C. Ryle says, "The meaning of this statement is a point on which commentators differ widely." How true these statements are, most students of Biblical literature well know.

The popular and generally accepted interpretation is that the word translated "generation" (*genea*) primarily means race, family, stock, and that the statement here concerns the nation or family of Israel which will be preserved as a people until all these things are fulfilled. This interpretation will be found in the notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (page 1034).

To take this passage and force it to teach that the Jews will always remain as a people is neither an adequate or satisfactory interpretation for many reasons, an important one being that *genea* does not primarily mean a race, kind, or family. It is found forty two times in the New Testament where it is translated "generation," 37 times; "time", 2 times; "age," 2 times; and "nation," 1 time. This word primarily means *generation* and should be so translated in every occurrence. That Israel will persist as a people is a truth abundantly taught in Scripture, but it is not the truth that is being declared in this passage.

The weakest and most untenable of all interpretations is that which makes "this generation" to mean the total people that were upon the earth when these words were spoken, and that out of all these people some would still be alive when all these things were fulfilled. Those who hold this view usually make the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to have been the second coming of Christ. This requires a most violent twisting of the words of our Lord, for the sudden coming of the Son of man with power and great glory certainly has to be a vastly different thing from a Roman general besieging and totally destroying a city. In A.D. 70, Jerusalem died by inches.

Another interpretation of this passage holds that "this generation" refers to that company of evil and wicked men that were then, and always had been, upon the earth since the entrance of sin. This view sees the Lord declaring that a company of wicked unbelievers and persecutors would persist through all time until He comes again. This interpretation is set forth by R. C. H. Lenski in his commentary on Matthew.

Those who contend for this idea are prone to cite the numerous passages of Scripture which speak of "this wicked generation," "an adulterous and sinful generation," and "an evil generation," as evidence that this occurrence of the word *generation* must also be understood this way. But the very opposite is true. The omission here does not signify that some such word as *evil* should be inserted. It indicates that it should be left out. The exquisite accuracy and completeness of inspired Scripture forbids the insertion of any such adjective in Matt. 24:34, unless it should be indicated by the context, which it certainly is not in this passage. Our Lord could easily have said, "this wicked generation shall not pass," if that had been what He meant. But He did not say this because He was not talking about the persistence of an evil generation. This interpretation is unacceptable since "all these things" spoken of here includes the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. The company of evil men that has persisted on the earth since the days of Cain is going to be brought to an end long before the Lord returns. This end is clearly indicated in Psalm 37:9, 64:7, 46:6, Isa. 59:19, and 2 Tim. 3:9. All these passages speak of an event that takes place long before the Lord leaves His present place at the right hand of God. **"Sit on My right hand, until I make thine enemies Thy footstool," is God's word to Him** (Heb.1:13).

A single continuing company cannot properly be called a generation. And if there is a continuing company of evil men, which is readily admitted, then

there is also a continuing company of good men, and the words "this generation shall not pass" could just as easily be applied to the good company. The truth is that it does not refer to either.

Another interpretation that is widespread, having been adopted by the Jehovah Witness group and propagated by their literature, is that the generation that would see the beginning of these signs would also see the end of them. This is an unnatural and contrived explanation that is wholly contrary to the sense of the Greek words used here. Only by the wildest stretch of imagination can the words "this generation" be made to mean one that would appear two thousand years later.

From the various ideas set forth above it becomes quite clear that a true interpretation of the Lord's words depends entirely on what He meant by "this generation." This is the subject of His declaration. If we miss the meaning of this we will never comprehend the truth declared in His words.

In most cases where a word has a common and popular usage we are prone to forget that it may have other meanings that are seldom used or heard. The word *generation* is so often used of people that we fail to consider that it has usages and meanings where people are not at all in view.

In order to arrive at the true meaning of "this generation" certain simple facts will need to be faced and remembered. The word *generation* is one of a family of words, the parent word being the verb *generate*, which means to produce. That which produces is a *generator*, and that which is produced is a *generation*. The *-ion* suffix is used to name the result of a process. Thus, since electricity must be *generated*, to do this we need a *generator*, and the electricity it produces is a *generation*. You may never have heard electricity called a *generation*, but that is undeniably what it is.

Since each step in a lineage is produced by a forefather, these steps are properly called *generations* as we see in Matthew 1:17. This is a typical example of the use of this word in relationship to people. In 2 Tim. 2:23 we are told that foolish and unlearned questions do generate strifes; therefore, strife is a *generation* when it is produced by something else.

A more pertinent example would be that since "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1: 21) it is clear that the Spirit of God was the *generator* and that the body of truth that came from these

men was and is a *generation*. These are the prophecies we now call by the names of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others. Each one of these books is a generation. And since there were speaking prophets and writing prophets, the *generations* of the speaking prophets have passed away but those of the writing prophets are still with us today.

If we consider the declarations of the Lord Jesus Christ we find that both His words and His works were divine generations. See John 5:30, 5:19, 17:8, 12:49. Furthermore, His words are called this in Scripture. In Isaiah 53:8 we find a statement that has puzzled interpreters, "Who shall declare His generation?" Many have attempted to solve the problem here by changing the translation, but this is futile since there can be no doubt but that the Hebrew word *dor* means generation. And yet our Lord had no offspring, therefore, no generations, according to the common definition given to this word. However, He did produce a very important body of truth, and this can rightly be called a *generation*.

Since He was "cut off out of the land of the living" (Isa. 53:8), it is apropos that the question should be asked, "Who shall declare His generation?" There was no answer to this question in the Old Testament, but there is an answer in the New. Out of the Lord's many disciples twelve were specially chosen and commissioned, and it was to these He said, "**When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself: but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak, and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you.**" John 16:13, 14.

Our Lord was a speaking prophet. He wrote nothing except a few words in the sand. Nevertheless, not one word which He wanted perpetuated has ever been lost. The body of truth which He generated has been preserved. It was His promise to the twelve that "**the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you**" (John 14:26).

When our Lord by speaking produced that body of truth that precedes the words we are considering, no stenographer took down His words and no instrument recorded His message. When He finished speaking not one of His disciples could have fully and accurately repeated what He said. It would

seem that His words would soon be confused and then forgotten. Yet in the face of these possibilities our Lord boldly declared, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. 24:34).

By the words "this generation" He meant the body of truth He had produced in speaking to them. Confirmation of this is seen in His next statement which is a reiteration of what He had already said:" Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away". Thus, "the generation" He was speaking of here was the words He had just spoken.

In the two statements, "this generation" and "My words" we find a figure of speech called pleonasm. In the construction of this figure, that has been said is immediately after declared in another or opposite way in order to make it impossible for the meaning which is a reiteration of what He had already said; "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Thus, "the generation" words we find a figure of speech called a *pleonasm*. In the construction of this figure that which has been said is immediately after declared in another or opposite way in order to make it impossible for the meaning to be missed or misunderstood. By this method the meaning is locked in. May we not be guilty of breaking this lock and making "this generation" to mean something that the Lord never had in mind.

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