

Matthew 24:34: 'This Generation'

Which Generation?

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Have you ever had a conversation with someone, and while you are listening to the other person prattling on about his or her escapades on the ball field, or at the beach (and it keeps going on and on), you suddenly realize that somewhere along the line in this conversation your mind wandered momentarily and you missed an important switch or change in the time element of the story?

Let us say that the other person is talking about his exploits playing football quarterback in high school; he did this, and he did that; he threw so many touchdown passes; they had a great team; they went to the state championship and lost; it was horrible, but we learned from it; my wide receiver ended up going to college and played on a national championship team; he eventually ended up in the pros; and on, and on it goes. Then, you suddenly realize that something is wrong. You are not tracking with it quite the way that you thought you were, because it has become apparent that at some point, he switched gears, and he was talking about his son's exploits on the ball field. Somehow, you had missed the transition. In a heartbeat of time, the time element had jumped 30 years to things about his son in the present.

Now I have gone through this imaginary conversation because the time element is something that we have to be aware of when we study prophecy. The time element is all-important. Often, it is essential to the proper understanding or interpretation of the prophecy that you are studying. If we misunderstand the "when" of the prophecy, we could be off by hundreds or thousands of years, and that would, of course, make a huge difference in the way that we understand it.

The "when" of prophecy—the time of its fulfillment—is the main factor in determining the various schools of thought on prophecy. They seem to be arranged in terms of time; when they expect things to happen.

For instance, there are three major views that revolve around the return of Jesus Christ. If you were to look into some of the commentaries, they will often use the Greek name for the return of Christ: *parousia*. This simply means, "the presence;" Christ is there. He is not far off in heaven, but He has come, and He has appeared to us, and He is there with us now. He is present with us.

We in the churches of God would be called pre-millennialists, because we believe in pre-millennialism, which is the belief that Jesus will return before His thousand-year reign in the Millennium. We believe that Christ will come, and He will put down all of those who are against Him, and all those who are fighting Him, and He will establish His government, and usher in the Millennium. The way we look at things, it is difficult to see anything else in Scripture. It is so clear to us. How can anybody not see this? But, some do not. They see something else.

Another group of people (who do not see what we see) hold to post-millennialism. They teach that God's Kingdom and Christ's reign began when Jesus ascended to heaven way back in 31 AD. The thousand-year reign will eventually begin once the church takes the gospel completely around the world, and converts everyone; then the Millennium will start at that point. Then Christ returns at the end of the Millennium and ushers us all into the New Jerusalem. They believe that the Millennium does not come about by God's efforts in putting all rule down against Him, but that it is a gradual

evolutionary style process where we do most of the work, going out into all the world preaching the gospel, baptizing everyone. And once that is all finished, which could be many thousands of years later (and according to the deceitful heart of mankind, this would never happen in this manner), Christ returns. That is how these post-millennialists look at it. The church has to do all the work before Christ will come back. Not only do they have to do all the work, then they have to wait 1000 years.

It is hard to see that in the Bible, but some do.

Finally, in this scheme of things, if there are pre-millennialists, and post-millennialists, what else is there but a-millennialists. These are the people who do not believe in a 1000 year reign of Christ at all. What they think is that the 1000 years is only a metaphor. It is a sort of stand-in term for a very long period of time that will take place before Christ returns. Like the post-millennialists, they say that Christ will return once the church has done all this work.

Again, this is very difficult to see in the Bible from our perspective. But there are people who think like this.

This is the way that you group people in terms of when they will believe Christ will return, and when the Millennium happens. There are still other ways to look at perspectives on prophecy. And, these are the ones that I really want to get at, especially the final one.

The first one is called, "Idealism." Idealists posit that the prophecies are not literally fulfilled. They do not look for a literal fulfillment at all. But, the prophecies, they say, stand for larger spiritual principles and realities.

Let me show you an example: Turn to Revelation 20:1-3. Here we see the strong angel coming down from heaven with a chain in his hand, and he takes up the serpent, binding him, and places him in the bottomless pit. Idealists do not ever expect that to happen literally; this is symbolic. It is a metaphor in picturesque terms so that we can understand what is really happening (according to them) is that someday there will be a complete eradication of evil; that someday all the evil influences will be wiped out. We will then have peace.

Now, idealists tend to spiritualize absolutely everything—every character, every symbol, every action. They do not mean what it appears to mean. They allegorize everything. Believe it or not, this was the way of interpreting prophecy after the age of the apostles for several hundred years. The early "church fathers" did a lot of allegorizing the prophecies, saying that these are just figures that mean such and such, giving a general overall principle rather than a specific fulfillment of the prophecy. This is idealism. It is not something that is used that often anymore, but it is still found around.

The second perspective on prophecy is called "historicism." This way looks at prophecy as a religious or theological means to explain history's events. Historicists usually claim that the prophecies were written after the things they write about happened. What they are doing, then, is using it to show God's hand in man's activities. So, they put them into prophetic language as though it is something that is yet in the future, but has actually happened in the past, so they point to it and say that God wanted us to learn this, that, or the other.

For example in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, the prophecies found there regarding the Sabbath-breaking and idolatrous sins of Israel and Judah occurred, and so the people going forward should not forsake the Sabbath and commit idolatry because the same sort of things will happen to them. Now, there is a way to use that properly as a teaching method and tool, but it treats the prophecies in a very cynical and humanistic way; that they were constructs of people—men—who use God's name to make these theological points.

Oftentimes they will say about the book of Daniel that he talked about the time of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius during the Babylonian time, and the Persian time (having lived deep into the Persian time), writing these things after the fact in order to make these points. So, they will tell you that there is no prophecy in it at all, but rather just history being written after the fact, and they project it as having occurred beforehand. It is cynical and humanistic, and takes God completely out of the picture. He is being used. Many times, the people who promote this type of interpretation are themselves either agnostics, or atheists. They look at everything as if humans did it all; God does not have to be.

Now, the third one is "futurism." We in the churches of God would be considered futurists in terms of interpretation of prophecy. That is, futurists believe that most prophecies have future fulfillments; particularly the ones that talk about the end of the age, or the Day of the Lord. We fall into this camp because we believe that when the Old Testament and the New Testament talk about the Day of the Lord, or the of the age, or the end times, or when Christ returns, they are still future.

Also, most futurists believe in the principle of "type and antitype." This means that there was a minor past fulfillment, usually within a generation or two or so of the time that the prophecy was actually given. So, we would have something like Isaiah giving prophecies during the time of Hezekiah that were about the time just ahead—the time of Babylon—which was only a hundred years or so in the future. But, that those particular prophecies have a larger, more significant (and sometimes spiritual) fulfillment at the end time before Christ's rule, so that they are (as some call it) dual-prophecies. These are fulfilled once early on, and then fulfilled a second time much later in history. They are indeed things that have been fulfilled in the past, but the greater fulfillment is still in the future.

Now the fourth one. We will discuss this one for the rest of the sermon today. This is called preterism. My dad gave a commentary on this last May (2011), and pretty much destroyed it. I want to destroy it again, and beat it into the dust. This preterism is from the Latin term *praeteritus*, which means "gone by," or "what has already taken place." *Praeter* is a prefix meaning "past." So, these are things that happened in the past.

A preterist view of prophecy is as having already been fulfilled in history. They say this especially about the Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, as well as the entire book of Revelation. There are actually a couple of different schools of thought among these preterists. There are "full preterists," who believe that all biblical prophecy is already fulfilled, and it was fulfilled before or with the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. According to them, this is the terminus of all prophecy.

"Partial preterists" are those who hold that some specific prophecies are still future. Most of them have been fulfilled, but there are a few that have not. Most notably, these are Christ's second coming, and the resurrection of the dead. Neither of those things have happened according to "partial preterists"; everything else has happened.

You just have to wonder how they get that, because there are so many other things that are hooked to the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

There you have it—those four ways or views—of prophecy. It is amazing that people can be so divergent while all reading the same material. But they are.

You would think, having gone over this, that preterism is a way-out perspective, and that very few people would hold to it—but you would be wrong, too. There are a fair number of people who believe this way. In fact, preterism, or at least its ideas, has been around since the time of Eusebius, one of those early Catholic Church fathers in the late 3rd century AD—about 260 to 300 AD, we think. So, people were already beginning to think that way just a couple hundred years after the close of the canon of the Bible.

It is held by a fair number of theologians today. In recent times it was started up again by the Churches of Christ, who tend to be fairly liberal—very liberal the way that we would look at them. But, it has sneaked its way into the reformed churches, which tend to be Calvinist mostly, and some Presbyterian churches too. And there are some others as well. It is not confined just to the Churches of Christ, or reformed churches, or Presbyterians. It is leaking out into other denominations too. If you know anyone who is big in Protestant circles you might recall the name R. C. Sproul who is a preterist. And, so is Gary Demar. They do quite a bit of advertising on the internet, and their stuff is out there.

Now, I have gone into all of this to explain these different views of prophecy because of the fact that preterists hang their hats on one particular difficult scripture—Matthew 24:34. Please turn there. I want to read this verse just so we know what the aim is. This is within the Olivet Prophecy. Jesus is speaking, not too long before He was arrested.

Matthew 24:34 Assuredly, I say to you, **this generation will by no means pass away** till all these things take place.

The remainder of this sermon will be my attempt to explain this verse, showing that by misunderstanding those two words—“this generation”—the preterists have built upon a faulty foundation. They believe that with Jesus saying, “This generation shall not pass,” He was talking to the generation present with Him and the disciples—the generation that crucified Him. That generation would be about 40 years in duration, which would bring it right about to the time of 70 AD—when that generation would pass with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Therefore, all of these things that Jesus had just talked about will have already come to pass. So, that is it for them. Jesus said, “This generation shall not pass until all these things are fulfilled.” They must have been fulfilled right then at that time; prophecy is over.

The crux of this issue is Christ's words, “This generation.” What did He mean?

As Mark Twain once said, “Prophecy is difficult, especially with respect to the future.” (Don’t you just love him?) He was being facetious, of course, but when somebody is using humor that way, there is a nugget of truth in it. It is something that we understand. “Yeah, it’s funny, but true!” What he means is, nobody has gotten it right, yet. The human mind has trouble with prophecy, especially with respect to the future, because our minds do not go that way. We cannot see what is going to happen.

We have a terrible time even with all our computing abilities, and our abilities to analyze, trying to make forecasts, and such, we still cannot predict what is going to happen—even seconds into the future.

Ask your weatherman! It is simple things like that, they can have their models, and they still tell us that we have a 30% chance of rain, and they can dodge and weave and say that it may or may not happen. We cannot trust them, though. They will say that it will rain today. But it ends up being bright and sunny all day, and it rains the next day because the cold front got stalled somewhere because of this other thing, which surprised them.

Well, it is even worse when it comes to biblical prophecy, because we are dealing with the Master of the Universe, and His mind, and the things that He has revealed to men, well, He thinks a lot differently than we do. He knows what is going on. He, being sovereign, can manipulate events to make things happen the way that He wants them to happen. So, things may be going merrily along in a certain direction, and all it takes is a little prod from God, and things start going off in a direction that we never thought they would go.

Interpretation of prophecy is open to all sorts of variables that we often cannot see. We may think that we can understand a lot of the variables, but when it comes down to it, we cannot. We might be able to describe some of them, but we cannot control them by any means.

This is why I have taught for more than a decade that our best course is to know the prophecies themselves—to know what the Bible itself says about the prophecies so that when they occur, we will recognize them immediately. Speculation on how they will come about, well, if you want to do that, it is fine, but do not get sure about your interpretations, because you do not know.

As I heard Dr. Meredith say one time about Dr. Herman Hoeh's speculations, "Well, he hasn't been right yet!" That is how we have to treat all of our speculations about what is going to happen. We have not been right yet.

Herbert Armstrong sincerely believed when he was writing in the 1950s that it would only be about 20 years, into the 70s, that Christ would come. And so, he and others made the foolish statement that it would be 1975, and people hung onto that, because that is "reality"—that is something that would happen in a few years. But, that kind of speculation is like quicksand. It does not do much good. It can get us thinking down a certain path, and that might be good, but on the other hand, it might "fix" us on that path, and we would then miss a lot of other things that are going on that could change our minds about things.

I am sure that when Herbert Armstrong was writing the booklet, *1975 in Prophecy*, he did not foresee himself living to 1986 as a man. That was 14 years after people thought the Great Tribulation would start; Christ would return in 1975; we would all be changed. I would have been a whopping 9 years old.

But this did not happen. He could not foresee that after his death the church would explode. And twenty years later on from that, we would be in a situation where the churches of God are scattered all over. The church became fixed on a path of interpretation that missed a great deal of the signs. It missed the signs of the church members—all of us, ministry, deacons, lay members—not being ready, not being entirely focused on what we needed to be focused upon. So, we missed the fact that God had to do something to shake us out of our complacency, because we were thinking that things

were going to wrap up quickly and painlessly, because we all had held onto Herbert Armstrong's coat-tails, and were going straight into the Kingdom of God.

That did not happen.

So, we need to understand, and really focus on what God has revealed in His Word about these prophecies; not about what men have said about these prophecies, or the predictions that they have made based upon them, but on what God Himself has said about them, so that we have a photographic memory of these prophecies, and we will have the “aha” moment, and then follow Jesus Christ as He is leading at the time.

Christ and Ezekiel both emphasized—Christ especially in John 13, and Ezekiel throughout his book—when you see it happen, then you will know. **THEN** you will know! Not before. Then—when it happens. So, this is why we need to know the prophecies so that we can know them then.

Now, perhaps the most elementary variable that we deal with in these prophecies is language. I suppose you might not have thought of it that way, but language is a variable. Most of us are reading these prophecies in English. We do not know Hebrew or Greek. We may have books that can tell us what these words mean, but we do not know the languages. We hardly know how these languages work. We do not know how to string these words together. So, we have to rely on scholars who are learned in these languages to help us know what these words mean.

But, allow me to let you in on a secret—a secret that theology tries to hide from you. Even the most learned Hebrew and Greek scholar is not always sure what the ancient speaker or writer meant by the words and phrases that he used. So, when they look into the ancient Hebrew, and ancient Greek, oftentimes they are making educated guesses about words.

This is why Herbert Armstrong told us time and time again, “Never base a belief or a doctrine on the meaning of a Greek or Hebrew word.” This is a basic element in Bible study. Sure, these Greek and Hebrew scholars can tell us a great deal about the language and they can give us some hints, but we cannot do that. This is a man's understanding of a word that is probably no longer being used. And if it is being used in modern Greek or Hebrew, its meaning has most likely changed.

Look at English! Go back and try to read Chaucer. It is difficult! Sometime you ought to go back a little farther and read Beowulf. Beowulf was written in Old English. You will likely not recognize 1 in 20 words.

Of course, Middle English developed out of that, with some Norman French thrown in, and so you get *The Canterbury Tales* of Geoffrey Chaucer, and you can probably work your way through that with a good dictionary or a version with good footnotes. But most times when high schoolers read one of the Canterbury Tales, they read it in Modern English—a translation from the Middle English.

And so, just over about 1000 years, our language has changed significantly. What do you suppose has happened with Hebrew and Greek of 2000 and 3000 years? They are no longer the same.

Modern Hebrew and Greek are not like their ancient counterparts. Even if those Hebrew and Greek scholars in Greece and Israel have used that as a basis for their scholarship, they are still only human

scholars. They are using their intellect to try and rework the language, or come up with what they think it means. But, they cannot be sure, because they did not live back then and speak the language as it was spoken then. That is the way it is!

Sometimes they know the words, and they say that they have a pretty good idea of what these words mean—they are simple, they are basic, they are root words. “This is Spot. See Spot run.” They are very simple and basic.

But sometimes just the syntax—the word order—allows for very simple phrases to mean two different things. What does it mean? Is it this? Or that? If it means this first thing, it implies thinking along one line, but if it is that, it will take your thinking off into a different direction. And if you read the commentaries, they should tell you that this word is uncertain, or this phrase cannot necessarily be pinned down, because it could mean this, or that. So, you have to take your best guess by using the context, and whatnot.

So, this is *one* of the problems.

Some words only appear once in all of Scripture, so, they have nothing to compare it to in ancient literature. They have to guess again. Usually what they do is try to find another word in a cognate language like Aramaic, or Arabic, or Accadian, and say it meant this thing in this language, while it meant this other thing in this other cognate language, and so in Hebrew it is likely to mean something similar. It means “lake” in this language, while it means “pond” in this other language, so in Hebrew it is talking about some sort of body of water. And this idea is about as good as they can do.

Sometimes a word is a colloquialism, meaning it is used in a particular way in a particular place, but it was not part of the formal language that everyone knew.

For instance, we have “hollers” (a corruption of “hollow”) down here (in our North and South Carolina area where we live), and other people would not know that you are talking about a little valley. They might think you mean “shouting.” This is a colloquialism.

Other times there are certain umbrella terms that may stand for a whole group of different ideas that are truncated into one term. So, it may be an actual word, but it cannot be taken literally, because it means some or all of these other little things.

We do this all the time. If I tell you that Congress was discussing the “Star Wars Program,” you and I know because we live here in this culture that the Star Wars Program was something that the Reagan Administration developed as a missile defense system—all the stuff we were going to do with our satellites, and other possible space warfare. Well, that is an umbrella term that covers a great deal more than what the words suggest—battles between stars?

What does that mean? If someone were to come along 5000 years from now and uncover this, and they had found George Lucas’ grave, would they think that we are talking about the Star Wars System in Congress, as in missile defense, or does it mean we are talking about Luke Skywalker, and Darth Vader, and the Emperor, and Yoda? I am being silly in a way, but do you understand? This is the sort of thing that confounds scholars of language about the Bible.

On other occasions there are cultural meanings that we do not get, which I did refer to earlier, because we do not live in that time. We do not know how the cultural ideas affected various words and the ways that they were used.

Even though they do their best to project themselves back into this time, and try to get an idea of how the words might have been used back then, they cannot do it perfectly, and sometimes they get it wrong. That is what you must understand—even when you read the commentaries, or you use your lexicon, a lot of times, even though they are telling you something very dogmatically, they are really only guessing.

So, there are ambiguities that could—not *do*, but could—shift the meaning one way or another. If this occurs within a prophecy, then your interpretation could hang on a “maybe,” or a “perhaps.” This is shaky ground.

Beside timing, which we have gone through, and now language too, there is also context. Context is a variable. This can be more difficult than it first sounds. We should be able to read what happened before, and we should be able to read what happened after, and so get a good idea of what the context is.

Confusion immediately clears up, right? “Because this particular verse goes with this, doesn’t it?”

Let me show you something. Have you ever gone through your Bible and looked to see how the chapters are divided? Have you noticed that sometimes they are not divided very well at all?

John 7:52 They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee."

Notice what happens here. In my Bible there is a new paragraph that starts here:

John 7:53 And everyone went to his own house.

And then they broke the chapter off right there! And the next verse says,

John 8:1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Why did they not leave that as a part of 7:53? Somebody, when they were doing the chapters, thought this would be a great place for a different context, but actually, both of these verses should belong together at the end of chapter 7. Chapter 8 should probably start with what we know as verse 2.

John 8:2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple . . .

This is where the real context change starts.

Let us look at another one found in II Corinthians 6.

II Corinthians 6:17-18 Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

II Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness . . .

That verse (7:1) should continue at the end of chapter 6:18. But, whoever divided the chapters goofed. They put it in the wrong context.

You will find similar problems in Galatians 4, and Philippians 4. The epistle of I John is probably the worst of all for this sort of problem. I would say that chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 are all divided wrong! Chapter 2 starts in the middle of His forgiveness of our sins. John had not finished his thought, yet. But, somebody stuck a chapter break in there. Whoever was reading it did not see the context clearly.

I am sure that you can find more instances of this all over the Bible. It is not just in the New Testament, but I thought I would do to the ones that we would probably be familiar with.

Establishing the boundaries of context is not as easy as it seems. And it becomes a variable.

Where does one idea start and end? This is especially a problem in prophecy, because prophecy is often not linear. They do not go through it from beginning to end; everything is not laid out A, B, C, D, 1, 2, 3. Sometimes there are jumps—they go back—they put this in, and so on. Look at the book of Revelation. How many inset chapters are there? Where does the context stop and the inset chapter begin and end, and then when does the time flow resume? There are people throwing bottles and nails and hammers at each other over the way the book of Revelation is divided because the way you figure the context stops and ends affects the way that they interpret the prophecy.

So, it is very important. It is a variable that we need to understand.

The original Hebrew and Greek had no chapter marking. They just went right on through. Sometimes there was a space to let you know that this is where the scribe wanted you to see that there was a change of context. But, sometimes there was not. So, you just have to be aware of context all of the time.

It can be difficult to see where one context ends, and the next begins; this comes into play in Matthew 24, which we will turn to now. I am assuming that you know what is going on in here since we have been through the Olivet Prophecy a lot in our time. We pretty much know what is there.

Matthew 24:32-36 Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Go to Mark 13, and we will read the same section there:

Mark 13:28-32 Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to

you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Now, let us go to Luke 21, and we will again read the same section there:

Luke 21:29-35 Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

Luke is quite a bit different from Matthew and Mark, but it is essentially the same, particularly the verse we are concerned about, Matthew 24:34, which is almost word for word the same.

So, we have to realize three things about this section:

1) We must realize that the wording cannot be wrong. I can say this—that there is no scribal error—because all three synoptic gospels have pretty much the same phrasing. All three would have to be wrong. That is not going to occur. We can be sure that since God's Word is truth, Psalm 12:6 says that it is purified seven times, that this is a true prophecy.

2) We must deal with the fact that we have three witnesses in Scripture to this statement. All three synoptic gospels tell us that by no means will this generation pass away before these things are fulfilled. So, our Savior saying something once should be enough. If He has it recorded twice, it becomes super-important. If He says it a third time, it is beyond all contradiction. Christ really said this. "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled." He really meant it. It is of primary important to His disciples.

3) We must recognize that the wording itself is dogmatic, and unassailable. He said this very plainly—and He said it with authority.

3a) He says, "Assuredly, I say unto you . . ." to begin His statement. In the King James Version, as we know, it is "Verily, I say unto you . . ." When He said these words, that is a marker that shouts out in warning, "Pay attention! This is important. Listen to Me. The following truth is being revealed for the first time (normally) by God's own Son." This is not something you will find elsewhere. He is telling them to listen up! This is a new truth, as it were. Make sure that you get it. It is like a seal of quality on a statement. It is as if He was saying, "What I'm about to say is backed by the Word of God, and God Himself." It is also a marker in which Jesus tells us that He realizes that most people will doubt what He is about to say, and they will discount it, and He is telling us, "Don't you discount this! I'm saying this truly." That is what "verily" means—truthfully, "I am saying this to you."

So, it is no wonder that the preterists get this wrong. He knew that they would doubt it, and so they did doubt it, and looked at it the wrong way—they misunderstood it.

3b) The statement itself contains the phrase, “will by no means,” which is far stronger than simply saying, “this generation will not pass away.” He is saying in very dogmatic and absolutist language, that He is emphasizing this prediction. It will “by no means pass away.” He wants us to take this seriously, and not doubt it. He is saying that this is irrevocable; it will happen this way, as strongly as He can say it. This is a huge clue on the timing of His return, and the setting up of His Kingdom on earth. He is drawing attention to it, using very strong language for us to not get this wrong.

3c) He follows His statement immediately with an equally firm and declarative statement that His words will not pass away (verse 33), “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” He is saying not only that “this generation will by no means pass away,” He says, “When I tell you something, it’s not going to pass away—by no means!” It is as sure as the rest of the revealed Word of God. We can rely on it! This is the way that it is going to be. He knew these things were so; He knew that this is how they are going to happen; they will come to pass; we can put all our money on it.

So, this by itself, just this internal evidence, destroys the preterists' misunderstanding of the verse. Why do I say that? Because, if Jesus meant that the generation that He was speaking to at the time, the generation of His disciples, if that was the generation that would not pass away before these things would be fulfilled, then He is a liar, and we cannot trust His words because these things have not been fulfilled yet. Some 1950-odd years have passed since then, and they have still not been fulfilled.

So, if the preterists' understanding were right, then we would have to say that Jesus is a liar, because Jesus' words were not fulfilled.

Just think about this. You know Matthew 24. Verse 14 says,

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Has the gospel been fully preached around the world as a witness? Evidently not. The end has not come. Is that right? Did I miss the end?

Matthew 24:21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Has there been great tribulation such as the world has never seen, and will never see again? No, there have been very bad times. But, we should look into verse 22 also:

Matthew 24:22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved . . .

Have we ever had a tribulation in which unless God stopped it, all life would have been eradicated? I do not think so. I know there have been some bad times in the past—the Black Death in the 14th century, which was pretty bad. We could talk about the Holocaust of the 1940s in WWII; the killing fields in Cambodia in the 1970s; other places where great atrocities have happened. We know that Stalin killed millions of his own people in the 1920s and early 30s in the Ukraine; and the communists in China killed so many millions of their own; and we are now killing how many million babies every year through abortion.

But, we really have not gone through a tribulation in which everything would be gone unless God stepped in. So, that has not happened yet.

Matthew 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Did you see any of this the other night? I do not think so. It has not happened.

I mean, there have been things that have happened up there like eclipses, and shooting stars, and asteroids have whizzed by, and various other things, but we have not seen the heavens roll up like a scroll, and that sort of thing. Those have not happened.

Matthew 24:30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and 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.

Now, we have all been looking for this, and it has not happened yet, as we all know.

Matthew 24:31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Have you been gathered up by an angel, yet, and taken to a central place with all of the others? I do not think so.

So, just by going through these various scriptures, we can conclude that either Jesus is wrong, wrong about what He said in verse 34, and His prophecies have failed, or what He meant by “this generation” does not mean the generation that He was speaking to.

I choose to believe the latter, because I choose to believe that my Savior tells the truth. So maybe *we* have made the mistake somewhere. It is our understanding and not His revelation that is faulty.

So then, what is going on in the Olivet Prophecy?

This is actually a tough question; hard to pin down. Perhaps the simplest way that I can explain it is to say that throughout the entire context of Matthew 24 Jesus is speaking—not in the present tense; not in the future tense; but in the prophetic tense.

You are going to say, “Prophetic tense? That isn’t something I learned in school.” Well, the prophetic tense is something I coined. Probably somebody else has used it, but I consider it a kind of verbal timing that does not account precisely for great swaths of time, or the differences in the timing of events. It is God’s view of time, not man’s view.

It says in Isaiah 57:15 that God inhabits eternity. Time to God is not the same as time to us. He lives over billions of years—forwards and backwards. Time and generations to Him are as nothing. He says that all of mankind is as the dust of the balance. And whether this dust is here at this time, or that dust is here at that time, it does not matter a great deal to Him. He has put us on this linear time

from the time that He gave us the ability to count time, through the sun, moon, stars, and planets. Those things He put up there for us to use to count time. But, He keeps time in a whole different way that we cannot really grasp.

So, He sees all history in a great sweep of time, and sometimes it seems as it is all the same to Him—it is all one. “A thousand years to Him are as a day in His sight.” Your life is a snap of the fingers. How many times in the Bible does it say that man is like grass that springs up and withers, as if it is in one breath, up and down—alive, now dead? That is the way it is to God. Time to Him does not mean the same thing as time to us.

And so, when we are reading prophecy, we have to try to get ourselves into His head, as it were, in terms of time. Sometimes there are clear markers, but sometimes there are not. Sometimes He sees things in great swaths of time, while at other times He truncates everything down to a very small amount of time. So, it is very difficult to pin down. I think time is the greatest of the variables in prophecy. And that is the one that confuses most people.

Let me give you an idea from the Old Testament about this prophetic time. Turn to Deuteronomy 29. I want to skip through the last portion of this chapter starting in verse 14. Please notice that Deuteronomy 28 has the blessings and cursings, and we know that these things apply to Israel throughout their entire history. So, have that in the back of your mind as we go through this.

Deuteronomy 29:14-15 I [Moses] make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but with him who stands here with us today before the LORD our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today.

So, we get an idea that Moses is speaking not just to the assembled Israelites that are there, but also all the people that were with them, and those who would come in the future into Israel.

Deuteronomy 29:18-22 So that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood; and so it may not happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart'—as though the drunkard could be included with the sober. The LORD would not spare him; for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book would settle on him, and the LORD would blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD would separate him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this Book of the Law, so that the coming generation of your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, would say, when they see the plagues of that land and the sicknesses which the LORD has laid on it:

Now Moses had been talking about one man's sin, and suddenly now, this thing has grown so that this sin has covered the entire land.

Deuteronomy 29:23-28 The whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and His wrath.' All nations would say, 'Why has the LORD done so to this land? What does the heat of

this great anger mean?' Then people would say: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which He made with them [now it is “them,” not just one man] when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; for they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they did not know and that He had not given to them. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.'

Deuteronomy 30:1-2 "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you [*you!*], the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice . . .

Did you notice what happened there? He had been talking to them, and then he changed from one person among them, sinning. And then he expanded it out to them—the whole people—have forsaken God. And we are talking about the whole time period of the curses. This happened as they came into the land; it went through the time of Joshua; it went through the time of the judges; and they went through the times of the kings; and by the time they reached the time of the kings, God had had enough. Israel went into captivity, and 150 or so years later, Judah does the same thing and goes into captivity. Israel is still out there, while Judah comes back; they have their problems; 70 AD comes, and we have the destruction of Jerusalem. Judah goes into exile again, and does not come back until 1948; there are still more Jews out in the Diaspora than there are in the land of Israel—and have they repented yet? Not, just the Jews, but the Israelites too?

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

What are we talking about? We are talking about the time of Jesus Christ when He brings Israel back into the land, and they repent! And do you know what He tells the people listening to Him? He says, “When these things happen to you . . .” Do you understand what has gone on here? He has taken something that happens (at this point) 3500 years into the future, and He projects it back onto the people who are standing in front of Him.

This is what I mean by prophetic time. It ebbs, it flows. It gives things that happen in the future to the people in the present; it takes the things that are happening in the present, and it projects them out to the people who will live far out in the future. We have to keep our minds in gear to understand when these things are shifting. It is hard sometimes because—did we notice—if I had not pointed them out, would you have said, “Oops, we’ve just shifted gears from the people to a singular man; and then a singular man into the people again; and then suddenly, we’re not there with the people, we’re in the future someplace, and it’s not a future that we can specifically say, ‘No, it was 1250 BC, or 70 AD, or . . .’ We cannot pinpoint it, because it is general.

Finally, we came to verse 6, and we get the indication that the time that He is really talking about is when Israel is brought into the land after the Second Exodus, and they repent.

So you understand that the One who inspired Moses to say these things is the One who stood on the Mount of Olives and gave the prophecy in Matthew 24. He still spoke the same way. He is not going to make it easy on us, and tell us that this is going to happen at this point, and this other thing will happen at that point.

Let us see something from Matthew 24:

Matthew 24:34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Herbert Armstrong taught us that the key was in verse 22—the key to verse 34 is found in verse 22:

Matthew 24:22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that mankind devised a way to eradicate life from the planet. It was only then that mankind had the means to destroy all flesh. So, the key to understanding the timing is there in verse 22, that these things could not come to pass until mankind had been able to invent planet-killing technology, which we did in the 1940s.

Now we have what is known as “mutually assured destruction.” Even though we have been getting rid of a lot of arms, there are still so many out there, that if we got into a nuclear exchange with one of the other nuclear powers, it would devastate the earth. And on top of all that, we have biological weapons, and chemical weapons, and genetic weapons; all kinds of things that are happening that if we should get into that kind of fight, we could kill everything on the planet. And if God did not step in, all flesh would be destroyed.

So, any tribulation that has occurred before the time of our planet-killing ability, including the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and the Holocaust, and all the rest, does not qualify as the Great Tribulation that Jesus refers to. The Great Tribulation is still future. But, now it can happen, so I believe that the generation of possible human extinction is the one that Jesus is referring to. What He has done is that He has shifted who He is talking to, and what He is talking about. And we would not be aware of it, unless it is drawn to our attention. He is really talking about the time that these things can take place.

Now, we have barely mentioned it, and I am already over time, but as we close, please recognize just where “this generation will no wise pass away” appears. It is in the midst of a parable! He had started talking about the Parable of the Fig Tree. Some people believe that He was talking about the founding of the State of Israel in 1948—possibly.

However, by definition we know that a parable is an illustration from the natural world and common life used to teach a spiritual truth; usually it is one that is hidden from those who are not in the know—those not clued in to the meaning—those who are not enlightened.

Earlier, I read the verse after this section purposely.

Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Luke tells us that this day could come upon us unexpectedly, if we are distracted. Jesus tells us in several places that He is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.

To me, the meaning of “this generation shall not pass away,” is clear: We may have a general idea that we are in the final generation. But, that is as specific as it is going to get. Once we see that these things can now take place, Christ and His Kingdom are waiting in the wings, and His return will occur.

We have been given the warning. Now all flesh could be eradicated from the planet. Get ready! The spiritual truth that He is trying to get us to understand is that this time between the time of planet-killing ability and the end when He returns is a time of incredible distraction. Luke says it best. He told us that it was a time of self indulgence (verse 34). Is that not a clue that we are in the end time? He says that it is a time of drunkenness, which implies a lack of self control, and hampered decision making. People are staggering about, they do not know what to do, and they cannot get a firm grip on what is happening. That is what drunk people do.

And it says that the cares of this life will be pressing down on us, with a weight that is hard to bear, meaning that there is overwhelming stress and pressure just to survive in this world.

So, once we are in the ballpark, which we know, we have been warned about, our task is to be on guard—watch! He says, prepare for His return.

Let us finish in Matthew 24. This is what He is getting at, and He takes this through into chapter 25 with the Parable of the Virgins. (I will have to leave that to you.)

Matthew 24:42-44 "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming [You will not know the specific time]. But know this [something you can know], that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore [learn something from this] you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Do you see the signs? Do we see the signs?

Then, let us fulfill our Lord's command, and get ready!