

Episode #920 Matthew 24 Part 9-This Generation Shall Not Pass

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord was telling His disciples about the consummation of the eon, and He had just gotten to the prediction of His great, second coming. He told them signs that, when they take place, will show them that it is near. Yet now He makes a very controversial statement.

III. This Generation Will Not Pass. Matthew 24:32-35.

A. Verse 34. “Assuredly” is *amen* I say unto you. The Lord Jesus Christ made this a solemn statement and pronouncement, leaving no room for equivocating or doubt.

Yet expositors would like nothing so much as to equivocate regarding this. There is wide disagreement about this, and great difficulty in interpretation.

1. “This generation” is the Greek word *genea*. The most widely promoted view among conservative Bible scholars is that this primarily means race, kind, stock, or breed, and that this refers to the fact that the Jewish race will not disappear from the earth until all these things are fulfilled. Yet this interpretation is more out of desperation than because this is actually the meaning of the word *genea*, which it is not, or of this passage, as this explanation is not right either. This word *genea* does not mean primarily a race or family, but it means primarily generation, and it should be translated that way in every passage, including this one.
2. The weakest and most insupportable interpretation is that which makes “this generation” to mean the sum of men living at the time Christ spoke these words, and that makes this out to be a prediction that all men living at that time would not die out before the events Christ spoke of would take place. This is the interpretation that liberal scholars and higher critics adopt, therefore, but they adopt this because of their lack of faith in God’s Word, and their desire to see it humiliated and proven wrong at every turn, and not because they truly know or understand the passage. This is also the view taken by the Preterists, and they make out that the second coming of the Lord Jesus and the fulfillment of these words took place at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Yet this is nothing but the most violent twisting of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the second coming of our Lord in power and great glory in no way resembles the coming of the Roman general Titus to sack and destroy a city.
3. Another interpretation commonly put forward (this is what Lenski teaches in his commentary on Matthew) is that we should refer the word “generation” to the wicked and sinful generation the Lord often referred to (see Matthew 12:45, 16:4), and that the Lord means that there will always be a company of wicked and sinful men until the time of His return. Yet the omission of any mention of “wicked” before the word “generation” should not cause us to insert it, but we should respect the accuracy of Scripture and leave it out. If the Lord had meant the wicked generation that lived at that time He could easily have said so, but He did not because that was not what He was talking about. Why would the Lord use His solemn assertion of important truth,

“Amen I say unto you,” before stating something so obvious as that there will always be a generation of wicked and sinful men as long as this evil flow of things continues? Moreover, we believe that there is a long time of God’s government on earth before these things take place wherein sin and wickedness will be restrained and brought to an end. Read about it in Psalm 37:9, 64:7, 46:6, Isaiah 59:19, II Timothy 3:9. An event takes place long before the Lord leaves His place on the right hand of God, Hebrews 1:3, that brings an end to the wicked company of men on earth. Moreover, a company of wicked men continuing through history cannot properly be called a “generation.” There is not just a wicked company of men; there is also a continuous company of good men. The words “this generation” could as easily be attached to this company. But the fact is that a continuing company of men is not what “generation” means, and it is not what the Lord meant when He used the word here.

4. Another widespread interpretation (adopted by the Jehovah’s Witnesses) is that the generation that sees the beginning of these signs will also see the fulfillment of them. This is a contrived and unnatural explanation that is wholly contrary to the sense of the Greek words used here. How can the words “this generation” be made to mean one that would appear two thousand years later? (They claimed these things began to take place in 1914, and that they would be completely fulfilled before all people living then will have passed away.)
5. Another explanation put forward by E.W. Bullinger and Michael Penny, and also supported by *Young’s Literal Translation of the New Testament*, is that this whole matter is made conditional based on the usage of the untranslatable Greek particle *an*, which appears in this sentence in Greek after the word “until.” The claim is that this particle made what the Lord was saying conditional on something the Lord did not state (the repentance and submission of Israel to Christ), and that since that condition was not fulfilled, what Christ said did not have to take place. It is very difficult to argue things based on an untranslatable word, but all I can say to this is that this is simply not how the Greek word *an* works. It does indicate a condition, but always a condition contained in the sentence. A word we have in English that indicates a condition is our word “if.” This word too indicates a condition, but always one contained in the sentence. For example, I cannot say, “I will go with you if, and then we will have a good time.” This is not a proper sentence, for I have not said “if what?” The Greek word *an* is NOT the word for “if” (there is another Greek word that means that), but it is a similar type of word, though it occurs in a different place in the sentence and works differently. Yet the idea that it could bring in a condition here not stated in Christ’s sentence is just wrong, dead wrong. All respect to Bullinger and Young and their Bible knowledge, but they were trying desperately to solve a problem here, and attempted to do so in a way that does not match up with the truth. My evidence for this? First of all, every other translator of the Scripture who has not made this sentence conditional. Secondly, the fact that the Lord made this sentence emphatic and definite by two positive elements of this sentence.

First, by the solemn assertion “Amen I say unto you,” which hardly comes before a vague possibility. Secondly, that the words “by no means” in “will by no means pass” is two Greek words for “no,” *ou* and *me*, which when put together form the strongest possible Greek “no.” Put together, the Lord is saying, “Amen I say unto you (most assuredly, definitely, and with all solemnity and assurance) that this generation shall absolutely not, by no possible means, pass away until all these things are fulfilled.” Yet we are told to make this, “until all these things might possibly, maybe, not sure, could be or could not be, fulfilled”? This makes the sentence into a joke. The Lord did not pound the table that this is true and then back off and say it only might be a few seconds later. There is no such thing as a “definite maybe.” The Lord assured us that this statement is true, not that it is only possibly true.

6. In order to get at the meaning of this verse, we must consider the meaning of the word “generation.” Whenever a word has a common and popular meaning, it is often possible to forget that it has other, less common meanings. For example, one meaning of the word “adjective” is that which does not and cannot stand alone. One could say, “I am not adjective in this,” and mean I do not and cannot stand alone in this. The same thing is true of the word generation: we are so used to using it to speak of people that we forget that it could refer to other things. The fact is that the word “generation” is a part of the “to generate” family of words. For example, when we want to generate power we use a generator. When someone wants to generate excitement for a product, he uses an advertising campaign. In these cases, both power and excitement are generations. Now since each individual is generated by his forefathers, people too can be a generation. A man can speak of his parents’ generation, his grandparents’ generation, his great-grandparents’ generation, and so forth. If he has children, he can speak of his childrens’ generation, his grandchildrens’ generation, and so forth. Yet this is not the only and exclusive meaning of “generation.” In II Timothy 2:23, strife is a generation. More relevant is the fact that this very Word of God that we are studying is a Divine generation. II Peter 1:21 reveals how the Bible was generated: the Spirit of God was the Generator, and the words spoken by the men who were prophets He inspired were a generation. Now there were both speaking and writing prophets. The words of the speaking prophets have passed away, yet the words of the writing prophets we have yet today in the Scriptures. The declarations of the Lord Jesus Christ, His words and works, were Divine generations. See John 5:19, 5:30, 12:49, and 17:8. In Isaiah 53:8, we have a problem that has puzzled interpreters. Some have tried to “fix” it by changing the translation, but there is no doubt that the Hebrew word *dor* means “generation.” All know the Lord had no offspring or posterity, so therefore no generations according to the common meaning assigned to this word. What does it mean to declare someone’s generation anyway? However, He did produce a body of truth, and this body of truth could rightfully be called a “generation.” He is described in Isaiah 53:8 as cut off from the land of the living, and so it is apropos to ask, “Who shall declare His generation?” that is, who shall declare His words? There is no answer to this in the Old Testament,

but in the New Testament we have the answer, for He chose twelve out of His disciples and commissioned them, and He told them, John 16:13-14, that the Spirit of Truth would remind them of what He said.

7. The Lord was a speaking prophet. He wrote nothing but a few words in the sand. Yet nothing that He wanted preserved has been lost. His promise to His disciples is that the Comforter would bring to their remembrance everything He said to them, John 14:26. Not a word would be lost. When our Lord by speaking produced that great body of truth in Matthew 24 that preceded these words we are considering, no stenographer took down His words. This is one of the most important generations of truth regarding future events ever produced, and yet no scribe was copying down His words and no audio recorder copied His message. When He was done speaking these words, not a one of His disciples could have possibly remembered and repeated everything He said to the letter. It would seem His words would soon be confused and forgotten. Yet in the face of this, He boldly declared that this generation He had just produced would by no means pass away until all these things would be fulfilled. He was referring to the body of truth He had just spoken to them. This is confirmed in the next verse.

- B. Verse 35. Notice the Hebrew figure of speech here, whereby a thing is put in multiple ways to lock in its meaning. This generation will by no means pass...heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass. The “generation” in verse 34 is “My words,” as we can see in the parallel, explanatory statement in verse 35. In the two statements “this generation” and “My words” we have the figure of speech Pleonasm. In the construction of this figure, that which has just been said is immediately after put in another or opposite way in order to make it impossible for its meaning to be misunderstood, and by this method the meaning is locked in. Let us not be guilty of breaking the lock and making “this generation” to mean something that the Lord did not have in mind. In verse 34 He says, “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” What does He mean by that? He repeats it, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.” The generation in verse 34 is the words of verse 35. “My words” is Greek *logoi*, my expressions of truth, as here produced as we have read them in chapter 24. Again “by no means” is the strongest possible Greek no, the words *ou* and *me* put together. Verses 34 and 35 are parallel, and express the same truth.

IV. Conclusion: The Lord said “this generation will by no means pass away,” and yet He did not mean all the people living at that time. He was referring to the generation of His words in the great, important prophecy He had just made. This passage has given many fits, yet it all makes sense when we take a second look at the meaning of the word “generation” and realize that He had just generated much truth, truth which will stand until it is fulfilled. Praise God for the truth He generated in His Word!