

# Matthew 24:34 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

**CLICK VERSE**

**To go directly to that verse**

**See Matthew 24 Commentary all on one page**

[Matthew 24:1 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:2 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:3 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:4 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:5 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:6 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:7 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:8 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:9 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:10 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:11 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:12 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:13 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:14 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:15 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:16 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:17 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:18 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:19 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:20 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:21 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:22 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:23 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:24 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:25 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:26 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:27 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:28 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:29 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:30 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:31 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:32 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:33 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:34 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:35 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:36 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:37 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:38 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:39 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:40 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:41 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:42 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:43 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:44 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:45 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:46 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:47 Commentary](#)  
[Matthew 24:48 Commentary](#)

Click chart to enlarge  
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
[Another Chart](#) from Charles Swindoll

## THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY MATTHEW (shaded area)

Click chart to enlarge

**Matthew 24:34 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place: amen lego (1SPAI) humin hoti ou me. parelethe (3SAAS) genea. aute eos an panta tauta genetai (3SAMS):**

- **This** - Mt 12:45 Mt 16:28 Mt 23:36 Mk 13:30,31 Luke 11:50 Lk 21:32,33

**KJV** Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

**NET** I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

**ESV** Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

**NIV** I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

**Comment:** The NIV adds a notation after generation {34 Or race} but this as discussed below ([see note](#)) this is probably not the best meaning of the word "generation."

**NLT** I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things take place.

**YLT** Verily I say to you, this generation may not pass away till all these may come to pass.

**ASV** Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.

**BBE** Truly I say to you, This generation will not come to an end till all these things are complete.

**CJB** Yes! I tell you that this people will certainly not pass away before all these things happen.

**CSB** I assure you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place.

### THE GENERATION THAT WILL PASS AWAY

**Truly** ([281](#))(**amen** is a transliteration of the Hebrew noun **amen** [= ([0543](#)) **amen**] and then into Latin and into English and many other languages, so that it is practically a universal word. **Amen** has been called the best-known word in human speech. **Amen** is a response to something that has just been said, except in Jesus' teachings. Jesus, Who is Himself the ultimate "**Amen**" (Rev 3:14-[note](#)), is the supreme authority and so it is clearly apropos that His teachings be introduced by **amen**. John's Gospel has 25 uses of "amen" and every use is a **double amen** (or double "truly" in the NAS - 25 times). None of the other 3 Gospels use a "double amen." It is also notable that in the four Gospels, **amen** is used only by our Lord Jesus Christ, almost always "to introduce new revelations of the mind of God." (Vine) Every use of "**amen**" or "truly" by Jesus serves to affirm what follows and by extension to cause us to pay close attention to the teaching. The Pauline uses of amen occur primarily at the close of his prayers or doxologies, and as such serve to confirm them as "it is firm" (or "so let it be").

**Lenski** comments that Jesus use of **truly** expresses "profound solemnity, using His well-known seal for verity and authority." (The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel)

**Truly I say** - As alluded to above, truly emphasizes that what follows is important. The Greek verb is [lego](#) and is in the **present**

tense, implying this is something Jesus is continually saying.

## **"THIS GENERATION" TO WHICH GENERATION DOES JESUS REFER?**

**This generation will not pass away** - To which generation is Jesus referring? This is discussed in more detail below because one of the possible meanings of **this generation** is used by [preterists](#) to justify interpretation Mt 24:15-22 (and Mt 24:23-29) as past history!

If one interprets Mt 24:15-29 literally, it is clear that all of these events are yet future. The **abomination of desolation** which marks the beginning of the one of a kind great tribulation did not occur in 70AD (see Mt 24:15 Commentary), so it is clear that Jesus was not referring to the **generation** who was alive at the time He spoke the Olivet Discourse. Preterists use **"this generation"** to support their premise that we have already experienced the **abomination of desolation standing in the holy place** and the world has already experienced a unique, never to be repeated time of **tribulation** (see Mt 24:21 Commentary). And thus they are forced to say that **"this generation"** cannot refer to a future generation. They are in effect "reasoning backwards" and using their interpretation of **"this generation"** to support their misinterpretation of Mt 24:15ff. Given that **"this generation"** is clearly not the generation alive when Jesus spoke, then what is the interpretation? While many interpretations have been proposed ([see below](#)), the two most reasonable interpretations of **"this generation"** are:

(1) "The simple and most reasonable interpretation that the leaves of the fig tree represent the birth pains and the other signs of His coming Jesus has mentioned in this chapter and that **this generation** refers to the people living at the end time who will view those signs." (John MacArthur)

**Richard Mayhue** - The temporal view understands **"generation"** to be the group of contemporaries who are alive at the time of Christ's parousia, extending from the birth pangs of Mt 24:8 through the coming of the Son of Man (Mt 24:44). ([See more detailed discussion](#))

**Neil D Nelson** argues "The major problem with this view is that it ignores the negative force of *e genea aute* ("this generation") throughout the New Testament and Matthew in particular and the moral use of the phrase in the Old Testament. The negative connotation of the phrase as referring to ungodly people united in their opposition to God's messengers is found in all previous uses of *e genea aute* (Mt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36). The reader of the Gospel would naturally understand the phrase to have the same connotation in Matthew 24:34. This view also ignores the implication that **"this generation"** will **"pass away"** at the Second Coming. Only the wicked belong to this type of people. This evil generation will be "swept away" in judgment and put into hell (Mt 24:39, 51). The righteous in contrast will inherit the kingdom and enter into eternal life in the presence of the Son (Mt 25:20-23, 34, 36). Therefore, **"this generation"** in Matthew 24:34 refers to an evil and faithless people guilty of resisting the messengers and the message of Christ. This view best aligns with the use of the phrase throughout Matthew and the purpose of Jesus in the discourse and the Gospel to prepare the disciples to endure the rejection of unresponsive humanity as they obediently serve Christ and others and thus ready themselves for the Lord's glorious return.

(2) Jesus was using the word **generation** as a qualitative term (as He had done numerous times in Matthew) and not as a quantitative term.

**Richard Mayhue** - The pejorative view understands **"generation"** in the sense of referring to the category of rebellious, sinful people who have rejected God's truth and righteousness (cf. Mt 12:45; 23:35-36); this has an OT precedent in Dt 32:5, 20 and Pr 30:11-14. ([See more detailed discussion](#))

**John MacArthur** agrees that this interpretation is "linguistically possible" but he feels that "it does not fit the context and also would have been superfluous and pointless, because no Jew doubted that many unbelieving, ungodly people would be alive to be judged when the Messiah came. In the minds of most Jews, the essential work of the Messiah would be to deliver Israel from its ungodly oppressors. He could hardly judge the nations and put His enemies under His feet if they had already been eradicated." (MacArthur New Testament Commentary)

As noted below, even highly respected commentators such as [William Hendriksen](#) and [R C H Lenski](#) (both of whom favor a 70AD fulfillment of Mt 24:15ff), agree that **this generation** is a *qualitative* term, not a *quantitative* (chronological) term referring to a *kind* of generation, not a *time* of a given generation. In other words, they both agree that **"this generation"** is highly unlikely to refer to the generation that was alive at the time Jesus gave the Olivet Discourse the only interpretation that supports a preterist interpretation of Mt 24:15ff.

The **NET Note** offers three possibilities for **this generation** - (1) Some take (**generation**) as meaning "race" and thus as an assurance that the Jewish race (nation) will not pass away. But it is very questionable that the Greek term *genea* can have this meaning... (2) **Generation** might mean "*this type of generation!*" and refer to the generation of wicked humanity... (3) **generation**

may refer to "the generation that sees the signs of the end" (Mt 24:30), who will also see the end itself.

While I agree the meaning of **generation** is controversial, my view is that the weight of Scriptural evidence most strongly supports the interpretation that Jesus was referring to the "*type of generation*" ([see note of explanation below](#)) that will witness the events beginning in Mt 24:15-note with the "*revelation*" of the Antichrist and ending with the "*revelation*" of the Christ in Mt 24:30-note (cp the two revelations - 2Th 2:8). Obviously, I believe the **abomination of desolation** in Mt 24:15-note is yet to stand in the **holy place**, the Temple. I am not a **dispensationalist** nor a **preterist**, but a **literalist** and a literal interpretation of Daniel 9:27-note calls for a 7 year treaty that is broken after 3.5 years, a specific event which has no past historical fulfillment in the first century. While the Hebrew of Daniel 9:27-note is difficult, this first portion of the verse is not difficult (i.e., the making and breaking of a covenant at the midpoint of seven years) and thus it gives the reader some very important truths to aid the understanding of Mt 24:15-note. Jesus clearly commanded the reader of Matthew 24:15 to direct his attention to Daniel. No, He did not specify Daniel 9:27 but that passage and Daniel 12:11-note (which from context of Da 12:1-note describes the same event as Da 9:27), are the writings in Daniel that most clearly relate to the **abomination of desolation** of Mt 24:15-note. And if one reads 2Thes 2:3-4-note, seeking a literal meaning, it is clear that Paul describes the revelation of a man who carries out an "**abomination**" in the **holy place** by taking his seat there and exalting himself over "every so-called god!" Even the **ESV Study Bible note** agrees that Paul is referring to the Antichrist. There is no Biblical or historical record that fulfills Paul's description in 2Th 2:3-4, so clearly it refers to a future event, an event which correlates perfectly with Jesus' warning of an **abomination of desolation in the holy place** in Mt 24:15-note! Note that this assessment is based on no one's system of theological interpretation! It is based on a literal reading of the text. **It is only when one goes to the commentaries that one encounters considerable confusion.** In fact, it is notable that none of the top five Matthew commentaries listed by Tim Challies or Ligonier ministries interpret Jesus' words in Mt 24:15-22 as descriptive of a future event. **Do you think there might be some bias in their lists?** It follows that if you consult those commentaries *before* you go to the Scripture, you will likely read Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse with an inherent bias against a literalistic and futuristic interpretation. As I have attempted to demonstrate in the commentary notes on Matthew 24:15-34, any interpretation other than a literal interpretation encounters significant problems in trying to make a non-literal interpretation "fit." And so while I admit "**this generation**" in Mt 24:34 is a controversial phrase, it is patently (and intellectually) unfair to use one's interpretation of this phrase as a reason for jettisoning a literal reading of Matthew 24:15-22! "**This generation**" (with up to [6 possible interpretations](#)!) should not be allowed to "trump" (be a decisive overriding factor) a literal reading of the "**abomination of desolation**" (Mt 24:15-note) a clear sign that will mark the starting point of the yet to occur, unprecedented time of the **great tribulation** (Mt 24:21-note). In fact the clear temporal association of the **abomination of desolation** with the unique **great tribulation** (*When* in Mt 24:15, *Then* in Mt 24:21-note Daniel 12:11-note), strongly supports a futuristic interpretation because the distress in 70AD was not **UNIQUE** and falls well short of the Jewish distress in World War II. While one might say 70AD foreshadowed the ultimate great tribulation, one cannot in all fairness interpret the **great tribulation** as fulfilled in 70AD, unless one spiritualizes or twists the plain meaning of Jesus' words!

In sum, **this generation** could refer to the evil type of **generation** that will exist until Jesus returned. Alternatively, MacArthur interprets it as the **generation** which would be alive at His Second Coming. **Hiebert** seems to combine these two interpretations of **this generation** writing that "It seems best to preserve the natural meaning of **generation** as denoting the people alive at a given time and accept the view that the reference is to that future, turbulent, **wicked** generation that will see the actual beginning of those eschatological events." The view that **this generation** refers to the one that was alive when Jesus spoke these words is untenable!

It is notable that the nearest preceding use of **generation** (genea) (thus in context) does not speak of time but of king (i.e., is not quantitative but qualitative).

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 "Truly I say to you, **all these things** (Ed: Note this is the same phrase as Mt 24:34) shall come upon this **generation**. (Mt 23:34-36)

Notice that in Mt 23:34-36 Jesus refers to sins that those to whom He is speaking did not directly commit and yet with which they are identified because they like those who had shed blood were also an evil, wicked kind of generation! Jesus use of **generation** in the preceding chapter would support the interpretation that here in Mt 24:34 He is referring to a kind of **generation**, an evil generation and not to what would occur within the lifespan generally attributed to one generation (from 30 to 100 years).

**Generation** ([1074](#))(**genea** gives us our English genealogy) literally refers to those descended from a common ancestor, but **click** for more complete discussion below. See also [Bob DeWaay's excellent analysis](#) of **genea** in the New Testament which deals specifically with its use by Jesus in Mt 24:34. **DeWaay** writes that...

Our range of meaning study has concluded that **genea** is used more often in the New Testament as a **qualitative term** than a **chronologically quantitative one**. Our study in particular of the Gospel of Matthew shows that Matthew uses it in that way. We

have also shown that taking the usage in Matthew 24:34 to be within that same range of meaning makes perfect sense in that context and fits with what we know about Bible prophecy from other passages. Therefore, the typical [preterist](#) interpretation is contrived and fails to consider the preponderance of evidence in the New Testament for the meaning of **genea** in such contexts. ([Ref](#))

## WHO WILL PASS AWAY?

**Will not pass away** - As explained in the following discussion of **until**, the idea is that when all these things have taken place, then the (evil) generation **will pass away** (cp Mt 24:36-38, 39 = "took them all away", Mt 24:40, 41 = "one will be taken [evil], and one [regenerate, redeemed] will be left," Mt 13:41 = "will gather out of His Kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit [present tense = habitually] lawlessness"). In sum, the perverse, evil, unbelieving, adulterous Christ rejecting **generation**, will pass away into hell and everlasting torment! But God will deliver a **remnant** of believing Jews (Ro 11:26,27-note) and believing Gentiles (Mt 25:31-41) who will not pass away but in fact will "pass into" the Messiah's Kingdom.

**Until** - Means up to the point in time. In context Jesus refers to "all these things." Nelson adds that "The word **until** means "up to the point at which and no farther" here, implying **this generation** (unlike Israel) will **pass away** in judgment at the Second Coming of Christ." Here are two uses of until in other eschatological passages...

Mt 13:30 'Allow both to grow together **UNTIL** the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

**Comment:** John the Baptize described that woeful day when the harvest would be complete - "'His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Mt 3:12) **But UNTIL that day, it is still the day of salvation for all who would believe! Dear skeptical reader, do not delay, for you know not what tomorrow holds. Throw yourself on Jesus Who holds all of your tomorrows and will hold you until tomorrow is no more! Thank you Lord God.**

Mt 23:39 "For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me **UNTIL** you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

**Comment:** **When will Israel make this declaration of love and loyalty?** Not UNTIL the Messiah returns and "all Israel" (all that believe in Messiah, 1/3 according to Zech 13:8 = the believing ) is saved. Then the redeemed will cry out to their Redeemer the glorious words of Psalm 118:25! **May that day hasten quickly Lord Jesus. Amen**

## ALL THESE THINGS

**All these things take place** - What **things**? Some say **all these things** up to but not including His return (described in Mt 24 because of Mt 24:33 where Jesus says "when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.") And what would that still include? They would include the cosmic signs of Mt 24:29 that lead up to His return and yet it is clear that they have not occurred. This creates an insurmountable problem for every commentary that says all of these events took place in 70AD.

## CRITIQUE OF THE TOP RATED COMMENTARIES ON "ALL THESE THINGS" & "THIS GENERATION"

Below are **comments** on some of the "top five" **commentaries** on Matthew as determined by [Challies](#) and [Ligonier](#). As has been noted elsewhere ([See critique of their interpretation of Mt 24:15](#)), all of these commentaries hold to a "preteristic" interpretation of Matthew 24 and see the Roman Army in 70AD as the fulfillment of the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15. It is worthy noting that none of these "acclaimed" commentaries even mention the possibility that the abomination of desolation could be the Antichrist taking his seat in the Temple as described by Paul in 2Thessalonians 2:3-4!

**Craig Keener** makes a fairly dogmatic statement that "the view (circulated mainly in current popular circles) that Matthew 24 addresses only a tribulation that even readers after 70 assumed to be wholly future is not tenable; Matthew understands that "**all these things**" (probably referring to the question about the temple's demise—Mt 24:2; Mk 13:4) will happen within a **generation** (Mt 24:34), language that throughout Jesus' teachings in Matthew refers to the generation then living (e.g., Mt 11:16; 12:39, 45; 16:4; 23:36; cf. Mt 27:25).

**Editorial comment:** **Keener** is not correct in making the statement that **generation** always refers to "generation then living." Notice that **Keener** conveniently ignores Jesus' uses of "**generation**" that are used as an adjective to describe the **quality** or **kind** of generation (Mt 12:39 = "evil and adulterous generation," Mt 12:45 = "this evil generation," and Mt 16:4 = "evil and adulterous generation") Notice also that Keener does not reference Jesus' pithy pronouncement against the "unbelieving and perverted generation" in (Mt 17:17). In summary, Keener's argument that generation always refers to the "generation then living" simply

cannot be substantiated from Jesus Own words! This is another example of interpretative bias because of the difficulties presented by interpreting "**generation**" as a kind of generation (or as the generation living when all these events occur). Keener would be forced to admit that the plain, normal reading of Jesus' words describes events which have not yet come to pass!

Further, AD 70 was not "great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be (Mt 24:21)." Though Josephus reported terrible atrocities, the tribulation Jesus was predicting here must be greater than the devastation caused by the universal flood in Noah's day to which Jesus in context directly compared the events of the end (Mt 24:37-39).<sup>24</sup> Matthew 24:22 says, "if those days had not been shortened, no human being (flesh) would be saved." Πᾶσα σὰρξ ("all flesh") is a technical term referring to all humanity nine times in the New Testament (Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; Gal 2:2-6; 1 Pet 1:24).<sup>25</sup> "All flesh" here is not limited to Jews who died in Judea in the first century; rather it implies that all humanity would be extinguished in the future "great tribulation" as happened at the flood (except for Noah and his family), if not for God's intervention for the sake of His elect. Jesus here was speaking of an event much worse than AD 70.

**R T France** (another of the top rated commentaries on Matthew) on Matthew 24:34 writes that

"Those who interpret this passage as referring to the parousia must therefore either conclude that it proved to be untrue, or that **this generation** does not here carry its normal meaning. It has, for instance, been taken to mean 'the Jewish race', or 'unbelieving Judaism'. It is unlikely that such an improbable meaning for the noun would have been suggested at all without the constraint of apologetic embarrassment!" (Tyndale NT Commentary-Matthew)

**Editorial comment:** France does not even attempt to defend his dogmatic statement that "It is unlikely that such an improbable meaning for the noun (genea - generation) would have been suggested." As discussed above Jesus Himself in this very Gospel used **generation** several times to describe the "**kind**" of generation (qualitative use not quantitative use) that would witness all these things, referring to it as "**evil**" in three different statements (Mt 12:39, 12:45, Mt 16:4). **France's** argument simply does not stand up to comparison with several of Jesus' earlier uses in Matthew of the word **generation**.

**William Hendriksen's** holds the view that Mt 24:15 was fulfilled in 70AD and yet he concludes that "**this generation**" is a *qualitative* term and not a *quantitative* term.

"By no means has it been established that the term "**this generation**" must be limited to contemporaries. It can also refer to **this kind of people**"; for example, **the Jews, at any time or in any age**. Worthy of consideration in this connection are such passages as Dt. 32:5, 20; Ps 12:7; 78:8; etc., where the Septuagint (Lxx) uses the same word (**genea**) as is here rendered "**generation**," but evidently with a meaning that goes beyond "group of contemporaries." Thus even in the New Testament (see Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 3:10), though the starting point may well be a reference to the people of that particular day, this may not be the entire meaning. So also probably here in Mt. 24:34. ([Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, Baker Book House, 1953-2001, New Testament Commentary](#))

**R C H Lenski** who also holds a 70AD fulfillment for Mt 24:15 agrees with Hendriksen on the interpretation of "**this generation**" as kind of generation:

With profound solemnity, using his well-known seal (**Ed**: "Amen" or "Truly") for verity and authority (see Mt 5:18), Jesus declares that "**this generation shall not pass away until all these things shall occur.**" The view that **genea** and especially *genea aute* refers to the contemporary generation, those living at the time when Jesus spoke, is **untenable**. A look at the use of (**Ed**: the Hebrew noun) **dor (01755)** in the Old Testament and at its regular translation by **genea** in the **Septuagint (Lxx)** reveals that a **kind of men is referred to**, the **evil kind** that reproduces and succeeds itself in many physical generations. Compare Ps 12:7: "Thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever"; Ps 78:8, the fathers (many physical generations of them); Ps 14:5, "the generation of the righteous"; Ps 24:6; 73:15; 112:2; Deut. 32:5, 20; Pr. 30:11-14; Isaiah often; Jer. 7:29; etc. From these passages turn to the New Testament and in addition to the Gospels note Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 3:10. Sometimes the evil manifested by the kind of men referred to is indicated by modifiers, as in Mt. 16:4; 17:17; Mk 8:38, but often the context does this... "**This generation**" consists of the **type of Jews** whom Jesus contended with during this Tuesday, Mt 21:23-23:39... **this type of Jew** will continue to the very Parousia. It has continued to this very day. The voice of Jewish rejection of Christ is as loud and as vicious as ever: "He is not the Messiah, not the Son of God!" ([The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel- R. C. H Lenski, Augsburg House, 1961](#))

**D A Carson** interprets "**this generation**" with a "quantitative" rather than a "qualitative" meaning writing that

only with the greatest difficulty be made to mean anything other than the generation living when Jesus spoke. Even if **generation** by itself can have a slightly larger semantic range, to make "**this generation**" refer to all believers in every age, or the generation of believers alive when eschatological events start to happen, is highly artificial. Yet it does not follow that Jesus mistakenly thought the Parousia would occur within his hearers' lifetime. **If our interpretation of this chapter is right**, all that Mt 24:34

demands is that the distress of Mt 24:4-28, including Jerusalem's fall, happen within the lifetime of the generation then living. This does not mean that the distress must end within that time but only that **"all these things"** must happen within it. (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

Note that Carson does not even acknowledge that the word **"generation"** as used in the Bible clearly can have both a quantitative and qualitative meaning. Notice also that Carson's statement *"if our interpretation of this chapter is right"* But as Carson admits in his discussion of the **"abomination of desolation"** in Mt 24:15 the *"obvious occasion, in general terms, is A.D. 70, though **certain difficulties must be faced.**"* He is forced to make this statement because he interprets the Roman Army as the "abomination." However he does acknowledge this interpretation creates a significant problem noting that *"by the time the Romans had actually desecrated the temple in A.D. 70, it was too late for anyone in the city to flee."* It is notable that he does not even mention the possibility of the Antichrist as the abomination of desolation, nor does he discuss Paul's description in 2Thes 2:3-4 of a future event which would certainly parallel Mt 24:15 and Daniel 9:27. In addition, regarding the unique, unprecedented "great tribulation" (Mt 24:21) which he interprets as fulfilled in 70AD, he makes the statement that even the horrors of the Nazi holocaust (where 6 million Jews, one-third of the world's population were annihilated) were not greater *"percentage wise"* than the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD (where Josephus estimates 1.1 million Jews died a figure many observers feel was exaggerated)! Finally, notice that Carson admits that **"all these things"** in Mt 24:33 is more problematic for **"all these things"** would include the cosmic cataclysms of Mt 24:29 which clearly have not occurred. He attempts to explain this problem by saying "The more natural way to take **"all these things"** is to see them as referring to the distress of vv. 4-28, the tribulation that comes on believers throughout the period between Jesus' ascension and the Parousia." But that still does not explain Mt 24:29, which precedes His coming!

**Leon Morris** on **"this generation"** - On the surface of it, the meaning is that he will be returning in glory during the lifetime of people then living, and indeed some exegetes hold to this view, claiming that Jesus thought that he would reappear on earth not so long after his death, perhaps at the fall of Jerusalem, to usher in the end of the world, which, of course, means that he was mistaken. In view of the fact that two sentences later he says that he does not know when it will occur (Mt 24:36), this appears to be an erroneous interpretation of the words. A better view is that all these things refers to the distress indicated in verses 4-28, which must occur before Jesus comes again but which does not mean that his coming will follow immediately. **A difficulty with this view is that it is not easy to see why all these things should include the events of Mt 24:4-28, but not those of Mt 24:29-31.** So others have suggested that the **generation** is the Jewish nation (it means "not just the first generation after Jesus but all the generations of Judaism that reject him," Schweizer, p. 458; so also Ryle, Hendriksen, and others) and point to its continuation through the centuries. Others think that the reference is to the human race, but this view has little to be said for it. **We should notice that in the Old Testament the term is sometimes used for a kind of person, as when we read of "the generation of the righteous" (Ps. 14:5) or "the generation of those who seek him" (Ps. 24:6).** From passages like this some have taken Jesus to mean that the church (**Ed:** Note Jesus was not addressing the church but Jews! The church did not even exist at this time!) will survive to the end (e.g., Green). But the term is used also of the wicked, as when the Psalmist prays, "guard us ever from this generation" (Ps. 12:7); or it may refer to "the generation of his wrath" (Jer. 7:29). **If this is its meaning, Jesus is saying that this kind of person, "this generation," will not cease until the fulfilment of his words. It is perhaps relevant to notice that a little earlier Jesus said of people to whom he was speaking, "you killed" Zechariah (Mt 23:35), a statement that implies the solidarity of the race through the years.** Mounce draws attention to the phenomenon of multiple fulfilment. He points out that the **"abomination of desolation"** had one fulfilment in the desecration effected by Antiochus Epiphanes and another in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. "In a similar way, the events of the immediate period leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem portend a greater and more universal catastrophe when Christ returns in judgment at the end of time." **Right up to the time when all these things happen there will be people of the same stamp as those who rejected Jesus while he lived on earth.** ([The Gospel according to Matthew \(The Pillar New Testament Commentary\)](#))

**Comment:** Notice that Morris recognizes the difficulties with interpreting **"this generation"** as the one alive when Jesus was speaking (which is D A Carson's interpretation - see above). Morris acknowledges that even in the preceding context (Mt 23:36), Jesus used **generation** (genea) in a qualitative and not quantitative manner, speaking of a evil, murderous kind of generation.

## SEVEN POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF "THIS GENERATION"

**Richard Mayhue** on **this generation** in Mt 24:34 has an excellent summary:

At least seven plausible views have arisen regarding Matthew 24:34.

### 1. Christ was mistaken.

## 2. Christ was speaking of the human race in general

**3. Christ was referring to A.D. 70. This is held by preterists** ( Ice and Gentry, Great Tribulation 26-27, 181; Russell, The Parousia 83-89; Sproul, Last Days 51-68) **and non-preterists.** (Bruce, Hard Sayings 228; Carson, "Matthew" 507; Hagner, Matthew 14:28 715; David L. Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments," Grace Theological Journal 10 1989:3-27; David Wenham, "'This Generation Will Not Pass... ' A Study of Jesus' Future Expectation in Mark 13," Festschrift for Donald Guthrie)

## 4. Christ spoke of faithful Christians in general

**5. Christ referred to the Jewish race generically (futurist view)** (Duane A. Dunham, " in Matthew 24:34, " New Testament Essays in Honor of Homer A. Kent, Jr., ed. Gary T. Meadors (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1991) 125-41; Hendricksen, Matthew 867-69)

**6. Christ referred to a future evil generation.** (Evald LÃ¶vestam, Jesus and this Generation ; Neil D. Nelson, Jr. [see below]; Robert L. Thomas, unpublished class notes).

**7. Christ was indicating the generation which would be alive at His future parousia** (Darrell L. Bock, Luke 9:51:24:53, in Baker Exegetical Commentary; Hiebert; John MacArthur, Matthew 24:28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary)

In this passage, the futurist possibilities (6 & 7) are preferred over the preterist option (3a) for very convincing reasons:

- Options **1, 2, 4, and 5** have been set aside as less than compelling because of faulty theology (1) or being too general for such a specific text (2, 4, 5).
- Contextually, Matthew 24 and 25 must be taken as a whole, not separated. The preterist view cannot handle the content of "the coming of the Son of Man" throughout Mt 24:37-25:30, a theme which began in Mt 24:3, 27, 30. The "coming" of Mt 24:30-31 is the same coming of Mt 25:31 and cannot possibly be accounted for or said to be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- Historically, the church that existed after A.D. 70 and in close time proximity to the event was still looking for a future fulfillment of Matthew 24:25, i.e., the second advent of Christ. Since John lived beyond A.D. 70, one would have expected him to have at least commented on this and for it to be reported by those who might have heard him, that Jesus had come in accord with the preterist view. However, there is no evidence of this whatsoever. Just the opposite is true in the Didache and Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, both written decades after A.D. 70.
- Grammatically speaking, "**all these things**" (panta tauta) give direction to help determine the meaning of the text. Whether one looks back or ahead in the passage, "these things" are the features which both precede and accompany Christ at His second coming (cf. Mt 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44). Keep in mind that Mt 24:4-44 is all part of Christ's direct answer to the disciples' question in Mt 24:3, "What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"
- Because it has been concluded contextually, historically, and grammatically that Christ's second coming is yet future, not historically fulfilled in A.D. 70, one can then deal with the meaning of "**this generation.**" The interpretation has two possibilities: "**generation**" can be taken pejoratively (view 6) or temporally (view 7). The pejorative view understands "**generation**" in the sense of referring to the category of rebellious, sinful people who have rejected God's truth and righteousness (cf. Mt 12:45; 23:35-36); this has an OT precedent in Dt 32:5, 20 and Pr 30:11-14. The temporal view understands "**generation**" to be the group of contemporaries who are alive at the time of Christ's parousia, extending from the birth pangs of Mt 24:8 through the coming of the Son of Man (Mt 24:44).

Either of these last two views deals with Matthew 24:25 in a futurist sense. Whether one opts for the "**evil generation**" view or the "**eschatological generation**" view, an eschatological period of time beyond A.D. 70 is in view. Thus, it is concluded from this text that Jesus was a futurist. ([Jesus: A Preterist Or A Futurist? MSJ 14:1 - Spring 2003](#))

## SIX POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF "THIS GENERATION"

Neil D. Nelson has a summary of six interpretations of **This Generation** In Matthew 24:34. He begins by asking...

**What Kind Of People Do Not Pass Away Until All These Things Take Place?**



## View #1: Contemporaries Of Jesus Witness The Second Coming

Perhaps the most difficult phrase to interpret in the entire Olivet Discourse is **"this generation will not pass away until all these things take place"** (Matt 24:34).<sup>31</sup> Some interpreters have concluded Jesus taught (erroneously it ends) that His contemporaries would be alive at His Second Advent.<sup>32</sup> The most decided criticism of this interpretation is that it makes Jesus a false prophet and the church perpetuated this error when it continued to pass on these words after the disciples had died.<sup>33</sup> However, Jesus (in Matthew's Gospel) is portrayed as one who is absolutely true and who teaches the way of God truthfully (Mt 22:16). In Matthew 24:35, the verse immediately following, Jesus pledged His truthfulness on this prediction and everything else in the discourse when He said: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Jesus' prophecies, including that of Mt 24:34 are more dependable than the universe itself. Further, in Matthew 24:36 Jesus strongly affirmed: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."

**How could Jesus on the one hand assert that His own contemporary generation would see the fulfillment of all His prophecy and then assert just two verses later that no human, not even He, could know the time of fulfillment?**<sup>34</sup>

## View #2: Contemporaries Of Jesus Witness The Coming Of Jesus In AD 70

The [preterist](#) interpretation of this phrase and Matthew 24 in general is a reaction to the interpretation of the first view. Their view is that Jesus' contemporaries will not pass away until they see all the things of Matthew 24:4-31, but **"all these things"** must therefore be restricted to the events of AD 70.<sup>35</sup> However, **"all these things"** in Matthew 24:34, as previously demonstrated, include the future **abomination** that causes **desolation**, the future **great tribulation**, and the **second coming** itself.<sup>36</sup>

## View #3: Contemporaries Of Jesus Witness The Beginning Of End Time Events

Another view takes the verb **"take place"** in Mt 24:34 (γένηται) as an ingressive aorist, which would produce the meaning *"this generation will not pass away until all these things begin to take place."*<sup>37</sup> This view is unlikely for several reasons. First it ignores the comprehensive nature of the word **"all."** To impose a limitation on the words "before all these things take place" really makes Jesus say: "before some of these things take place."<sup>38</sup> **"All"** has a naturally comprehensive force throughout the discourse (Mt 24:2, 8, 9, 14, 22, 30, 33, 34, 47; 25:5, 7, 29, 31, 32). Also, not all these things begin to happen by AD 70. The future **abomination** (Mt 24:15), **great tribulation** (Mt 24:21-22), and the **second coming** (Mt 24:27-31) do not begin to take place during the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries. Moreover, the aorist subjunctive genetai is much more likely a consummative aorist in light of the prophetic nature of Jesus' statement.<sup>39</sup> In Matthew 5:18, a verse with a very similar phraseology, genetai is certainly a consummative aorist. The verb ginomai is used of consummated events in Mt 24:6, 20, 21 [2x], and Mt 24:32.<sup>40</sup>

## View #4: This Generation Is Israel As A Race

An old view abandoned today by many dispensational interpreters is that **"this generation"** in Matt 24:34 refers to Israel as a race.<sup>41</sup> However, while Mt 24:34 implies that **"this generation"** will pass away after the events of Mt 24:4-28 occur, Matthew envisioned a mission to Israel until the parousia (Mt 10:23), a conversion of Israel before the second coming (Mt 23:39; cf. Ro 9:1-11:36; Isa 66:22; Zech 8, 13-14), and the presence of Israel in the kingdom (Mt 19:28).<sup>42</sup> In other words, Israel in contrast will not pass away when **"all these things take place."** The word **"until"** means "up to the point at which and no farther" here, implying **"this generation"** (unlike Israel) will **"pass away"** in judgment at the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>43</sup> Also the **fig tree** in the parable of Matthew 24:32-35 is not a type of Israel. Jesus instead used it to make a straightforward analogy.<sup>44</sup> Just as the budding fig tree inevitably results in a harvest of figs, so the events of Mt 24:4-25 will inevitably usher in the judgment of the Son of Man at His coming. **"This generation"** will pass away in judgment when Christ returns, but Matthew extends the promise that Israel will be preserved and will enter into the kingdom.

## View #5: This Generation Is An Evil Kind Of People Who Oppose Christ And His Messengers

A fifth view, which is an old dispensational view and at the same time relatively new in current dispensational circles takes seriously both the Old Testament background of the word **geneá** ("generation," דור in the Hebrew OT) and how **"this generation"** (**e genea aute**) is characterized throughout Matthew and the rest of the New Testament. **E genea aute** in Matthew 24:34 describes unbelieving, rejecting humanity, unresponsive to God's messengers, and headed toward eschatological judgment.<sup>45</sup> John Nelson Darby, the acknowledged father and developer of dispensational premillennialism, made the point over a century and a half ago that **e genea aute** in Matthew 24:34 refers to an evil type of people.

He wrote: "The difficulty as to **"this generation shall not pass away"** is a prejudice flowing from the English use of the word **"generation."** It is quite as much used for a moral class in scripture, as for the period marked by human life; and if Deuteronomy

32:5, 20 (where this very subject is treated of) be referred to, the sense is plain." <sup>46</sup>

Again Darby commented: "As to the generation not passing away, a reference to Deuteronomy 32:5, 20, will give the plain and sure sense of it, and that in reference to this very subject [the Lord's coming]. The mere common use of the word is a class of persons, as, the generation of the wicked, not the period of a man's life."<sup>47</sup>

The primary Old Testament background for Jesus' reference to **e genea aute** here is in the Old Testament descriptions of the rebellious Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness (cf. Nu 32:13; Dt 2:14; Ps 12:7; 78:8; 95:10).<sup>48</sup> Adjectives such as "evil," "perverse," "adulterous" and "faithless" used by Jesus to characterize "this generation" (Mt 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) come from the Song of Moses (Deut 32:5, 20). Culver noted that the Hebrew word דור ("**generation**") "*is used widely to indicate a class of men distinguished by a certain moral or spiritual character,*" such as in the phrase "*generation of the righteous*" or "*generation of the wicked*." He said this metaphorical (non-chronological) use of the word is theologically the most significant use of דור in the Old Testament and becomes the basis of Jesus' use of **genea**. ("generation") in the Gospels.<sup>49</sup>

Psalm 12:7 (11:8 LXX) uses the exact phrase **e genea aute** and says: "You, O Lord, will keep them [LXX "us"]; You will preserve him [i.e., the godly man] from 'this generation' forever." "This generation" is described in this context as lying, boastful, proud, violent, and wicked. The godly do not belong to this **generation**, though they live among these evil people of their age (cf. Acts 2:40; Phil 2:15). Matthew seems to have juxtaposed the phrase "this generation" in Mt 24:34 with his account of the days of Noah (Mt 24:37-39), an explicit type of the coming of the Son of Man. This seems to be a purposeful echo of Genesis 7:1 where Noah is described as the sole righteous man in "this generation" (**e genea aute**), which is described as wicked, violent, corrupt, and self-absorbed in Genesis 6:5-11. Noah, like the godly man in Psalm 12, lived among, but did not belong to "this generation."

A study of the use of **e genea aute** (Mt 11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36; 24:34) and **genea** with other descriptive adjectives (Mt 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) used in the same sense, reveals that the kind of people identified with the words "this generation" are characterized as those who reject Jesus and His messengers and the salvific message they preach, who remain unbelieving and unrepentant, who actively test and persecute Jesus and His messengers, and who will face eschatological judgment. The pejorative adjectives given to "this generation" (**evil, adulterous, faithless, perverse**) throughout the Gospel are qualities that distinguish between those who are subjects of the kingdom and those who are not.

The use of "this generation" in Matthew 23:36 (**Ed comment:** For proper context of "this generation" read Mt 23:29-36 and you will see that generation in v36 clearly uses "**generation**" to speak of evil men of all times) directly before the Olivet Discourse is particularly instructive. There Jesus' prophetic condemnation falls on "this generation" both for murdering the righteous men of the Old Testament (Mt 23:29-31, 35) from the beginning of the Hebrew canon (Abel) until the end (Zechariah in the last book of the Hebrew Bible, 2 Chronicles; note Jesus says: "whom you murdered") and for scourging, and killing, and crucifying "prophets, and wise men, and scribes" (i.e., His disciples; cf. Mt 5:12; 7:24; 10:41; 13:52) all the way until the second coming. The contemporaries of Jesus (**Ed:** the "**generation**" alive when Jesus made this pronouncement) did not murder Zechariah (Mt 23:35-36), nor will they murder Jesus' disciples until the end of the age. Therefore the phrase "this generation" in Mt 23:36 and in Mt 24:34 extends beyond Jesus' contemporaries to also include the murderers of God's servants in the Old Testament and forward to those who will persecute disciples until Jesus' return (Mt 23:39 = **Ed:** This event is clearly an indirect allusion to the Second Coming). Since the persecution extends until the Son of Man comes (Mt 10:23; 23:34; 24:9-14, 15-26), the judgment also does not fall until that time.

The reader of Matthew 24:34 should therefore interpret "this generation" (**e genea aute**) in the same way it has been consistently used throughout Matthew, as a kind of people who reject Jesus, who remain hostile to Jesus' disciples, who are blind to the signs of His coming, and who remain opponents of the Gospel and its messengers until the end. Then finally they "**will pass away**" at the judgment when Christ returns.<sup>50</sup> In the context of Matthew's Gospel, the disciple is not above his teacher, nor is the servant above his master (Mt 10:24-25). The obedience of Christ in the midst of "an evil and perverse generation" as He endured its hostility and obstinate unbelief, becomes then the pattern for his disciples.<sup>51</sup> The Lord's teaching in Matthew 24:32-35 is that the followers of Christ will continue to endure the persecution and opposition of "this generation." This sinful class of opponents of Christ and his messengers will continue to be present directly until the coming of the Son of Man. However, saints have the sure hope, based on Christ's word (Mt 24:35) that Jesus as Son of Man will come and gather them into His kingdom and vindicate them by judging "this generation." Just as Christ suffered, so will disciples in this age. Just as Christ was subsequently glorified, so they will "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34).

#### **View #6: This Generation Is All The People Alive At The End**

A final view, held by several dispensationalists is that "this generation" refers to all the people who are alive when Jesus returns.<sup>52</sup> This view says that the end-time **generation** will see the completion of the end-time signs. It seems somewhat tautologous (redundant) to say that the last generation will not pass away until the end-time events conclude (**Ed:** That is, the last

generation is somewhat redundant if one is speaking of the end times - of course they would be the last generation). Jesus hardly needed to state this sort of truism. However, the emphasis in this interpretation is that when the end comes, it comes quickly. The **generation** that experiences the **great tribulation** will also witness the end.<sup>53</sup>

The major problem with this view is that it ignores the negative force of **e genea aute** ("this generation") throughout the New Testament (**Ed**: As explained in more detail in View #5) and Matthew in particular and the moral use of the phrase in the Old Testament (**Ed**: See also View #5). The negative connotation of the phrase as referring to ungodly people united in their opposition to God's messengers is found in all previous uses of **e genea aute** (Mt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36). The reader of the Gospel would naturally understand the phrase to have the same connotation in Matthew 24:34.

This view also ignores the implication that **"this generation"** will **"pass away"** at the second coming. Only the wicked belong to this type of people. This evil generation will be "swept away" in judgment and put into hell (Mt 24:39, 51). The righteous in contrast will inherit the kingdom and enter into eternal life in the presence of the Son (Mt 25:20-23, 34, 36). Therefore, "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 refers to an evil and faithless people guilty of resisting the messengers and the message of Christ. This view best aligns with the use of the phrase throughout Matthew and the purpose of Jesus in the discourse and the Gospel to prepare the disciples to endure the rejection of unresponsive humanity as they obediently serve Christ and others and thus ready themselves for the Lord's glorious return.

- Excerpt from Neil D Nelson's "Three Critical Exegetical Issues In Matthew 24: A Dispensational Interpretation -- [See full article below and bibliographic notes](#)

## IN DEPTH STUDY OF GENEAE: GREEK WORD FOR GENERATION

**Generation** (1074)(**genea** gives us our English genealogy) literally refers to those descended from a common ancestor and in this sense refers to a race, a clan or descendants.

See [Bob DeWaay's excellent analysis](#) of **genea** in the New Testament which deals specifically with its use by Jesus in Mt 24:34. DeWaay concludes

Our range of meaning study has concluded that **genea** is used more often in the New Testament as a **qualitative term** than a **chronologically quantitative one**. Our study in particular of the Gospel of Matthew shows that Matthew uses it in that way. We have also shown that taking the usage in Matthew 24:34 to be within that same range of meaning makes perfect sense in that context and fits with what we know about Bible prophecy from other passages (**Ed comment**: Not to mention that the nearest prior use by Jesus of the phrase "*this generation*" is in Mt 23:36 where [in context of Mt 23:29-39] *generation* clearly refers to evil, murderous men from the beginning of time [Abel] to the end of the age!). Therefore, the typical **preterist** interpretation is contrived and fails to consider the preponderance of evidence in the New Testament for the meaning of **genea** in such contexts. ([Ref](#))

**Genea** in the Greek OT, the **Septuagint (Lxx)** - Often translating the Hebrew noun **dor (01755)** = period, generation, generations, dwelling place. First use of **genea** in the **Lxx** is in "Generations of Noah" = Ge 6:9, Covenant with Noah = for "all successive generations" = Ge 9:12; **Genea** describes when Israel would return to their land from Egypt (in the "fourth generation" = Ge 15:16). God would establish His covenant "throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant" (Ge 17:7). "Generation to generation" implies "everlasting" (God's dominion and His Kingdom) in Da 4:3, Da 4:34, cp Ps 33:11 ("the plans of His heart from generation to generation" = forever; see also Ps 145:13 = "Your dominion endures throughout all generations"). Ps 49:19 = "He shall go to the generation of his fathers" = he will die like them. The Hebrew phrase "*dor dorim*" = generation, generations = "throughout all generations" = Ps 72:5, Ps 102:24, Isaiah 51:8 (= "to all generations"). In Ps 73:15 "generation of Your children" may refer to the Israelites (cp Dt 14:1 where they are called God's sons). In Ps 77:8 "Has His promise come to an end forever?" is literally "Hath His... saying failed to all generations."; Ps 78:4, 6, 102:18 = "generation to come" = next generation. Ps 79:13, 89:1, 4, 102:12, 106:31, 119:90, 135:13 = "to all generations" (Lxx = genean kai genean"). Ps 85:5, 146:10 = "to all generations" (Lxx = geneas eis genean"). Ps 90:1 "in all generations" (Lxx = genea kai genea). Ps 105:8 "He has remembered His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations (forever)." Ps 112:2 "the generation of the upright will be blessed" = refers to the class of people characterized by uprightness or godliness.

The **Lxx** uses **genea** a few times in the Old Testament in a more qualitative sense, specifically describing a generation characterized by being perverse, crooked and faithless! As discussed below in the summary of interpretations of "this generation" in Mt 24:34, this qualitative sense one of the ways Jesus' words can be interpreted.

Dt 32:5 "They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; but are a **perverse and crooked generation**.

Dt 32:20 "Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a **perverse generation**, sons in whom is **no faithfulness**."

Psalm 12:7 You, O LORD, will keep them; You will preserve him from this generation forever.

**BDAG** summary (with several Scriptural additions) -

**1. those exhibiting common characteristics or interests** = race, kind (Lk 16:8).

**2. the sum total of those born at the same time**, expanded to include all those living at a given time and freq. defined in terms of specific characteristics, generation, contemporaries; Jesus looks upon the whole contemporaneous generation of Israel as a uniform mass confronting him (cp. Ge 7:1; Ps 11:8) Mt 11:16; 12:41-42; 23:36; 24:34; Mk 13:30; Lk 7:31; 11:29-32, 50f; 17:25; 21:32 This generation is characterized as "unbelieving and perverted generation" = Mt 17:17; Mk 9:19; Lk 9:41; Unbelieving = Mk 9:19; Evil =, Mt 12:45; 16:4 Lk 11:29; "evil and adulterous" = Mt 12:39; 16:4; "adulterous and sinful" = Mk 8:38. Their contemporaries appeared to Christians as "crooked and perverse generation" = Phil 2:15 (Dt 32:5). A more favorable kind of generation = "the righteous generation" = Ps 14:5; "the generation of those who seek Him" = Ps 24:6; "generation of the upright" = Ps 112:2. The desert generation (**Ed**: of Israel whose unbelief stirred up God's anger) = Heb 3:10 (Ps 95:10). After he had served his own generation Acts 13:36; 1 Clement 5:1 = the first generation (of Christians)

**3. the time of a generation, age** (as a rule of thumb, the time between birth of parents and the birth of their children (Gen 50:23; Ex 13:18; 20:5). Here the original sense gradually disappears, and the meaning 'a period of time' remains.

**a. of periods of time defined in terms of a generation** age, generation Mt 1:17; Lk 1:48; (Ps 89:1)

**b. of an undefined time period period of time generally** (Ps 48:12; 88:2) to all ages Lk 1:50; cp "throughout your generations" = Ex 12:14; to all generations = Eph 3:21; "from the past ages and generations" ~ from earliest times = Col 1:26; from ancient generations = Acts 15:21; "from generation to generation" = Ex 17:16; from generation to generation = Lk 1:50; "in other generations" ~ at other times = Eph 3:5; "in the generations gone by" = in past ages = Ac 14:16.

**4. Quotation of Isaiah 53:8** "His [Jesus] generation" = Ac 8:33

**Liddell-Scott-Jones**

I of the persons in a family

1 race, family,

2. race, generation

3. offspring,

4. metaphorically, class, kind,

II of Time or Place,

1 birthplace,

2. age, time of life,

3. after Homer, time of birth

**Thayer** -

1. a begetting, birth, nativity

2. passively, that which has been begotten, men of the same stock, a family;

a. properly, as early as Homer; equivalent to "fathers" in Genesis 31:3, etc.; the several ranks in a natural descent, the successive members of a genealogy: Mt 1:17

b. metaphorically, a race of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, character; and especially in a bad sense a perverse race: Mt 17:17; Mk 9:19; Lk 9:41; Lk 16:8; Acts 2:40.

3. the whole multitude of men living at the same time: Mt 24:34; Mk 13:30; Lk 1:48 Lk 21:32>; Php 2:15; used especially of the Jewish race living at one and the same period: Mt 11:16; 12:39,41-42, 45; 16:4; 23:36; Mk 8:12,38; Lk 11:29f, 32,50; 17:25; Acts 13:36; Heb 3:10; Lk 7:31; 11:31; Acts 8:33 (Is 53:8 the Sept.)

4. an age (i.e. the time ordinarily occupied by each successive generation), the space of from 30 to 33years

**Moulton and Milligan** - The collective sense of this word—involved in its historic relation to *genos* —is normal throughout = "race, lineage"; Thus it denotes a family, without individual reference : "his issue"; in a will, ";their joint issue,"; ";no one may swear by any other oath [than Zeus, Hera and Poseidon], nor offer it, nor may he bring forward his family,"; i.e. to swear by them, of a manumitted slave, "exempted priest of the 4th generation"

**Genea** - 42x in 37v - **NAS Usage**: generation(32), generations(10), kind(1).

Matthew 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen **generations**; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen **generations**.

Matthew 11:16 "But to what shall I compare this **generation**? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children,

Matthew 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous **generation** craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

41 "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this **generation** at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

42 "The Queen of the South will rise up with this **generation** at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

45 "Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil **generation**."

Matthew 16:4 "An evil and adulterous **generation** seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away.

Matthew 17:17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted **generation**, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me."

Matthew 23:36 "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this **generation**.

Matthew 24:34 "Truly I say to you, this **generation** will not pass away until all these things take place.

Mark 8:12 Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this **generation** seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this **generation**."

38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful **generation**, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Mark 9:19 And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving **generation**, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!"

Mark 13:30 "Truly I say to you, this **generation** will not pass away until all these things take place.

Luke 1:48 "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all **generations** will count me blessed.

50 "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON **GENERATION AFTER GENERATION** TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

Luke 7:31 "To what then shall I compare the men of this **generation**, and what are they like?

Luke 9:41 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted **generation**, how long shall I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."

Luke 11:29 As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This **generation** is a wicked **generation**; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.

30 "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this **generation**.

31 "The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this **generation** at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

32 "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this **generation** at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

50 so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this **generation**,

51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this **generation**.'

Luke 16:8 "And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own **kind** than the sons of light.

Luke 17:25 "But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this **generation**.

Luke 21:32 "Truly I say to you, this **generation** will not pass away until all things take place.

Acts 2:40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse **generation**!"

Acts 8:33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS **GENERATION**? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

Acts 13:36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own **generation**, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;

Acts 14:16 "In the **generations** gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

Acts 15:21 "For Moses from ancient **generations** has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

Ephesians 3:5 which in other **generations** was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all **generations** forever and ever. Amen.

Philippians 2:15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse **generation**, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

Colossians 1:26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and **generations**, but has now been manifested to His saints,

Hebrews 3:9 "Therefore, I became provoked at that **generation** and said, 'Their hearts are always wandering and they have not known my ways.'

**Genea** - 145v in OT -

Ge 6:9; 7:1; 9:12; 15:16; 17:7, 9f, 12; 25:13; 31:3; 43:7; 50:23; Ex 1:6; 3:15; 12:14, 17, 42; 13:18; 16:32f; 17:16; 20:5; 27:21; 29:42; 30:8, 10, 21, 31; 31:13, 16; 34:7; 40:15; Lev 3:17; 6:18; 7:36; 10:9; 17:7; 21:17; 22:3; 23:14, 21, 31, 41, 43; 24:3; 25:30, 41; Num 9:10; 10:8, 30; 13:22, 28; 15:14f, 21, 23, 38; 18:23; 32:13; 35:29; Dt 2:14; 5:9; 7:9; 23:3, 8; 29:22; 32:5, 7, 20; Josh 22:27f; Jdg 2:10; 3:2; 1Chr 16:15; Esther 9:27f; 10:3; Job 8:8; 42:16; Ps 10:6; 12:7; 14:5; 22:30; 24:6; 33:11; 45:17; 48:13; 49:11, 19; 61:6; 71:18; 72:5; 73:15; 77:8; 78:4, 6, 8; 79:13; 85:5; 89:1, 4; 90:1; 95:10; 100:5; 102:12, 18, 24; 105:8; 106:31; 109:13; 112:2; 119:90; 135:13; 145:4, 13; 146:10; Prov 22:4; 27:24; Eccl 1:4; Isa 13:20; 24:22; 34:10, 17; 41:4; 51:8f; 53:8; 58:11f; 60:15; 61:3f; Jer 7:29; 8:3; 10:25; Lam 5:19; Dan 4:1, 3, 34; 6:26; 9:1; Joel 1:3; 2:2; 3:20; Zeph 3:9

## Three Critical Exegetical Issues In Matthew 24: A Dispensational Interpretation

[Journal of Dispensational Theology - Volume 11:33 Aug 2007](#)

Jesus prophesied what the future would involve and prepared His disciples and those who would follow in their example to understand and to face future events and difficulties forewarned and forearmed. He prepared them for ongoing faithfulness to Christ, His people, and His commission while they awaited His return. The disciples with their heads clouded by ambitions of immediate glory (e.g., Mt 18:1; 20:20-28; cf. Lk 19:11; Acts 1:6) desired a definitive pronouncement which would give them the signs and times for which they were looking (Mt 24:3). Jesus did not give them an apocalypse that would enable them to see where they were on the end-time timetable and how close they were to the end of history. He gave them what they needed to know to face a future fraught with adversity and to accomplish a successful mission to the nations. He united predictions of the future with exhortations concerning the conduct required of faithful and wise followers.

The importance of the Olivet Discourse as his Farewell Sermon and great prophetic teaching makes sound interpretation of the discourse imperative. However, as Wilkins wrote: "Jesus' predictions in this discourse have produced an almost dizzying array of interpretations."<sup>5</sup>

The Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24—25 contains the fullest record of the Lord's prophetic teaching during His earthly ministry. Each of the five great discourses (or sermons) by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 5—7, 10, 13, 18, 24—25) are of utmost significance to His followers, but the Olivet Discourse is given a unique importance since Matthew added the word "all" to the formula at its conclusion by which he ends each discourse.<sup>1</sup> The end of the discourse reads: "When Jesus had finished all these sayings... " (Mt 26:1ESV).<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is the culmination of the great blocks of teaching in Matthew. Indeed, it is Jesus' Farewell Discourse or Testament in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus, like biblical leaders before Him, such as Jacob (Gen 47:29-49:33), Moses (Deut 31:1—34:38), Joshua (Josh 23:1-24:30), Samuel (1Sa 12:1-25), and David (1 Chron 28—29), near to the occasion of His death prepared His followers to face the future without His physical presence. Farewell discourses usually contain warnings concerning false teachers (Matt 24:4, 5, 11, 23-26; cf. Acts 20:17-18; 2 Tim 2:16-18; 3:1-8; 2 Pet 2:1-22; 3:16-17),<sup>4</sup> appeals to remain faithful and to exercise loving behavior toward one another (Matt 24:4-14, 36-51; 25:1-30; cf. 2 Tim 1:13-14; 3:14-17; 2 Pet 1:5-12; 3:14-15), predictions of woes and tribulations (Matt 24:4-13, 15-28), warnings of judgment against those who persecute his followers or who do not carry out his commands (Matt 24:38-51; 25:11-13, 24-30, 41-46), and blessings to come to faithful followers (Matt 24:31, 33; 25:10, 20-23, 34-40, 46b).

Jesus prophesied what the future would involve and prepared His disciples and those who would follow in their example to understand and to face future events and difficulties forewarned and forearmed. He prepared them for ongoing faithfulness to Christ, His people, and His commission while they awaited His return. The disciples with their heads clouded by ambitions of immediate glory (e.g., Matt 18:1; 20:20-28; cf. Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6) desired a definitive pronouncement which would give them the signs and times for which they were looking (Matt 24:3). Jesus did not give them an apocalypse that would enable them to see where they were on the end-time timetable and how close they were to the end of history. He gave them what they needed to know to face a future fraught with adversity and to accomplish a successful mission to the nations. He united predictions of the future with exhortations concerning the conduct required of faithful and wise followers.

The importance of the Olivet Discourse as his Farewell Sermon and great prophetic teaching makes sound interpretation of the discourse imperative. However, as Wilkins wrote: "Jesus' predictions in this discourse have produced an almost dizzying array of interpretations."<sup>5</sup> This study will deal with three crucial interpretive issues in Matthew 24, showing the strength of a futuristic dispensational interpretation in comparison with other schools and varieties of interpretation.<sup>6</sup> The interpretive issues which will be covered are:

- 1) The identification and timing of the events in Matthew 24:15-31;
- 2) The referent of "this generation" in Matthew 24:34; and,
- 3) Whether "one is taken, one is left" in Matthew 24:40-41 refers to the rapture or to the second coming.

**Are The Abomination That Causes Desolation, The Greatest Tribulation, And The Coming Of The Son Of Man Past Or Future Events?**

Turner helpfully divided approaches of evangelical interpreters into four classifications based on how much of the discourse they assign to the AD 70 fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, and how much they assign to the end of the age.<sup>7</sup> **Preterist** or historical interpreters believe Matthew 24:1-35 was fulfilled in the first century, especially in the judgment of God upon Jerusalem. While moderate preterists tend to believe that Matthew 24:36-25:46 discusses the end of the age and the second coming,<sup>8</sup> full or extreme

preterists believe that all the events in the discourse were fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem and even the second coming, resurrection, and final judgment are all past events. Futurist interpreters, while differing as to whether Matthew 24:4-14 refers to the interadvent age, or wholly or partly to a future "great tribulation" period immediately before the end,<sup>9</sup> assign all of Mt 24:15-41 to the future. There are two types of mediating positions, the traditional and the revised preterist-futurist positions. The traditional **Preterist**-futurist position understands Mt 24:15-26 as a "double reference" prophecy referring in a perspective common to biblical prophecy in the near view to the events of AD 70 and in the far view to the end of the age.<sup>10</sup> The revised preterist-futurist view of Carson sees AD 70 as the subject of 24:15-21 and the church age being addressed in Mt 24:22-28.<sup>11</sup>

## **Preterists And The Parousia**

There are significant problems with the preterist and preterist-futurist views of Matt 24:15-31. For example, the view of preterists like France, Garland, and Sproul is that "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 must refer to Jesus' contemporaries who experienced "all these things" (Mt 24:33-34) including "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt 24:30b). To protect the veracity of the Lord and the authority of Scripture to a coming in judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70.<sup>12</sup> However, in the context of the discourse this then mandates that Matthew 24:27-31 refers not to the second coming, but rather words like *παρουσία* ("coming," Mt 24:27), *ερχόμενον* ("coming," Mt 24:30), and *δόξης* ("glory," Mt 24:30) likely refer to the second coming of Christ. *Παρουσία* is used in Matthew 24:37, 39 ("the coming of the Son of man"),<sup>13</sup> which are verses these moderate preterist interpreters take to refer to the future return of Christ.<sup>14</sup> To see *παρουσία* in Matthew 24:27 as a symbolic or spiritual coming of the Lord would be to use the word in a way unprecedented in Matthew and in the entire New Testament.<sup>15</sup> Forms of the verb *ερχομαι* ("come") which is used in Matthew 24:27, are used throughout the rest of the discourse in passages that clearly speak of the second coming (Mt 24:42, "your Lord is coming"; Mt 24:44, "the Son of Man is coming"; Mt 24:46, "when he comes"; Mt 25:10, "the bridegroom came"; Mt 25:19, "the master of those servants came"; Mt 25:27, "at my coming"; and, Mt 25:31, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory"). In Matthew 25:31, the word "glory" is used twice (*δόξη, δόξης*) of the Lord's glorious presence at His second coming.

The coming of the Son of Man with His angels to divide humanity at the future judgment accompanying the second coming is emphasized previously in the kingdom parable in Matthew 13:41 (cf. 13:49) and later in Matthew 25:31 (cf. 24:44; 26:64).<sup>16</sup> The reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked at the second coming, in fact, is a major theme throughout the rest of the Olivet Discourse (cf. 24:40-44, 45-51; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46). That is the same event spoken of in Matthew 24:27-31.

The event described in Matthew 24:27-31 is also both universal and unmistakably visible to all on earth, which was not the case in the local judgment which befell Jerusalem in the first century. There is a very strong emphasis here on the universal visibility of the coming of the Son of Man (Mt 24:27, "for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man"; Mt 24:30, "then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory") in contrast with repeated warnings concerning deceptive reports of a secret coming (Mt 24:23-26). This coming judgment causes all the tribes of the earth to mourn since Jesus' return means judgment.<sup>17</sup> It also means that the elect throughout the globe in Mt 24:31 (who are dispersed so widely because they have been obedient to the Lord's commission cf. Mt 24:14; 28:19-20) will be gathered by the Lord's angels to enter into the kingdom, eternal life, and the joy of the master (cf. Mt 25:21, 23, 34, 46).<sup>18</sup> Only a physical return of the Lord in total judgment satisfies the language in Mt 24:27-31. The use of Daniel 7:13-14 in Matthew 24:30, where one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven and receives authority over all the nations from the ancient of Days, also signals that Matthew 24:29-31 is speaking of the future return of Christ. In Daniel 7, God passed judgment on the four kingdoms that dominate the earth and gives all authority to one like a son of man (Dan 7:13-14). His kingdom will be over all the earth and He will reign forever.

## **The Abomination And The Great (Est) Tribulation**

There are several events or references in Matthew 24:15-28 which do not fit an AD 70 fulfillment. Matthew declares that the abomination comes first, followed by the great tribulation and flight. The abomination causes desolation.<sup>19</sup> However, in the siege of Titus in AD 70, the tribulation preceded the abomination. In Daniel, the abomination is always linked to the Temple. The abomination of desolation takes place "in the holy place"; that is, in the Temple. However, when the Romans entered the Temple with their standards, it was too late to escape and for flight into the mountains.<sup>20</sup>

The phrase "**abomination that causes desolation**" comes from the book of Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; cf. Da 8:13). Abomination (*βδέλυγμα*) refers to "what defiles a sacred place and causes it to be left desolate."<sup>21</sup> While originally it referred to the act of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (who in 167 BC outlawed Jewish religious practices, slaughtered swine on a temple altar devoted to Olympian Zeus, and then destroyed much of the Temple precincts and the city of Jerusalem, Dan 8:13; 11:31; 1 Macc 1:54, 59; 4:38; 6:7; 2 Macc 8:17), Jesus by His words in Matthew 24:15 ("when you see... ") foresaw a yet future fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy shortly before the end of the age. The Danielic reference in Matthew 24:15, points the reader to Daniel 9:27 and 12:11



which look at the consummation and the end of the age.<sup>22</sup> Daniel 12:2-3, 11, 13 speaks of the time of the end and the resurrection of the righteous. Daniel 9:27 speaks of Daniel's seventieth week and a future figure who will establish himself as God in the Temple in the middle of the seven years which precede Christ's Second Advent.<sup>23</sup>

Further, AD 70 was not "great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be (Mt 24:21)." Though Josephus reported terrible atrocities, the tribulation Jesus was predicting here must be greater than the devastation caused by the universal flood in Noah's day to which Jesus in context directly compared the events of the end (Mt 24:37-39).<sup>24</sup> Matthew 24:22 says, "if those days had not been shortened, no human being (flesh) would be saved." Πᾶσα σὰρξ ("all flesh") is a technical term referring to all humanity nine times in the New Testament (Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; Gal 2:2-6; 1 Pet 1:24).<sup>25</sup> "All flesh" here is not limited to Jews who died in Judea in the first century; rather it implies that all humanity would be extinguished in the future "great tribulation" as happened at the flood (except for Noah and his family), if not for God's intervention for the sake of His elect. Jesus here was speaking of an event much worse than AD 70.

A final proof that Matthew 24:15-28 speaks of the great tribulation of the future, rather than of a first century event is in Matthew's use of the words "cut short" in Matthew 24:22 and "immediately" in Mt 24:29.<sup>26</sup> Carson, because of the word "immediately" understood Matthew 24:22-28 to refer to the entire interadvent period of the tribulation now stretching almost 2,000 years. But then "immediately," seems to have lost all meaning and effect and it is hard to see how God has "cut short" or limited the days (Mt 24:22). Jesus said, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened... then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" (24:29-30). This means that immediately after the great and unparalleled tribulation described in Matthew 24:21-26, the second coming will occur. The words εὐθὺς or εὐθέως ("immediately") in all 18 occurrences in Matthew mean "immediately," "at once," "without delay," or "instantaneously." The word means the same thing here in this context.<sup>27</sup> Futurists have no difficulty in seeing the parousia immediately after the future abomination that causes desolation and the great tribulation. This unparalleled tribulation will last about three and a half years according to Daniel 9:27; 12:7, 11; Revelation 11:3; 12:6, 14. God "cut short" the days by limiting them to 1,260 days (Rev 11:3). Preterists who use Matthew's "immediately" in Mt 24:29 to tie the siege of Jerusalem to a symbolic "parousia" of Christ in a temporal judgment on Jerusalem err because "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (Mt 24:29) refers back to "those days" (Mt 24:22) of the future great tribulation. Preterist-futurists who stretch the tribulation to include the whole interadvent age rob the words "immediately" and "cut short" of their plain meaning in Matthew.<sup>28</sup>

The futurist interpretation of Matthew 24:15-28, the view of most dispensational interpreters, best explains this important section of Jesus' sermon. The combination of the temporal and inferential conjunctions "therefore when" which begin Matthew 24:15-28 signal a shift<sup>29</sup> to the important topic of a major event prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and Da 12:1-12, the still future event when Antichrist erects his image in the Temple to be worshipped, which in turn commences the never to be equaled "great tribulation," which lasts three and one half years. God cuts this tribulation short for the sake of His elect. The tribulation then ends immediately as Christ comes in His full glory to judge the nations and to gather His elect, that is tribulation saints, into His kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

The Identity Of "This Generation" In Matthew 24:34: What Kind Of People Do Not Pass Away Until All These Things Take Place?...

Note: Nelson's discussion of this question is [quoted above](#)

### **One Taken, One Left: Does This Refer To The Rapture Or To The Second Coming?**

The language "one is taken and one is left" in Matthew 24:40, 41 suggests to some that the Rapture of the church is being addressed.<sup>54</sup> However, the only future coming of the Son of Man described in the discourse is the glorious and universally visible return of Christ (Mt 24:3, 27-31; cf. 24:14, 33, 50-51; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46). The language of Mt 24:27-41 does not suggest that a different event is now addressed.<sup>55</sup> Matthew 24:40-41 occurs in the context of judgment. The future time of judgment at the second coming is compared with the day when Noah entered the ark and "the flood came and swept them all away" (Mt 24:39). The day of judgment, concerning which no one but the Father knows the timing, parallels the sudden judgment and loss of life of the unresponsive in Noah's time. As the wicked were "swept away" in that day, so the world will "pass away" (24:34) at the future arrival of the Son of Man. This universal judgment is that of the second coming, not a pretribulation rapture. The parallel passage in Luke 17:26-37 makes it especially clear that the reference is to the judgment at the second coming. That passage after mentioning the destruction brought by the flood and the fire and sulphur raining upon Sodom, mentions that "one will be taken, and the other left" (Luke 17:35). When the disciples ask Jesus, "Where, Lord?" He responds with a grisly image of the gathering of vultures (Lk 17:37).<sup>56</sup>

The synonyms ἔρην ("taken away" or "swept away," Mt 24:39 from αἰρω) and παραλαμβάνεται ("taken," Mt 24:40-41 from παραλαμβάνω) seem here to stand for analogous concepts. Just as the entire generation of the flood was "taken away" in the cataclysm of Genesis, so "this generation" in its entirety will be "taken" in the judgment of the parousia. The thoughts are parallel, not contrastive. The difference in verbs may be due to precision of description ("swept away" ESV is an apt translation of ἔρην in

relation to the flood) or to stylistic variation. If "taken" in Mt 24:40-41 means being taken in judgment, this eliminates reference here to the rapture, that is, being caught to meet the Lord in the air. However, granting that the reference in Mt 24:36-44 is to the second coming, the point then becomes virtually moot as to whether "taken" in Mt 24:40-41 means gathered to meet the Lord (cf. Mt 24:31) or taken in judgment (cf. Mt 24:39). The essential point is that a permanent separation of humanity occurs at the second coming with the righteous being taken into the kingdom and the unrighteous being taken in judgment.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

This study has presented a futuristic, dispensational view of three important exegetical issues in Matthew 24. The evidence derived from a careful study of the Olivet Discourse in the context of Matthew's Gospel suggests that both the preterist and the preterist-futurist views of Jesus' teaching about the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation of Matthew 25:15-26 are incorrect; neither event occurred in AD 70. The abomination that causes desolation is a yet future event near the end of the age in which the image of the Antichrist is erected in the Temple and Antichrist himself is worshipped as God. This is the meaning of Daniel 9:27 and Da 12:11 (also indicated in 2Th 2:1-12; Mk 13:14; Rev 13:1-18). The great tribulation is also a yet future event which is of such severity that it exceeds the devastation of the universal flood in the days of Noah. All humanity would perish in this tribulation except for the intervention of God on behalf of tribulation saints. This greatest of all tribulations occurs "immediately" before the second coming of Christ.

The preterist view that equates "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt 24:30) with his symbolic coming in the judgment of AD 70 is also in error; rather this is the literal, visible coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His full glory and power. The use of the vocabulary to describe His coming elsewhere in Matthew and in the Olivet Discourse itself, and the stress on the universal visibility of the parousia should assure believers of the validity of Jesus' own precious and great description of his Second coming.

A study of "**this generation**" as used in Matthew and in its Old Testament background shows that it speaks of a wicked kind of people through the ages who are steadfastly opposed to the messengers of God and who are described as faithless, evil, perverse, and adulterous. Jesus did not promise His saints a future mission free from difficulties. Indeed, the Olivet Discourse is full of predictions of tribulation and opposition. In the Parable of the Fig Tree (Matt 24:32-35) Jesus affirmed that his followers will experience the difficulties mentioned in Matthew 24, but that as they see Jesus' predictions come to past they may be assured "that he is near, at the very gates" (Mt 24:33). They will face opposition from the same sort of evil people who opposed the prophets and Jesus before them, but when all these things take place, "this generation" which is evil, will "pass away." Then the faithful servants of Jesus (Mt 24:45-47) will be vindicated and they will enter into the kingdom and the joy of their master.

Finally, Matthew 24:40-41 does not speak of a pre tribulation Rapture. The rapture is not the subject of the Olivet Discourse, but the second coming is. The second coming is certain, yet its timing is unknown. Therefore Jesus called in the strongest terms for His saints to be faithful, prepared, and ready for His return. If this is the case in relation to the second coming, "how much more important is it for people to be prepared for the unannounced and 'sign-less' resurrection and rapture of the church."<sup>58</sup>

## Bibliography

1 Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), 13.

2 At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:28 (ESV) reads: "And when Jesus finished these sayings... " This is the typical formula used at the end of the first four discourses.

3 Many scholars since the time of Friedrich Busch, *Zum Verständnis der synoptischen Eschatologie: Markus 13 neu untersucht*, *Neutestamentliche Forschungen* (Göttersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1938), 4:44, have viewed the discourse as being a Farewell Discourse rather than an apocalypse in terms of its genre. See, for example, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 3:326. Several elements separate the discourse from Jewish apocalypses. Apocalypses are invariably pseudonymous (being falsely attributed to an authoritative figure from the past), and are replete with bizarre images, heavenly secrets, esoteric symbols, ex eventu prophecy (prophecy of an event after it actually occurred), and timetables; its revelations come via a heavenly mediator. None of these are true about Jesus' discourse. The teachings in the discourse come from Jesus himself who discourages sign seeking and end-times calculations. The discourse discourages premature apocalyptic fervor and contains more parenetic (exhortations and commands) and parabolic material, than that which merely unfolds the future. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark 13* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 18, wrote of the Eschatological Discourse: "There is no other apocalyptic

writing known to me which contains so high a proportion of admonitions and in which instruction and exhortation are so completely interwoven." For further information on the Olivet Discourse as a farewell discourse see Neil D. Nelson Jr., "Be Ready for the Hour Is Unknown': A Literary Critical Exegesis of Matthew 24" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000), 253-57.

**4** Both 2 Timothy and 2 Peter may be considered farewell speeches of Paul and Peter respectively (see 2 Tim 4:6 and 2 Pet 1:12-15).

**5** Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 789. See D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:488-95, for a sample of the many issues with which an interpreter must interact in regards to the interpretation of the discourse. Matthew 24 is often considered the most difficult chapter to interpret in the Gospel of Matthew.

**6** The author of this article does not mean to imply that dispensational interpretations of the discourse are monolithic. There is some variation in dispensational interpretation of these issues. Indeed, concerning the difficult problem of the meaning of Matthew 24:34 ("Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place"), several dispensationalists have changed their views after continued study. Few dispensational writers on an academic level today continue to hold that "this generation" refers to Israel as a nation. However, such an interpretation had been a popular view decades ago.

**7** [David L. Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments," \*Grace Theological Journal\* 10 \(Spring 1989\): 3-27.](#)

**8** Examples of moderate or partial preterists include David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 240-41, 244-49; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 183-208; and R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 333. R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 66, 158, regards himself a partial preterist, but believes that all of Jesus' prophecies in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in the period between the discourse itself and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He still believes in a literal second coming, future resurrection, and final judgment based on other New Testament texts. He admitted to being "still unsettled on some crucial matters" (158). His purpose in that book was not to exegete Matthew 24—25, but to evaluate the claims of partial and full preterism.

**9** [John F. Walvoord, \*Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come\* \(1974\), 183](#), understood Matthew 24:4-14 as a unit, describing the general characteristics of the age leading to the end. He wrote: "In general, these signs have been at least partly fulfilled in the present age and have characterized the period between the first and the second coming of Christ. They should be understood as general signs rather than specific signs that the end is near" (183-84). He did believe these general inter-advent difficulties will be "fulfilled in an intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion." Walvoord is probably "the greatest defender of the pretribulation rapture in [the twentieth] century" (from the dedication in Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, gen. eds., *When the Trumpet Sounds* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995], 3). Other dispensationalist writers who hold this view include Wilkins, *Matthew*, 772-77; David K. Lowery, "A Theology of Matthew," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 60; Joel F. Williams, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2002), 158 [concerning the Markan parallel to these verses]; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 461-97; and Nelson, "Exegesis of Matthew 24," 191-94. C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 1033, held that 24:4-14 applies to the church age and to the end of the age. Louis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 5:120-21, believed that Mt 24:4-8 describes events of the present church age and Mt 24:9-26 describes the tribulation period. Dispensationalists who place the events of Matthew Mt 24:4-14 exclusively in an end times tribulation period yet future include: J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Books, 1958), 277; Paul P. Enns, "Olivet Discourse," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, gen. ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 287; and Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 317-20.

**10** Adherents of this view (traditional preterist-futurist) include George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 309-11; and Leon Morris, *Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 593-608. Thomas Ice, "Back to the Future," in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 13, argued that to be a pre-tribulationist, one must be a futurist. However, several dispensational interpreters hold to a traditional preterist-futurist view including Turner, "Matthew 24"; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 778-91; Glasscock, *Matthew*, 468; and John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 169-70. C. Marvin Pate, "A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 135, saw the hermeneutical key for progressive dispensational interpretation of New Testament prophecy to be an "already/not yet" eschatological tension. For Pate, both Revelation 6—18 and parallel events in the Olivet Discourse were partially fulfilled in AD 70

yet have their ultimate fulfillment in the future. Darrell L. Bock, Luke 9:51-24:53, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1675-77, carefully differentiated between the account in Luke 21:20-24 which describes Jerusalem's fall and the account in Matthew 24:15-22 which looks at the end-time and speaks of consummation. He took a futurist view on this section in Matthew.

11 Carson, "Matthew," 499-504.

12 France, Matthew, 333-47; Garland, Reading Matthew, 235-39; Sproul, Last Days, 41-65.

13 Παρουσία also refers to the Second Coming in Matthew 24:3.

14 Stanley D. Toussaint, ([A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse](#)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (October-December 2004), noted that παρουσία is always used of the actual presence of a person and that in 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; and 1 John 2:28 it refers to the Lord's presence at the Second Coming.

15 Blomberg, Matthew, 363.

16 See Eugene W. Pond, "The Background and Timing of the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (April-June 2002): 201-20 ([click for this resource](#)), for evidence that the judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 occurs on the earth immediately following Christ's return to reign.

17 Gustav StÅhlin, "κοπετός, κόπτω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), said that the word "mourn" in Matthew 24:30par. is "the world's mourning for itself in its final, hopeless distress." The world has come to the realization that it is too late and each one grieves concerning their personal fate at the "immediately impending judgment of God." The mourning of those soon to be judged contrasts with the gathering of the elect into the kingdom by the Lord's angels. The consistent pattern throughout the rest of the discourse of dividing humanity into two groups begins here. When the sign of the Son of Man (the sign is the Son, a genitive of apposition) appears it is too late to repent (cf. Rev 1:7). An alternate interpretation is taken by Toussaint, "Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse," 477-79. He said that the mourning is the repentance of the tribes of Israel when Jesus returns in fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10. If so this would be further proof of the future salvation of Israel in line with Matthew 23:39.

18 There is no rapture found in the Olivet Discourse. Blomberg, Matthew, 363, no pretribulationist himself, correctly affirmed this.

19 Preterists are quite divided as to the specific event in the first century which Matthew called the **abomination of desolation**. See Toussaint, "[Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse](#)," 479-80, for four possibilities. France, Matthew, 340-41, a preterist himself, identified problems with various preterist views as to the exact identity of the event and came to no conclusion other than that it had to occur in AD 66-70.

20 Toussaint, "[Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse](#)," 480.

21 William F. Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 137-38.

22 Matthew 24:15 with its formula "**spoken of through the prophet Daniel**" is different than the other "fulfillment" quotations in Matthew in that although it has other essential elements of a fulfillment formula, it is the only one that lacks an explicit reference to any fulfillment of the prophet's words, in this case, the text of Daniel. Matthew therefore intentionally did not want this text to be understood as fulfilled. See Fred W. Burnett, *The Testament of Jesus-Sophia: A Redaction-Critical Study of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 306-07. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 481, indicated that the very command that the reader "understand" alludes to Daniel 12:9-10 immediately before Daniel's final mention of the abomination of desolation. These words speak of the end-time.

23 Other revelation in the New Testament identifies the future **abomination** as a person (Mark 13:14 where the masculine participle "standing" refers to a person standing where he should not), who proclaims himself to be God and is called "the man of lawlessness" (2Th 2:1-9) and "the beast" whom earth dwellers are made to worship (Rev 13:1-18).

- 24 Lowery, "Theology of Matthew," 190. Josephus, Jewish War 5-7, reported the death of **1.1 million Jews**, but most scholars believe that the population of Jerusalem during the feast time was **closer to 150,000**. In any case the world (and the Jewish people) have experienced greater tribulations than this in the past century.
- 25 In 1 Corinthians 15:39 Paul used the phrase in the sense of all human and animal life, an even wider usage. See Toussaint, "[Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse](#)," 481.
- 26 For more on this see Nelson, "Exegesis of Matthew 24," 185-88.
- 27 Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, 320-21. Redaction critics see εὐ θέρως as a deliberate redactional addition to his Markan source in order to deliberately connect the tribulation to the parousia.
- 28 Carson, "Matthew," 594-95 differentiated between the time of the "great distress" of AD 70 in Matthew 24:15-21 and the general interadvent age in Mt 24:22-28. Therefore Jesus did not affirm that His second coming would be immediately after AD 70. A better solution is to see that Mt 24:15-28 is one unit. The word καί ("and") in verse 22 ties Mt 24:15-21 to Mt 24:22-28. Therefore the event, which is "immediately" before the second coming, is the **great tribulation**, which commences with the **great abomination**.
- 29 Wilkins, Matthew, 777.
- 30 The disciples addressed by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse represent Jewish tribulation saints in Matthew 24:15-31. They also represent both the church and Jewish tribulation saints in Matthew 24:4-14, which covers the entire interadvent age (church age plus the tribulation). The parables in Matthew 24:32—25:46 apply in one way or another to both groups. All believers of both eras need to be faithful and ready for the Lord's return. The Olivet Discourse was therefore specifically relevant to the first disciples and it remains relevant to all saints until the end of the age.
- 31 For a fuller study of "**this generation**" in Matthew 24:34 see [Neil D. Nelson Jr., "This Generation' in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 38 \(September 1996\): 369-85](#); and, Nelson, "Exegesis of Matthew 24," 159-221.
- 32 For example, Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:367-68, affirmed that Matthew 24:34 teaches all the events of verses 4-31 (including His return in glory) would occur before all his contemporaries had died. Since some of Jesus' contemporaries were probably alive when Matthew wrote, "he did not have the problem we do." They say that most modern commentators take this view.
- 33 Bock, Luke 9:51-24:53, 1689.
- 34 This is an absolute prohibition of any knowledge of the time. The expression "day and hour" is a formula using synonymous parallelism which refers to time in general, with the word "day" being used frequently in Matthew for the time he will come in eschatological judgment (Matt 7:22; 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36). In the following context in the discourse "day," "part (watch) of the night," and "hour" are used interchangeably of the unexpected time of the coming of the Son of Man (Matt 24:42-44). Matthew 24:50 and Mt 25:13 again use "day" and "hour" in parallelism. See Blomberg, Matthew, 365.
- 35 Preterist-futurist interpreters, such as **Blomberg**, Matthew, 363-64; **Donald A. Hagner**, Matthew 14-28, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1995), 715; and, **Craig S. Keener**, A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 588-90, have a similar interpretation, but they restricted the reference of "**all these things**" in Matthew 24:34 to the events of Matthew 24:4-26 or Mt 24:15-26 which they said were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in the first century.
- 36 In Matthew, since the immediately following pericope (Mt 24:36-44) and the immediately preceding context (Mt 24:29-31) both speak of the parousia, this suggests that "all these things" in Mt 24:34 include the end as well as the preliminary events which announce the certainty of its arrival. The words of Matthew 24:35 also refer to the consummation of all things. When Jesus spoke of "all these things" in verse 34, He was surveying all the events He had just announced.
- 37 D. A. Carson, "Matthew," 507; Toussaint, "[A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse](#)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (October-December 2004), 485-86.
- 38 Anthony A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 116.
- 39 See Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids:

Zondervan, 1996), 558-61. It could also be a constative aorist, which is the most frequent use of the aorist tense.

40 John Francis Hart, "A Chronology of Matthew 24:1-44" (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1986), 217.

41 For example, this was the former view of Pentecost, **Things to Come**, 281, which he abandoned in *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 405.

42 Toussaint, "[A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse.](#)" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (October-December 2004) 484, said, "this would imply that Israel would cease to exist as a nation after the Lord's return." See also John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton: Victor, 1990), 391; I. H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 780. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 953; and, Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to St. Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 458, said it means that Israel will remain wicked until the parousia, at which time she will be judged.

43 For a full discussion see Nelson, "Exegesis of Matthew 24, " 204-09. This "exclusive" use of **UNTIL** predominates in eschatological contexts in Matthew (e.g., Mt 13:30; 23:39). The verb "**pass away**" means to come to an end or to perish. See Johannes Schneider, *παρέρχομαι* (παρέρχομαι) in *Theological Dictionary*, 2:681-82.

44 This is evident in the Lukan parallel where Jesus said: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees." Any deciduous fruit tree would make the same point.

45 Modern dispensationalists who take this view include: Lowery, "Theology of Matthew," 100; Williams, "Mark," 139, 161; and Nelson, "Exegesis of Matthew 24, " 159-221; idem., "This Generation," 369-85. Darrell Bock, *Bible Knowledge Key Word Study*, 247-48 said this negative ethical view or the idea that once the end starts it will be completed in a generation are the most likely views.

46 John Nelson Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, ed. William Kelly, 34 vols. (London: G. Morrish, n.d.; reprint, Sunbury, PA: Believer's Bookshelf, 1972), 9:277.

47 *Ibid.*, 11:372.

48 Williams, "Mark," 139.

49 R. D. Culver, "dōr," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. Robert L. Harris, Bruce K. Waltke, and Gleason L. Archer, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:187.

50 The discourse says that this evil type of people ("this generation") will be "swept away" (Mt 24:39), "taken" in judgment (Mt 24:40-41), dichotomized and put into hell (Mt 24:51), "shut out" of the marriage feast (Mt 25:11-12), "cast into outer darkness" (Mt 25:30), and they will go into the eternal punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41, 46).

51 In Matthew 17:17, Jesus was exasperated with a "faithless and perverse generation" ensnared in the grip of Satan. He exclaimed: "How long am I to be with you?" But to his disciples at the end of the Gospel he proclaimed: "And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:20).

52 For example, Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), 279-80; Glasscock, *Matthew*, 475; Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 319; Pentecost, *Words and Works*, 405; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1688-92.

53 Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1691-92.

54 Hart, "Chronology of Matthew 24, " 242-44, is an example of a dispensationalist who takes this to speak of the pretribulation rapture.

55 Blomberg, *Matthew*, 366. Contra Hart, "Chronology of Matthew," 242-44, elsewhere in Matthew the phrase *περι δε*. (Mt 24:36) is used to continue discussion of the same subject or to continue the movement of the narrative (20:6; 22:31; 27:46).

56 Bock, *Bible Knowledge Key Word Study*, 236, said: "The fact that the stress is on judgment means there is no rapture here."

57 Carson, "Matthew," 509. Lowery, "Matthew," 100, said that παραλαμβάνω ("taken" in Mt 24:40, 41) is often a positive term in the Gospel (e.g., Mt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 14, 20, 21; 17:1; 26:37). However, it is used in a bad sense significantly in Mt 27:27 (cf. Mt 4:5, 8). Αφίημι (α φιεσαι, "left") in Mt 24:40-41 can carry a negative connotation in Matthew (Mt 4:20, 22; 8:22; 19:29; 23:38; 26:56), but it also has positive connotations in Mt 4:11, 20, 24; 6:12.

58 Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, The New Testament Explorer (Dallas: Word, 1999), 51.

## "This Generation" and it's Preterist Exegetical Misuse

Bob DeWaay

Original post - ["This Generation" and its Preterist Exegetical Misuse](#)

Several years ago I published an article ([click here](#)) about Matthew 24:34 where I claimed that **"this generation"** was a pejorative term about rebellious Jewish leadership.<sup>1</sup> In today's article I will support that claim by providing a range of meaning study of the term **"generation"** (Greek [genea](#)) as used in the New Testament. I will show that the term **"generation"** is most often used in the New Testament in a **qualitative** (people of the same kind) not **quantitative** (people of the same time) sense.

The Greek word for **generation** ([genea](#)) is found 37 times in the New Testament. Only five of these are outside of the Gospels and Acts. As with most words, it has a range of meaning depending on its context. When used in the plural, it denotes "succeeding generations of people" whether past or future and is used that way 8 times in the NT.<sup>2</sup> Of the 29 other instances of its use, the term clearly means during someone's lifetime or era — twice (Acts 8:33 about Messiah and Acts 13:36 about David's generation). It is the other 27 instances that will be important to help us understand how Matthew used the term in Matthew 24:34.

This passage is identical in the Synoptics: "Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place" (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:32; Mark 13:30), all from the Olivet discourse. The passage in Matthew is most commonly cited by [preterists](#) as proof that the prophecies Jesus gave had to have been fulfilled within forty years or a generation of people then living (70 A.D. they say). Taken that way, the term **"generation"** is a *quantitative time modifier* only. I will provide evidence that this interpretation is wrong. Besides these three cases under dispute, there remain 24 other times that [genea](#) is used in the New Testament. These will be the key to understanding Matthew 24:34 and the synoptic parallels.

The term [genea](#) is used most often in the New Testament in a pejorative (expressing contempt or disapproval) sense. In those cases when **"generation"** is used pejoratively (often with modifiers like "evil, unbelieving, perverse," etc.) it functions as a qualitative statement about a group of people. Though often, but not always, addressed to people then living, the key idea is the spiritual condition of the people, not the number of their years or the time of their living. The meaning in these cases is "an ethnic group exhibiting cultural similarities—'people of the same kind.'"<sup>3</sup> When used this way in the New Testament, the similarities are always bad characteristics. There are some cases where the ideas of "people of the same time" and "people of the same kind" are combined. For example, in Luke 11:29-32 we see a negative characterization of those who demanded a sign:

And as the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This **generation** is a wicked **generation**; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this **generation**. The Queen of the South shall rise up with the men of this **generation** at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this **generation** at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

Though clearly referring to those who witnessed Jesus yet did not believe Him, the key idea is their wickedness—not just when they were alive. I say that because **"this generation"** does not apply to all Jews or all people then living. Some believed; those will not be condemned at the final judgment.

Amazingly, all 24 of the cases of the use of **"generation"** in the New Testament that do not refer to succeeding generations or obviously to someone's lifetime, are qualitative or have a strong qualitative component.<sup>4</sup> In none of these usages does **"generation"** mean "all people without exception alive at the same time" nor do they mean "all Jews without exception." The qualitative idea is seen, for example, in this passage: "And his master praised the unrighteous steward because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of

this age are more shrewd in relation to their own **kind** than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). The NASB translated "**genea** - **generation**" as "**kind**." Paul used the term the same way here: "that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse **generation**, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). He is discussing a type of person, not a period of history. This passage applies to all Christians throughout church history.

When conducting a range of meaning study, as we are here, it is of foremost importance to know how the same author used a term, particularly in the same piece of writing and in similar contexts. Therefore, how Matthew used **genea** in passages previous to Matthew 24:34 is the strongest evidence for his meaning there. The first four usages (excluding Mt 1:17 where the plural is used referring to a genealogy) are in Matthew 12:39-45:

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous **generation** craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this **generation** at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South shall rise up with this **generation** at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil **generation**."

The qualitative dimension to these usages is undeniable. It was spoken in response to the Pharisees demanding a sign. Its application is not limiting "**generation**" to people alive whoever they may be or for however long they may live, but applies to those (like the parallel passage in Luke previously discussed) who refused to believe Christ and remained therefore under God's judgment.

The next usage in Matthew is in Mt 16:4:

"An evil and adulterous **generation** seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.'  
And He left them, and went away."

This is a repetition of the previous condemnation in chapter 12 and also characterizes people by their spiritual qualities not merely when they lived in history (people of the same kind is the more prominent idea, not people of the same time). The sign of Jonah is a reference to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. That event is the sign that He is the Messiah. **This sign applies to every generation, not just to those of the first century.** Paul said, "Jews seek for signs" but Paul preached Christ crucified (1Corinthians 1:22, 23). The cross of Christ became the definitive sign and those who reject that sign (anytime in church history) come under condemnation.

In Matthew 17:17 we read:

"And Jesus answered and said, 'O unbelieving and perverted **generation**, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me'"

This was not spoken directly to the disciples alone, but to the general unbelief He found in Israel. Some scholars think **unbelieving and perverted** are allusions to Deuteronomy 32:5, 20.5 The same Greek word for "perverted" is found in both Matthew and the LXX of Deuteronomy. The allusion to Deuteronomy shows the idea of corporate solidarity. **Their unbelief when Jesus was present doing mighty deeds echoes the unbelief of those who were delivered from Egypt by God's mighty deeds and then grumbled in the wilderness.** Moses wrote, "They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation" (Deuteronomy 32:5 - "**generation**" is **genea** in the LXX). Since this was part of Moses' song it was not just for people then alive but **future generations**: "For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 31:9). The people in Jesus' day had the same characteristics as those in Moses' day and those carried on after Jesus' ascension just as they did after Moses' death.

The next usage of **genea** in Matthew is also in a passage that links current negative qualities to people with similar qualities from other times in Israel's history:

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah,



the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this **generation**." (Matthew 23:34-36)

**This passage is clearly cross generational.** It goes from the distant past (Cain's treatment of Abel) to the future (I am sending... you will kill). What characterizes "**this generation**" in Matthew 23:36 (**the closest parallel usage of genea to that in Matthew 24:34**) is not how many years certain people were alive, but their spiritual qualities. **Those who rejected Jesus and had Him killed are of the same kind as those who killed the righteous throughout Old Testament history and those who would kill Jesus' representatives in the future. What all these people have in common is not the era of history they live in, but their negative, spiritual characteristics.** This is a vivid example of the qualitative use of "**generation**" in Matthew and elsewhere in the New Testament and in the Old as well.

Having seen that throughout Matthew **genea** is used **qualitatively**, often in connection with pejorative adjectives, we have established how Matthew used the term within its range of meanings. Let us therefore examine Matthew 24:34 and see if there is reason to believe Matthew suddenly changed his usage. The passage says

"Truly I say to you, this **generation** will not pass away until all these things take place."

**Which generation?** - Those who happened to be alive whoever they might be? The only other time we find that usage of **genea** in the New Testament is in Acts 8:33 and Acts 13:36 when it is attached to the lives of specifically mentioned persons (Messiah and David). Everywhere else the term "**generation**" used in the singular it has qualitative connotations. Preterists who take this incident in Matthew 24:34 to be ONLY quantitative do so against the contextual evidence in Matthew. When Jesus wanted to make a time constraint, He said "some of you standing here will not taste death until ... " (Matthew 16:28 referring probably to the Mount of Transfiguration). Eight previous usages in Matthew ALL had qualitative connotations as we have shown. Why would this suddenly change without notice? The answer? It has not.

If we take "**this generation**" in Matthew 24:34 to mean the same thing it does in Matthew 23:36 and elsewhere—rebellious and unbelieving Jews as epitomized by their leadership, then we can make sense of it in the context of Bible prophecy. **Jesus is predicting that the Jewish leadership and most of their followers would remain on the scene of history and remain in their unbelieving condition until the prophecies in Matthew 24:1-33 have come to pass. They will then pass away. How and why? Because Messiah will return and bring judgment on the unbelieving, banishing them from His Kingdom and will gather together the believing remnant and "all Israel will be saved."**

Paul made this important statement:

"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob'" (Romans 11:25-26).

The hardening of national Israel, which is what makes them a crooked and unbelieving generation, is partial and temporary. There always has been a believing remnant. Those are not included in "the generation of His wrath" (Jeremiah 7:29). Here is what Jesus predicts:

The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:41-43)

The same "Israel" that is partially hardened now will be "saved" - national, ethnic Israel. When Messiah bodily reigns on the earth it will be over a righteous Israel, not a wicked and perverse generation.

Our range of meaning study has concluded that **genea** is used more often in the New Testament as a qualitative term than a chronologically quantitative one. Our study in particular of the gospel of Matthew shows that Matthew uses it in that way. We have also shown that taking the usage in Matthew 24:34 to be within that same range of meaning makes perfect sense in that context and fits with what we know about Bible prophecy from other passages. Therefore, the typical preterist interpretation is contrived and fails to consider the preponderance of evidence in the New Testament for the meaning of **genea** in such contexts.

## End Notes

1. CIC issue 77; July/August 2003 [HTTP://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE77.HTM](http://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE77.HTM)

2 Matt. 1:17; Luke 1:48, 50; Acts 14:16; 15:21; Eph. 3:5, 21; Col. 1:26.>

**3** Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (1:111). New York: United Bible societies.

**4** Mt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19; Luke 7:31; 9:41; 11:29, 30, 31, 32, 50, 51; 16:8; 17:25; Acts 2:40; Philippians 2:15; Heb. 3:10.

**5** "The adjectives "unbelieving" and "perverse" echo Deut 32:5, 20 and suggest both faithlessness and immorality." Blomberg, C. (2001, c1992). Vol. 22: Matthew (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (267). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

## How Preterists Misinterpret Matthew 24:34

by Bob DeWaay

See original post - [A Solution to the Problem of "This Generation" in Matthew 24-34](#)

"Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place." (Matthew 24:34)

Matthew 24:34 is a difficult passage for Bible interpreters. The problem is that Jesus appears to be predicting that the **generation** of Jews alive when He made the prophetic predictions found in Matthew 24 would also be alive to witness the fulfillment of His prophecies. This difficulty has sparked numerous proposed solutions.<sup>1</sup> The solutions fall into camps based on whether or not the interpreter believes in a literal, future fulfillment of the prophecies in Daniel, Matthew 24, and Revelation. Those who believe in future prophecy often consider "**generation**" either to mean the Jews in general, or a generation that will arise later in history and witness these things. Those who believe that everything was fulfilled by 70 AD (these are called [preterists](#)) take "**this generation**" to mean "those alive when Jesus gave His prophecies."

Gary Demar writes, "That is, the **generation** that was in existence when Jesus addressed His disciples would not pass away until **all the events** that preceded verse 34 came to pass."<sup>2</sup>

This would mean that the gathering of the elect would have to have already happened: "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:31).

Another preterist writes: "All Scripture referring to "end-time" events must relate to the Jewish war with Rome during the period A.D. 66-70 which culminated in the destruction of the temple and the end of animal sacrifices. The promised second coming, resurrection and judgment must have occurred during that period. All 'difficult' prophetic passages must be interpreted based on this premise."<sup>3</sup>

Some who believe in a future literal fulfillment of Bible prophecy have claimed that "this generation" means: "those who will be alive when Israel is regathered as a nation." Preterists have attacked that interpretation as being contrived. They rightly point out that at least some of what was predicted in Matthew 24 did happen within the lifetime of the disciples (particularly the destruction of the temple). Why would "**this generation**" refer to a future generation that will not have witnessed that event? Other suggestions by futurists have not done justice to the text and grammar of Matthew 24:34.

In this article I will propose and defend my solution to this difficulty. My thesis is that "**this generation**" as used in Matthew 24:34 is not a chronological modifier,<sup>4</sup> but a qualitative statement<sup>5</sup> about the spiritual condition of the Jewish leaders and those who follow them. I will defend this thesis by showing the usage of this phrase in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and the Psalms and by showing how the Jewish concept of corporate solidarity<sup>6</sup> applies to its usage. The reason this is important is that preterists have been confusing many sincere Christians and discrediting the study of Bible prophecy by using Matthew 24:34 as a key proof text. Those of us who believe in literal Bible prophecy need to give a cogent interpretation of the text that does justice to the historical and grammatical issues.

### This Evil Generation

Matthew 12:41-45 contains the most concentrated usage of the phrase "this generation" in the Bible. Jesus is condemning those (particularly the Pharisees who had just claimed that Jesus had a demon -- verse 24) who rejected the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. Here is what Jesus said:

The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the

South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation. (Matthew 12:41-45)

"**This generation**" is mentioned three times; referring to the leaders who had refused the evidence that Jesus was the "Son of David" (Messiah) and accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus warned that these rebellious Jewish leaders will be worse off on the Day of Judgment than pagans who had responded to less evidence than the Pharisees had witnessed. The further implication is that their situation will be worse in the future because Jesus had come and cast out demons, but since they refuse to come to faith in Him, they shall be overrun with worse demons in the future. The demons become a metaphor for the spiritual condition of the Jewish leadership and the "house" they are managing.

Clearly these things do apply to the Jewish leaders who are contemporaries with Jesus. However, do they apply to all Jews then living? The answer is "no." Those who come to faith in Christ are not the ones who face future judgment and being overrun with worse demons. Only those who rejected Him are in mind (and the "house" they are managing). The chronological factor is important in that those who were alive saw the greatest evidence that Jesus was who He claimed and thus face stricter judgment at the end of the age. However, others then alive are not included in the condemnation of "this evil generation." The leaders refuse to come to faith in the face of Jesus' power over nature, sickness, and death as shown in the previous chapters of Matthew. This soon leads to the demand for yet more signs. Here is Jesus' answer to that request: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." (Matthew 16:4a). Later in the New Testament Paul wrote "For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness" (1Corinthians 1:22, 23). The one sign that was offered was still the watershed issue when Paul wrote. One must either come to faith based on the crucified and resurrected Christ or continue in spiritual blindness and face judgment.

I believe that "**this generation**" has to do with the refusal of Jewish leaders and those who follow them to believe the clear evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. This is epitomized by those who were contemporary eyewitnesses of Jesus and His mighty works, but not limited to them. As I will show later, those who rejected Christ are standing as one with the generation who witnessed all the miracles at the time of Moses and yet died in unbelief. They are one with their fathers and all who follow who refuse to believe the gospel. In this sense, "this generation" includes sinful Jewish leadership at the time of Christ, but is not thereby exhausted of meaning. All future generations must face up to the evidence and either join their fathers in rejecting the evidence, or join with the remnant that believes and is saved. Though the same issues confront the Gentiles until the end of the age, the term "this generation" is used to refer to the Jewish leaders and their followers.

The incident in Luke where Jesus casts out demons and laments an "unbelieving and perverted generation" provides another example of "generation" used in a pejorative sense. Here is the story of the incident:

"And I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." And Jesus answered and said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you, and put up with you? Bring your son here." And while he was still approaching, the demon dashed him to the ground, and threw him into a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement. (Luke 9:40-45)

The failure to be able to cast out the demon caused Jesus to link His own disciples with the "unbelieving and perverted generation." The question is, "why"? The answer is found in the context. Notice that Jesus went from lamenting the perverted generation to a solemn statement about His arrest and crucifixion which the disciples failed to understand. Their lack of understanding is underscored by the next verse (Luke 9:46) where they are arguing about who will be the greatest. If they really understood the true mission of Messiah (to be arrested and crucified) they would not be clamoring for greatness. The "unbelieving ... generation" is one that does not perceive the nature of Jesus' person and mission.

The passage shows (much like Matthew 12) that people do not receive or understand the true purpose, mission, and nature of Messiah they will be left powerless in the face of demons. As long as the disciples did not understand the cross, they were still in the same spiritual condition as the "perverted generation" (the Jewish leaders and their followers who reject Christ). The disciples wanted greatness (just like the leaders who had rejected Christ) and they were just as powerless to bring true freedom from satanic oppression. This freedom comes only through the cross. The disciples' "understanding" is not opened up until the 24th chapter in

Luke's narrative.<sup>7</sup> Though "this generation" refers to those who reject Christ, as long as the disciples lack understanding of the cross and seek greatness, they too are sharing in spirit the nature of "an evil and perverted generation." This problem is rectified later when their eyes are opened to the true mission and nature of Messiah.

The next usage of "this generation" in Matthew (after the one in Matthew 12 discussed earlier) shows that the term is not referring to all Jews, or all Jews alive at the time, but to those who reject Messiah. The passage also shows the idea of corporate solidarity in Jewish thinking that transcends chronological considerations:

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation. (Matthew 23:34-36)

In Matthew 23 Jesus rebukes the Jewish leadership pronouncing woe after woe upon them (showing Jesus' solidarity with the true prophets of the Old Testament). Notice how Jesus' statement transcends chronological limitations. Not only does He refer to future messengers He would send and whom they would reject, but He includes the Jewish leadership in the guilt of all those who before them persecuted God's chosen ones.<sup>8</sup> The issue was not chronological (though Jesus' contemporary "judges" epitomize the wickedness of rejecting God's prophets) but moral and spiritual. All those who reject God's ordained messengers, past, present, and future are included in the condemnation of "this generation." It is becoming clear that "this generation" is a phrase that Jesus used qualitatively rather than chronologically.<sup>9</sup> At issue was not when certain Jewish people were born and how many years they might live, but their response to divine revelation: including that which comes through the Old Testament prophets, the person of Jesus, and future preachers of the Gospel.

The term "**this generation**," is also used qualitatively in the other synoptic gospels. An important one is found in Mark 8:38: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." The adjectives "adulterous and sinful" show that Jesus is speaking of the general rebellion against Him and His message as epitomized by Israel's leadership. Is there any reason to limit the warning about being ashamed of Christ and His teaching to only those alive before 70 AD? Luke 9:26 issues the same warning but makes it universal. Luke 11:29-32 uses "this generation" in a rebuke to those who demanded signs from Jesus.

**When Jesus did intend a chronological limitation, He used different terminology.** Consider the next verse after Mark 8:38 cited above: "And He was saying to them, 'Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.'" (Mark 9:1 also Matthew 16:28) The phrase "**this... generation**" denotes the moral and spiritual qualities of those included, the phrase "some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until" denotes a time limitation. Keep this in mind when we return to Matthew 24:34 to understand why Jesus uses "this generation" in that passage.

At Pentecost Peter used similar terminology when preaching to his Jewish audience:

"And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse **generation!**'" (Acts 2:40).

Could we possibly construe his words to mean, "*Be saved from all Jewish people now alive*"? No. The **perverse generation** was the Jewish leadership who had rejected their own Messiah. There was no concern about how many years they could be expected to live in a normal lifetime. At issue was their beliefs and behavior. Again we have an example of "**this generation**" being a **qualitative** statement that connoted spiritual wickedness.

In the case of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 we find out how people can be saved from **this... generation**? by repenting and believing the gospel. Later in Acts Saul of Tarsus was listening to Stephen's preaching and indictment of the Jewish leadership by linking them with Jewish rebellion from previous generations:

You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; (Acts 7:51, 52)

They subsequently killed Stephen for these words as Paul held their coats. At that point in his life Paul was still a part of the perverse generation that some of Peter's hearers were saved out of. In Acts 9 Paul was converted from being a leader of the "perverse generation" who kills God's spokespersons, to one who embraced Messiah. He joined other Jewish believers in Messiah in the early Jewish church, many who had been saved under Peter's preaching. By God's grace they escaped from the wicked generation. Paul

had been one of the leaders who was indicted by Stephen's sermon. "This generation" is something one can be saved from!

## **The Old Testament and Corporate Solidarity**

Most Americans prize individuality. We have a hard time understanding the thinking of the Jewish people who wrote the Bible. However, we need to comprehend the idea of corporate solidarity to make sense of many Biblical passages. For example, the author of Hebrews argued that Levi paid tithes in Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4-10). Levi was Abraham's descendant so according to Jewish thinking, if Abraham was lesser than Melchizedek, then Levi was too.

Often the idea of corporate solidarity is applied to guilt. Paul uses this reasoning in Romans 5. All "sinned" in Adam: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Romans 5:12). The word translated "sinned" is in the aorist tense in the Greek, meaning a point in time event. This event is Adam's sin.<sup>10</sup> The Jewish idea of corporate solidarity sees all of Adam's posterity as sinning "in Adam." The converse of this is found later in Romans 5 where all of those who are "in Christ" are made alive by His one act of righteousness.<sup>11</sup> The issue is which group does one belong to, those who are only in Adam, or those of Adam's race who are now in Christ by faith in His finished work. Corporate solidarity is true in each case.

Another way the Jewish idea of corporate solidarity is expressed is through Hebraic idioms. A common one is where someone is called "a son of" with the meaning, "characterized by." This finds numerous expressions throughout the Bible. Consider this example: "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (Ephesians 2:3). Those who are "children of wrath" are not literally "conceived by" wrath but are characterized as being under God's wrath against sin. Jesus uses this terminology in Matthew 23 in the same context as the "this generation" statement discussed earlier: "Consequently you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets" (Matthew 23:31). By killing God's messengers, they make themselves "sons of" those who did likewise in the Old Testament, though the Pharisees considered themselves "sons of the prophets" not the "sons of" their murderers. The idea is this: they are in corporate solidarity not because of family tree, but because of belief and behavior. Likewise Christians are called "children of light" as opposed to being "of darkness": "For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness" (1Thessalonians 5:5).

The idea expressed in these and many other passages is that those who follow the example of certain people in previous generations are participating in their guilt. How one believes and acts makes him a "son of" one who previously did the same. For example, in John 8 Jesus called those who considered themselves "sons of Abraham," actually "sons of the devil" (John 8:33-59). Here is a verse that shows the Jewish understanding of corporate solidarity in guilt or righteousness: "They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham'" (John 8:39). The "sons of Abraham" are those who "hear God's word" and listen to the truth that Jesus proclaims. The "sons of the devil" believe "the lie" (John 8:44). This whole section illustrates the difference between sonship based on genetics and sonship based on faith; contrasting the literal use of "son" and the idiomatic use where it means "characterized by." The notion of corporate solidarity as used in passages like this shows that generational guilt is passed along not by family tree (though being Jewish is still an important issue as shown in Romans 9-11) but by belief and practice.

The Old Testament also uses such terminology. For example:

"Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise," says the Lord; "I will set him in the safety for which he longs." The words of the Lord are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. Thou, O Lord, wilt keep them; Thou wilt preserve him from this generation forever. The wicked strut about on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men. (Psalm 12:5-8)

Notice that the phrase "this generation" is not used to mean "all those now alive" nor "a forty year period of time." It means "the wicked who afflict the righteous." The issue is moral, spiritual and transgenerational, as shown by the phrase "forever."

We have seen that many times the phrase "this generation" refers to people who are refusing to listen to God. We have also seen that the Jewish concept of corporate solidarity often links people to one another across various generations based on following the same pattern as important people in Jewish history. One can be a "son of Abraham" by listening to God or a "son of those who kill the prophets" by rejecting God's authoritative spokespersons, regardless of one's literal family tree.

## **"Filling up the Measure" of Guilt**

Before applying what we have learned to Matthew 24:34, let us consider passage that show a Jewish transgenerational understanding of guilt and "sonship." Paul had preached Christ in Thessalonica and was fiercely opposed by the Jews (Acts 17:1-9). When he later wrote to the church in Thessalonica he wrote this:

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. (1Thessalonians 2:14-16)

Some have considered this passage evidence of anti-Semitism in the New Testament. Though it is surely harsh, one ought to consider what Paul wrote in Romans 9-11 before charging Jewish Paul with anti-Semitism. Paul was not indicting Jews as merely being Jewish, but was only speaking of those who rejected God's Jewish Messiah and sought to drive away the Jewish Paul who was giving them evidence from the Jewish scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 17:2, 3). Their hostility was to the gospel. By driving Paul out of town they tried to keep Gentiles from hearing the gospel and being saved. Paul is referring to the events found in Acts 17.

The key word 1Thessalonians 2:16 is the one translated "fill up the measure" which often means "to supply what was lacking." It is only used six times in the New Testament. One of its usages is in this passage where it is translated "fulfilled": "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive'" (Matthew 13:14). The "filling up" here is seen in the fact that the people to whom Jesus preached had the same response as those to whom Isaiah preached. In both cases they do not listen and are subjected to the judgment of hardening. In Isaiah's day we have the idea of the "already and not yet." Though the immediate context (God telling Isaiah about his calling and the response he would get to his ministry) had to do with people alive in Isaiah's day, the passage also has a later fulfillment in history, in this case the preaching of Jesus. Those in Jesus' day "fill up" the sins of those in Isaiah's day by doing likewise.

Interestingly the same Isaiah passage is cited in Acts 28 in the context of Paul preaching to Jews in Rome. This passage demonstrates clearly the idea of corporate solidarity we have been discussing:

And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them.' Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." (Acts 28:23-28)

The same Isaiah passage cited by Jesus to show the guilt of those who would not listen to Him is used by Paul later. The passage continues to find fulfillment in those who are like their "fathers" to whom Isaiah preached. Here also it was not all the Jews that are indicted (some believed) but those who acted like their "fathers" in Isaiah's day and refused to listen to God's word.

So in Isaiah's day we have the "already" (those who refuse to listen and are hardened) and the "not yet" (future Jews who would not listen to Messiah). In Paul's day we have the "already" (those who were the "fathers" of the Jews who did not listen) and the "yet still" those alive in Paul's day who refused to listen and were hardened. In the 1Thessalonians 2 passage Paul says that the Jews "fill up the measure of their sins." He means that they continue in the pattern of those who went before and rejected God's message and add to the corporate pool of sin of which they are a part.

Paul's teaching in 1Thessalonians 2 echoes the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Consequently you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers. (Matthew 23:29-32)

They would soon "fill up the measure of the guilt" by turning Christ over to be crucified. Thus they make their "fathers" to be the ones who killed the prophets and not the prophets themselves. In this sense one has moral culpability as to who one's "father" is. In either case they are still Jewish.

## **"This Generation"** in **Matthew 24:34**

"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." (Matthew 24:34)

As I mentioned earlier, the assumption that "generation" is a time qualifier is problematic. "All these things" did not take place during the lifetime of anyone then alive [unless one believes the preterists who claim that the Son of Man came in the clouds of glory and gathered His elect in 70AD]. So either "all these things" is not literal but actually means "some of these things" or some other solution must be found. Many have been suggested. These include the idea that it means "race" (i.e. the Jews will still be alive, or others have said that the "race" of the church will still be here) and even some have said that the generation did not begin until 1948.<sup>12</sup>

Those who solve the problem by saying it is a chronological statement but only about a limited part of what Jesus predicted in Matthew 24 point out that "this generation" elsewhere in Matthew is always about those who were living when Jesus spoke to them. But they fail to consider the fact that even though addressed to people then living, the phrase "this generation" had a qualitative connotation in each of the passages. As I have shown, in the nearest context to Matthew 24 (Matthew 23) Jesus linked "this generation" to those who had gone before and those who would come later. I also showed that in Acts, "this generation" was something that one could be saved from by repenting. I also showed that when Jesus did want to qualify a statement by limiting it to the lifetime of His hearers He said, "some of you standing here will not taste death until..." , a phrase that could have been used in Matthew 24:34 without ambiguity if it was His intent to mean the same thing (Matthew used the phrase in 16:28). So I conclude that though "this generation" did include some of those who were living when Jesus spoke to them (just those who rejected His message), it also includes those in the future who would make these rejecters of Messiah their "fathers" by doing likewise.

Let us apply my thesis (that "this generation" is a qualitative modifier that applies to Jewish resistance to God's message and messengers and that it is transgenerational) to Matthew 24:34. There is a time modifier in Matthew 24:34 and it is this phrase: "shall not pass away until ... " This means that the Jewish leadership and their followers will continue to reject the gospel of Jesus as the crucified Messiah until the end, when Jesus returns. It is not a prediction that Jews will not be saved; but that the bulk of them as epitomized by their leaders will continue in the same manner as their "fathers" did, from the time of Moses, the time of Jesus, the time of Paul, throughout the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24) until finally Christ returns and rectifies the situation.

This fits with a common theme in Matthew -- that Jesus never predicted that the masses would become His followers or that national Israel would accept Him as their King during His first advent and the indefinite period that would follow. This theme is shown in the teaching of the "narrow gate"; the parable of the soils, the other parables of Matthew<sup>13</sup>, and many other parables that teach a Messiah rejected by those who rightfully belong to Him (such as the parable of the landowner -- Matthew 21:33-41).

To conclude that Matthew 24:34 predicts continued Jewish rejection of the gospel until the very end fits Matthew's theme, fits the word usage of "this generation" as being qualitative elsewhere in Matthew, and fits historical reality. One Jewish objection to the Gospel at the time of Matthew's writing was this, "if this Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, then why was He rejected and crucified and why are not more Jews following Him?" Matthew uses a considerable amount of his Gospel answering this objection by showing that Jesus predicted His own crucifixion and also predicted that He would be rejected and most people would not become His followers. Therefore things are right on track as Jesus predicted them. I believe that the interpretation of Matthew 24:34 that I am proposing fits Matthew's theme and purpose as revealed elsewhere in Matthew. That in Matthew's day and in the indefinite future most Jews would reject Messiah is not proof of the invalidity of the gospel claims, but proof that Jesus really was a true prophet; in fact He was the Prophet that God promised through Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15).

## **Avoiding Anti-Semitism**

Many passages I have cited in this article are harsh rebukes to Jewish hardness to the Gospel. Because of such passages, some have accused the New Testament writers of being anti-Semitic. I believe this charge is invalid for several reasons. I will state these reasons and then discuss Paul's attitude as seen in Romans 9-11. Paul serves as model for Christians to follow in order to have a right attitude toward God's special people, the Jews.

What the critics often fail to realize is that passages such as Matthew 23, 1Thessalonians 2; John 8, and others were written by Jews. These are not the compositions of a Gentile church in 350 AD reflecting the anti-Semitism of that later day, but were written in the 1st century by Jews. Even the Christian Jews of Paul's day were not in a power position vis-À-vis non-Christian Jews. Paul was under arrest by the Romans when he made his statements in Acts 28. The Christians who wrote the New Testament were under Jewish and Gentile persecution and were a minority. So the documents they left us do not reflect hatred of the Jews by powerful

Gentiles, but a compassion for other Jews by Jews who firmly believed that Jesus was indeed the promised Son of David and that the salvation of their Jewish loved ones depended on them coming to faith in Christ. Thus love and not hatred was the motivation for these strong statements.

Jesus' harsh rebukes in Matthew 23 were against Jewish leaders who were abusing those they were supposed to help. Their victims were Jewish victims. So when Jesus condemned the Pharisees as "making children of hell," he was standing in the place of Jewish prophets from the Old Testament who stood up to corrupt Jewish leadership. Do people accuse Jeremiah of being anti-Semitic? Jesus and His apostles claimed to be the "sons of" such prophets. What is at issue is whether there is sufficient evidence to believe Jesus was who He claimed to be. If so, He was no anti-Semite, but the Jewish Messiah who was and is filled with compassion for the lost sheep of the tribes of Israel.

Paul reflected the compassion of Christ for Jewish people; so much so that he was filled with grief and sorrow over their spiritual condition and could even wish himself accursed if it would mean bringing them to salvation (see Roman 9:1-5). Paul prayed for the salvation of Jews (Romans 10:1). Paul warned Gentile Christians not to boast against the Jews (Romans 11:18). Paul reminded us that we are grafted into a Jewish olive tree (Romans 11:17-24). Even the "times of the Gentiles" which persist until the end of the age, have a saving purpose for Jews -- to provoke them to jealousy and thus motivate some to come to Messiah (Romans 11:14).

This brings us to the passage in the Bible that tells us the nature of the time clock that God has set for the end of "this generation." Since "this generation" constitutes Jewish leadership and their followers who reject the message of the gospel, it will come to an end when Christ comes again in judgment, saves a remnant of the Jews, gathers together all of His elect (Matthew 24:29-31), and banishes the rebels to punishment before setting up his Messianic kingdom. Here is how Paul describes it:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob."  
(Romans 11:25, 26)

The removal of ungodliness from Jacob will be when "this generation" passes away. After that only the godly will remain and the phrase "this wicked generation" will no longer apply.<sup>13</sup> Notice also that the hardening that characterizes "this generation" as the term is used in the Bible is two things: 1) partial 2) temporary. Just as was the case in the gospels and Acts, there are those who are saved out of the hardened majority.

## Conclusion

We have shown that "this generation" is used in a pejorative sense in the New Testament and is therefore qualitative and not setting a time limit. We have also seen the transgenerational idea of guilt in Jewish thinking as it applies to the phrase. This guilt is being "filled up" by those who follow in the footsteps of their "fathers" who did likewise. Matthew includes a statement at the trial of Jesus to emphasize this: "And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" (Matthew 27:25). Clearly the issue of "this generation" rejecting Messiah is seen as a continual problem down through subsequent generations. By taking "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 in the sense of Jewish hardness to the gospel we are able to take the statement completely literally and avoid the problems of other proposed interpretations. This also fits with what Paul taught in Romans 11. Let us join with Paul in praying for the salvation of the Jewish people. That many are hardened should never deter us from praying for them and preaching the gospel to them.

## End Notes

**1** See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison; "Matthew vol. III" in The International Critical Commentary; Emerton, Cranfield & Stanton ed. (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1997) 367 for a list of 8 possibilities, which is not exhaustive of those which have been proposed.

**2** Gary Demar, End Times Fiction, (Nashville: Nelson, 2001) 67, 68.

**3** [HTTP://WWW.PRETERISM.INFO/](http://www.preterism.info/) from an article by Michael Fenemore, Were the Apostles False Prophets?

**4** Here "chronological modifier" would mean a time limit as to when "all these things" would take place.

**5** I mean by "qualitative" that "this generation" is a pejorative term about the moral condition of the group in question.

**6** The Jewish idea of corporate solidarity is that a person's identity is intrinsically tied to the group, so much so that the group identity takes priority over individual identity.

**7** This is found in Luke 24:45-47.



**8** The incident of Zechariah's murder is found in 2Chronicles 24:20-22. Though it happened hundreds of years before, Jesus said "whom you murdered." This shows how, in Jewish thinking, one's present behavior determines whose true "son" he is; in this case either a true son of the prophet Zechariah who spoke for God or a son of his murderers. Jesus claimed they were the later.

**9** Robert H. Gundry, Matthew; A commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1994) 2nd edition; 491; suggests understanding "**this generation**" in a qualitative rather than chronological sense. Gundry writes, "Matthew seemingly shifts direction, however, by dwelling on the qualitative rather than chronological sense of [genea](#) [generation]... Therefore he may intend "**this generation**" to be understood as meaning "**this kind**." The emphasis would then fall on the perversity of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees (see the contexts of Mt 12:39; 16:4), and the chronological extent of the generation would remain open." He then cites Matthew 23:35-36 as evidence. I found Gundry's comments after I had come to a similar conclusion through my own exegetical studies.

**10** Leon Morris, The Epistle to The Romans; (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1988) 231, 232. Morris says, "The aorist points to one act, the act of Adam; we would expect the present or the imperfect if the apostle were thinking of the continuing sins of all people."

**11** Romans 5:18, 19.

**12** Some used this faulty reasoning to predict the rapture of the church in 1988.

**13** This is also confirmed by Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks. The end of the 70th week will be the end of sin for the Jewish people: "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place" (Daniel 9:24).