

THIS GENERATION

SHALL NOT

PASS



*A Comprehensive Biblical Explanation of
Mathew 24:34*

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

Matt. 23:34 has been the center of much discussion and many interpretations for at least two generations; and the explanations of "this generation" continue to shift without improvement. One definition after another has been offered and each has done service until time or facts have proven that it was not tenable and then another occupied the field until it was found faulty. So the shifting has gone on until no interpretation can now hold the center of the theological stage.

Within the theological history of Seventh-day Adventists "this generation" has had several limitations. First it was the generation that saw the darkening of the sun in May 1780, that was to witness the Lord's return. Next it was the generation that saw the falling of the stars in 1833, that would live to the end; then it was the generation that saw, or recognized, these heavenly manifestations as signs of His return that was referred to.

In my early days the explanation that limited the generation to those who saw the last of the signs, the falling of the stars, was the one almost universally held. I shared this view myself as a heritage from my devoted father. I was compelled to abandon that interpretation when I began to study the Bible for myself.

What About the Fourth Sign?

Let us examine Matt. 24:29, and note the signs as we read: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." Unquestionably, "the sun shall be darkened" is sign No. 1, "and the moon shall not give her light" is sign No. 2, "and the stars shall fall from heaven" is sign No. 3. How can anyone be at all consistent, and refuse to accept "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" as sign No. 4? Just so sure as the darkening of the sun or the falling of the stars, is a sign, just so sure is the shaking of the powers of the heavens a sign of exactly the same thing as that of which the others are signs. Our brethren point out definitely signs 1, 2, and 3, but, can anyone locate sign No. 4—"The powers of the heavens shall be shaken" this side at least of the falling stars of 1833? If it is the generation ho see the last of these signs that is to live to see the coming of Christ, then that generation may not

yet have been born. But someone will say; the powers of the heavens are to be shaken at His coming. If that b true, it cannot be a sign. It will be an accompaniment to His coming. It must appear prior to the event which it portends in order to be a sign. We admit that it may be a very short period between the shaking of the heavens and the appearing of the Master, but mark, it must be a period of time between the two, otherwise it fails to be a sign. A clap of thunder is not a sign of a coming bolt of lightning. It is an evidence that a bolt of lightning has already appeared.

Any searcher for truth who seeks to unravel this confusion of interpretations by trying to set limits to the generation that sees the Lord's return will continue to walk in a maze of confusion.

What Is A Generation?

Let us consider the Bible use of the term "generation." In Matt. 1, we have the genealogy of Christ, beginning with Abraham. "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas." The summing up of this genealogy is found in the 17th verse: "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations."

This shows that the Bible use of the term "generation" involves the time intervening between the birth of father and son. There were fourteen such periods between Abraham and David, and between David and the Captivity, and between the Captivity and Christ.

This Generation

The simple, plain language of the Lord would certainly lead us to understand that the Master meant the generation that he was talking to, of which Peter, James and John were a part. If He had meant the closing generation He would have used the adjective **that** instead of this. The Greek text confirms this meaning. Without any distortion or figurative application, any grammarian, either English or Greek, would understand that Christ meant the generation that he was talking to.

The term "this generation" is used twenty times in the New Testament, and in every other case, it is unquestionably applied to the generation to which Christ and the apostles were speaking. For the convenience of those

who wish to investigate, we cite all the instances where the term "this generation" is used in the N.T. Matt. 11:16; 12:41,42,45; 23:36;24:34; Mark 8:12,38; 13:30; Luke 7:31; 11:29, 30:31,32,50,51; 17:25; 21:32; Acts 2:40.

It would seem that one would be safe in concluding that "this generation" in Matt. 24:34 applied to the people to whom Christ was speaking when in every other place, it applies to that generation.

Before segregating this expression in Matt. 24:34, and building an article of faith upon it, one should have very convincing evidence that it is not used in this case as it is in all other places.

With this simple and consistent understanding of "this generation" let us turn our attention to another part of the verse and see the harmony that exists.

Fulfilled

If we were as familiar with the Greek as we are with the English and heard Jesus deliver the discourse in Matt. 24 we would have had no difficulty in understanding His words then, nor many years after. The key to the solution of the confusion that has surrounded this text is found in a correct understanding of the word "fulfilled."

Ginomai, the Greek word from which "be fulfilled" is translated in Matt. 24:34, is found in the New Testament not far from eight hundred times and is translated "fulfilled" but three times. This shows beyond question that the translation in this verse is far from representing the common use of the word.

The other two instances are found in Matt. 5:18 and Luke 21:32. The Concordant translation which is generally recognized by Greek scholars as very exact, translates "fulfill"—"should be occurring" in Matt. 24:34, and Luke, 21:32, and "should be coming to pass" in Matt. 5:18. The word has a very wide range of uses and an equal range of translations. Its primary meaning is "to become, i. e., to come into existence, begin to be, receive being, to be born, to rise." The word from which "generation" is translated has the same radical as **ginomai** from which "fulfill" is translated in the verse under consideration. "Their meaning is manifest, though not felt by all, in the word Genesis, seeing this book deals with the beginning of things." "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created." Gen. 2:4.

The very best of Greek scholars declare that the

Greek word from which "fulfill" in Matt. 23:34 is translated, never has the meaning of completed, but, on the contrary always indicates a beginning or continuing. In confirmation of this we cite a couple of authors:

Lange is responsible for the following quotation from Martin Luther: "All will begin to take place now in this time while ye live," and Lange adds: "Ye will survive the beginning of these events."

Comments of Dr. D. T. Taylor

"Now in our Lord's prophecy the subject is 'this generation.' The predicate is the affirmation that during its continuance and before its end some other event or events shall begin. The other events are 'these things,' and 'these things' in the narrative took in the first demolition of the Jewish temple. If then our Lord said, 'This generation shall not pass, till all these things begin to be done' or fulfilled, He did not say till all these are completely fulfilled. And as the series of events took in the last day scenes, the notion so destructive of truth that He accomplished any prophecy of His second coming in the first century is shattered to atoms. So complete is its annihilation that it should never be so much as named hereafter, only in shame."

Again he says: "With Mr. Boon we insist that 'The verb **genetai** from **ginomai** etymologically and historically always implies a beginning, never an ending. Surely Jesus said 'This now living generation shall not pass away, till the fulfillment of all these things in this prophecy has begun.' And if only the beginning, then the burden of the great prophecy in all its wonderful details remains to extend along the centuries to the end, and not 'this generation,' but rather 'that day;' not the beginning of the series, but the end brings back our ascended Lord. Lawfully and forevermore is this text rescued from the destroying grasp of the misguided expositors who cramp and belittle the grand prediction, and crowd down and back the accomplishment of its coming event, His Advent into the first century. Let us hear no more of the false and utterly exploded notion."

The Birth of John A Parallel

We have a striking parallel to Matt. 24:34 in the use of **ginomai** in the account of the birth of John the Baptist, as found in Luke 1. The angel Gabriel came to Zacharias, the father of John, and to his wife Elizabeth to announce the coming of a son, and he told them of the striking work and experience of John from his birth

to his death. vv. 13-17. Zacharius asked for a sign. To this request, the angel replied: "And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." The expression "shall be performed" is translated from the same Greek, **ginomai**, which is used in Matt. 24:34. When the baby John was born, the friends wished to name him after his father Zacharias. Elizabeth protested; so they referred it to his father who was dumb. He asked for a writing tablet, and wrote "His name is John." "Immediately his tongue was loosed, and he spake and praised God." Read vv. 59-64.

Here was a series of predictions which was to come to pass before Zacharias would be able to speak, but his speech was restored to him when the baby was eight days old, before he had fulfilled any of the predictions pronounced by the angel. This shows that the Greek word, **ginomai**, does not have the meaning of completed, but, on the contrary, indicates that the things predicted would begin to be fulfilled. The same understanding should be applied to the text under consideration, i.e. the signs which Christ gave his apostles in Matt. 24 would begin to come to pass before the generation to whom he was speaking, should come to its end; that is, the people to whom he was talking, would live to see the beginning of Christ's predictions. And this was the exact truth, for the destruction of Jerusalem which was a part of the discourse in Matt. 24 came to pass during the life-time of the apostles.

Another striking illustration of the use of this Greek word is found in Rev. 1:1, where it is translated "things which must shortly come to pass." The events that the angel told John would come to pass cover the whole history of the world from His time to the end. These could not all be done "shortly," but the series of events narrated in the book of Revelation began to be fulfilled during the days of John. They "shortly" began to be fulfilled, and this is the primary meaning of the Greek in this verse and the same is equally true of Matt. 24:34.

A good illustration of the true meaning of this Greek verb is found in Acts 5:24 where it is translated "would grow." Here it certainly has the meaning of progressive development and not the meaning of completion. Remember that "would grow" in this verse is translated

from the same Greek word that "fulfilled" is translated from in Matt. 24:34.

Ginomai is frequently translated "arose" as in Mark 4:37, Luke 6:48, Acts 6:1; 11:19; 19:23; 23:7, 9, 10.

That the reader may get the plain, simple meaning of Matt. 24:34 let us render it in simple, modern English: Truly I say unto you, the people now living shall not all die, till the things I have been telling you shall begin to be fulfilled. This is not a strained translation but is exactly the meaning that the Lord intended to convey to his hearers and they, who were familiar with the Greek, undoubtedly understood him in that manner. And this brings perfect harmony to the whole prophecy, for the things which he predicted about the destruction of Jerusalem were fulfilled during the lifetime of those who heard Him.

Completion is Expressed by Another Greek Word

If Christ had intended to indicate a completed work he would have used a different word from that which he used in the text under consideration. Had He meant to convey the idea of a completed work, he would have used the Greek word **pieroo** which is defined "to make complete, accomplish, complete, end, expire, fill up." Joseph Strong. This Greek word is used in the original New Testament text 93 times, and always in the same sense of completion. The two words **ginomai** and **pieroo** are well illustrated in the text quoted above, Luke 1:20. **Ginomai** is translated "shall be performed" and **pieroo** is translated "shall be fulfilled." Here it means a completed work, as the English text indicates.

For the convenience of our readers, we will insert a few scriptures where this Greek word **pieroo** is translated in its true meaning, that of completion. "And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." Matt. 27:35. "And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith. And he was numbered with the transgressors." Mk. 15:28. "Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people he entered into Capernaum." Lu. 7:1. "And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush." Acts 7:30. "And ye are complete in him which is the head of all principality and power." Col. 2:10. The words translated from the Greek word

pioero are put in bold faced type.

Coming Out of Egypt in the Fourth Generation

Lest some of our critics attempt to cripple the force of these facts by quoting Gen. 15:16, we will offer a few facts in explanation of this text. Some honest Bible students have used this text to prove that a generation covers a hundred years. We have proven that the Bible use of generation is from father to son. I Chron. 6:1-3 shows that Moses was the fourth generation from Levi, and we all know that Levi went down into Egypt with his father Jacob. Levi lived 137 years. Kohath lived 133 years and Amram 137 years, (See Ex. 6:16, 18, and 20) and Moses lived 120 years. Deut. 34:7. This shows that Moses who led the children of Israel out of Egypt, represented the fourth generation from the time they went into Egypt. This is giving Moses' lineage through his father. If we take it through his mother Jochebed, Moses represents but the third generation from Levi. Read Ex. 6:20 together with Num. 26:59. These scriptures show that Moses' mother, Jochebed, was a daughter of Levi, i.e. Amram married his father's half sister. Levi begat Jochebed and Jochebed begat Moses. These scriptures instead of contradicting our statement only confirm it.

Conclusion

With a correct understanding of the language which Christ used, all the maze and perplexity of understanding Matt. 24:34 disappears. This removes the text from the field of speculation and puts it on a solid foundation. It is folly to try to locate a particular period of years in fulfillment of this prophecy.

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