

“ONE GENERATION” – APPROXIMATELY FORTY YEARS

Following Christ’s dissertation of “signs,” tribulation, celestial events AND the coming of the “Son of man,” Luke records: “***This generation*** shall not pass away, ***till all*** be ***fulfilled***” (Luke 21:32; cf. Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30). Some scholars interpret this as having *no* timing significance and claim it is only pastoral. Furthermore, many state that it only refers to a specific “group of people that were rebellious against God” (7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32; 50-51; 16:8; 17:25).¹ – the Jewish nation. But since it relates to a “fulfillment issue” associated with the second coming, a higher purpose is in evidence.

Looking Deeper

The LEH (Lust–Eynikel–Hauspie) Lexicon reviews ancient meaning of words as they were used/understood in the Septuagint era (period before Christ’s day). Referencing Exodus 12:14 as a *generation* (“throughout your generations”), they concluded it related to “offspring.” Thayer’s Lexicon refers to a *generation* as the time of “begetting” or “births.” The Liddell–Scott Lexicon associates it with “time of birth” – the moment of origin.

The Biblical use of “generation,” therefore, alludes to “from child to child.” It is a sequential story of “natural descent.” In Robertson’s New Testament Word Pictures, commenting on Matthew 24:34, it states: “In the Old Testament a generation was reckoned as forty years. This is the natural way to take this verse.” That would be the period between generational births.

Building on these gospel records:

- Christ’s end-time message appears to have been given in early A.D. 31. It was in A.D. 70 that “all” these things occurred with the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman armies as they marched forward with their standard of a detestable eagle – the same insignia as the tribe of Dan (another story/discussion). This symbol was to the Jewish mind an abomination if it entered their city precincts. From ***that*** historical account, about **40 years appears to be within the framework of that “one” generation** when Jerusalem fell at that final siege.² That was a contemporary application.
- “Christ gave His disciples a sign of the ruin to come on Jerusalem, and He told them how to escape: ‘When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter there into. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written ***may be fulfilled*** [experiencing a predicted event].’ This

¹ Green, Joel B.; *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (InterVarsity Press, February 1992).

² Keener, Craig S.; *A Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans Publishing Company – 1999) (emphasis added).

warning was given to be heeded **forty years after**, at the destruction of Jerusalem. The Christians obeyed the warning, and not a Christian perished in the fall of the city.”³ This was understood as within a generation.

Jesus had declared His generation was one of vipers (Matthew 3:7, 23:23). Then He noted:

- “Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon **this generation**” (Matthew 23:36).
- Even more striking was Christ’s judgment that the blood of all past prophets would be required of **this generation** (Luke 11:50).

Since He also associated this prophecy with time-of-the-end events – it is apropos as a final application to tie it to another (last) generation period preceding the second advent.

The Greek text strongly implies that the generation Jesus was **mainly speaking** to is the one that surrounds the second coming. That “generational period,” that unique group of people, would not “pass away” until **all** of Christ’s prophecies would be fulfilled.⁴

One cannot escape the *generational* warning **as a timing message**. It is a unique inference to a probational period, a time of “the last chance.” Jeremiah was commissioned approximately 627 B.C. to warn God’s people of Jerusalem’s fall. It became desolate 587 B.C. – 40 years later.

As the 40 years drew to a close (~593 B.C.) Ezekiel was called. To rivet home that generational period to Jerusalem – Judah – he was to lie on his right side 40 days – each day for a year to the siege of that city (Ezekiel 4:6). In this he apprised them of a waning probation.

As in Noah’s day, when timing prophecies announced mercy’s diminishing hope to the antediluvian world, so He frames subsequent messages to God’s people. In divine grace, you are warned that there is only one generation to repent and cease your rebellion!

Broadening these Concepts:

Jeremiah was called to preach one generation before Babylon fell:

- “Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken the **generation** of his wrath” (Jeremiah 7:29; cf. 2:31).

“For **forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation** as a witness for truth and righteousness. In a time of unparalleled apostasy he was to exemplify in life and

³ White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 630; *The Great Controversy*, p. 28 (emphasis added).

⁴ Douglas, J. D. and Tenney, Merrill C.; *Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary*.

character the worship of the only true God. During the terrible sieges of Jerusalem he was to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah.”⁵

Israel was “sentenced” to be in the wilderness for **forty years** – one generation.

*“And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even **forty years**, and ye shall know my breach of promise”* (Numbers 14:33-34).

*“And the LORD’S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness **forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed”*** (Numbers 32:13).

Expositor White comments regarding the “generation” of rebellious Israel: **“For nearly forty years** the children of Israel are lost to view in the obscurity of the desert. ‘The space,’ says Moses, ‘in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the **generation** of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the Lord swore unto them. For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed.’ Deuteronomy 2:14, 15.”⁶

“God declares through His prophet, ‘My Sabbaths they greatly polluted.’ Ezekiel 20:13-24. And this is enumerated *among the reasons* for the exclusion of the **first generation** from the Promised Land. *Yet their children did not* learn the lesson. Such was their neglect of the Sabbath **during the forty years’ wandering**, that though God did not prevent them from entering Canaan, He declared that they should be scattered among the heathen after the settlement in the Land of Promise.”⁷

- **“Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways”** (Psalm 95:10).
- **“And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness”** (Acts 13:18).

Paul focused on this also:

- **“While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?”** (Hebrews 3:15-17).

⁵ White, Ellen G.; *Conflict and Courage*, p. 237 (emphasis added).

⁶ White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 406 (emphasis added).

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Ibid.*, p. 409 (emphasis added).

“The book of Deuteronomy should be carefully studied **by those living on the earth today**. It contains a record of the instruction given to Moses to give to the children of Israel. In it the law is repeated. At the time when the instruction which it contains was given, the people of Israel were encamped beside the Jordan. All but two of the adults who had left Egypt had died in the wilderness. **Now the generation that had arisen during the forty years of journeying** were about to pass over the Jordan to receive their inheritance in the promised land. But they must first hear from the lips of Moses the instruction given him by the Lord for them. The words of the law must be repeated to them, and they must hear again the conditions upon which they were to enter into and take possession of the promised land. *The Review and Herald*, December 31, 1903.

The context of the generational statements in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 follow the timing story of the Fig Tree. The message is clearly “be prepared” for the “eschatological end” because it will occur in the framework of one generation. When that “tree” shows that that generation is almost gone, “Summer is nigh” – a timing.

Why is a prophetic generation about 40 years? Jesus is alluding to the early history of Israel when they “failed” to prepare and a whole generation of 40 years was lost (Hebrews 3:15-17).

The implication: “Don’t be like your forefathers who died in the wilderness.”

By the Fig Tree parable, Jesus noted that when the branch is tender and filled with leaves, you know summer is near. Just like that – when the signs I gave you occur, my coming is near. Then a definitive message came (best seen in Luke 21:28). When the signs **begin** to come to pass your redemption draweth nigh. This generation won’t pass till all be fulfilled. The assumption is made that when the signs have collectively started, the generation period has begun.

Scholar Craig S. Keener noted:

“The temple’s desolation in the first generation constitutes the final visible prerequisite for the kingdom before the cosmic signs of Jesus’ return’ [p. 588] [in other words: it has time-of-the-end application]. He ties this even to Jeremiah’s time before the Babylonian exile where God waited till a ‘final generation’ before He permitted captivity. ‘Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected **and forsaken the generation** of his wrath’ (Jer. 7:29). Interesting: Jeremiah’s period of warning covered exactly **forty years**. ‘No Doubt that Jesus uses the term [generation] as ... elsewhere in Matthew “as the **climactic generation**” ... the Son of man’s coming would arrive as sudden and unexpected judgment.... Jesus’ followers might recognize the completion of requisite signs (of I Thessalonians 5:4-6)’”⁸

⁸ Keener, *Op cit.*, pp. 589, 591 (Hood Theological Seminary; Salisbury, NC) (emphasis added).

Summary Conclusion:

Using the metaphors of Israel's "pre-Babylonian" probationary period of 40 years, their probationary 40-year wandering in the wilderness and Christ's declaration of Jerusalem's attack that occurred 40 years later, all in the Biblical context of "one climatic generation," the evidence suggests that this gospel warning of "one generation" is approximately 40 years.

There is a distinct contextual issue that Jesus alludes to in His apocalyptic discourse that invites us now to see the approximate 40-year generation related to eschatologic prophecy. Jesus paralleled **the generation** of the Jewish people **in His day** with that of the final group who will live just before His second coming. In **that context**, block of time is of immense importance to our generation. It **began** when the collective unfolding of events commenced.

There **are** unique end-time periods (not unlike those preceding the apocalyptic deluge of Noah's time) which have now started. 1929 marked the first signal that history's culminating events had begun. That was heralded by the woman and beast metaphor of Revelation 17 (discussed in our book called *When "The" Church Rides the Beast*⁹). Another forward-moving point statistically accelerated within an exponential curve (like a lady in labor) in 1978, launching a "within one generation" prediction that Christ said would introduce the last era when "your redemption draweth nigh." That fulfilled Christ's Matthew 24 and Luke 21 predictive apocalyptic messages. We are currently nearing the end of those two time prophecies. The "fig" harvest is pending.

Two other clocks are wound up with the pendulum ready to be released: (1) earth's final three and a half year period (reviewed in Daniel and Revelation several times and (2) the announcement of the eschatological "day and hour." Prophecy eliminates guessing, speculating and suppressive sensationalism. It is precise, objective and, now, of urgent interest.

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⁹ Fowler, Franklin S.; *When "The" Church Rides the Beast* (Christian Heritage Foundation; Lucerne Valley, CA).