



## 51: **This Generation** (Mt 24:29-35)

### **The Judgment of Jerusalem - Part 4**

Today we tackle one of the most difficult parts of this difficult passage revolving around this phrase from Jesus: "**This generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." What did Jesus mean & what's that mean for us?

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## teachingnotes

### **Catch the Context**

Remember that this whole conversation on the Mount of Olives starts off with Jesus telling His 1st century disciples that the temple was going to be destroyed within their lifetime (Mt 24:1-3). He warns *them* of what *they* can expect to see and tells them when *THEY* see the abomination of desolation that they are to get away from Jerusalem instead of running to Jerusalem. Luke likely interprets for his Gentile audience what this Jewish language - **abomination of desolation** - means - **when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies ...flee to the mountains** (Mt 24:15-16; Lk 21:20-21).

### **Great Tribulation Believers Go Through**

**Matthew 24:21-25** (NIV) For then there will be **great distress** [great tribulation - ESV, NAS, LSB], unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the **sake of the elect** those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told **you** ahead of time.

Note that the **elect** - followers of Jesus *ARE present* during this great **distress**/tribulation.

**Matthew 24:26-28** (NIV) So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be **the coming of the Son of Man**. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

This **coming of the Son of Man** involves **DEATH** - hence the language of **carcasses & vultures**, likely referring to Jesus coming in judgment against His enemies in Jerusalem - as He had previously mentioned to His disciples when He said...

**Matthew 10:23** (NIV) When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before **the Son of Man comes**.

### **3 Interpretations**

1. This has *nothing to do with the 1st century followers of Jesus* because His 2nd coming will be 2000 years later. Jesus doesn't really mean **YOU** - the people He is speaking to at the time.
2. Jesus thought His 2nd coming would happen during the lifetimes, *but Jesus was WRONG*.
3. The phrase **Son of Man comes** isn't referring to His 2nd coming, but His coming in judgment against unbelieving Israel during the lifetime of His 1st century followers.

### **Cosmic Convulsions**

**Matthew 24:29** (NIV) Immediately after the **distress** [tribulation - ESV, NAS, LSB] of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

Many contemporary interpreters would say, "*THAT hasn't happened yet, so it must be a future event.*" We Americans have funny phrases that would need explaining to people from another culture, sayings like "**IT'S RAINING CATS & DOGS!**"

- "The abomination of desolation" is a Hebrew phrase referring to an army surrounding, capturing, & defiling Jerusalem along with the Temple of the One True God.
- "The sun & moon being darkened and the stars falling from the sky" is Old Testament prophet language, where disturbances in the sun, moon, and stars pointed to political & social upheaval where those who ruled over the Jews would be humbled or even destroyed.

☀️ **Joseph had a dream of the sun, moon, & stars bowing down to him** (Gen 37:9-10). His father, Jacob interpreted this to refer to HIM (sun), wife (moon), and brothers (stars) - the people who had authority over Joseph, who would one day have their authority taken away & bow before Joseph.

Isaiah used this same language of sun, moon, & stars to describe the destruction of the Babylonians by Medo-Persians.

### Reference to God's Past Judgment on Babylon

**Isaiah 13:9-10** (NIV) See, the day of the Lord [Yahweh] is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The **stars** of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising **sun** will be darkened and the **moon** will not give its light.

**Isaiah 13:17-19** (NIV) See, I will stir up against them the Medes...Their bows will strike down the young men; they will have no mercy on infants, nor will they look with compassion on children. **Babylon**, the jewel of kingdoms, the pride and glory of the Babylonians, **will be overthrown by God** like Sodom and Gomorrah.

• So, God uses this language to refer to His judgment coming on the Babylonians by another army...sent by Him!

☀️ Josephus: "**Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet that continued a whole year.**"(AD 66)<sup>1</sup>

- Josephus later understood this and others strange signs in the sky as omens pointing to the destruction that was coming to Jerusalem in AD 70. It is likely that the weird astronomical anomalies were pointing to the ruling Jewish authorities, like the chief priests, being thrown down & destroyed.

**Matthew 24:30-33** (NIV) Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, **when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.**

### Who Is This Generation?

**Matthew 24:34-35** (NIV) Truly I tell you, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

### 3 ways to Interpret Jesus' Words:

1. Atheists like **Bertrand Russell** have seized upon this passage to point to Jesus being *WRONG*.

*"He [Jesus] certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. There are a great many texts that prove that and there are a lot of places where it is quite clear that He believed that His coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living."*<sup>2</sup>

- Some some Christians who have come to the same conclusion.

☀️ **C.S. Lewis** called this, "**The most embarrassing verse in the Bible**"<sup>3</sup>, thinking Jesus - in his human ignorance - got this wrong.

✗ If Jesus *DID* say His 2nd Coming would occur during the generation of His 1st century followers, then Jesus WAS wrong.

2. Contemporary voices like **John MacArthur** have a way to dispel this dilemma. They say that **this generation** is NOT referring to the generation of the 1st century disciples.

☀️ "**This generation** will therefore be composed of Jews and Gentiles who are alive at the rapture but are not taken up because they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup>

3. Jesus is referring to what His 1st century followers will experience.

❓ WHO has Jesus been talking with this entire time? His 1st century disciples. Up to this point He has warned *THEM* of what *THEY* could expect to see - **wars, famine, false messiahs**, and the **abomination of desolation** taking over Jerusalem - **WITHIN** their lifetimes.

❓ If we were the 1st century disciples hearing Jesus answer our question, which generation would we have thought He was referring to?

<sup>1</sup>Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 742.

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, Why I Am Not a Christian (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 16.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, The World's Last Night and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), 97-98.

<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 4, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 67.

The Greek word translated 'generation' - **genea** - is used **33 times in 27 verses in the Gospels** (13 in Matthew; 5 in Mark; 15 in Luke - **Matthew** 1:17, 11:16, 12:39, 12:41-42, 12:45, 16:4, 17:17, 23:36, 24:34; **Mark** 8:12, 8:38, 9:19, 13:30; **Luke** 1:48, 1:50, 7:31, 9:41, 11:29-32, 11:50-51, 16:8, 17:25, 21:32)

Greek scholars tell us that this word - **genea** - is used in a couple of different ways:

1. **People of the same KIND** - common characteristics including interests or race.
2. **People of the same TIME** - contemporaries living at the same time - how we typically refer to 'generation'

❖ **Genea** is used of **people of the same time** in all these biblical cases.

☛ **Dr. Sproul** notes that if "this generation" is to be taken *literally*, then some of the language in this passage must be understood as *figurative* (i.e. the coming of the Son of Man is *figurative* since Jesus did not physically return during the 1st century), OR if "all these things" are to be taken literally, then "this generation" must be figurative.' But you can't have both.

### **Timeline of Events**

- **A.D. 33** Olivet Discourse (just before Jesus crucified) Jesus warned of destruction of Temple and what would come before. The apostles ask the question, "*When will this happen?*" (Mt 24:1-3) Jesus answers that wars & rumors of wars would come first, along with false messiahs, persecution, famine, & strange earthly & cosmic events - like earthquakes & signs in the sky.
- **A.D. 33-35** Peter and John imprisoned (Acts 4); Apostles imprisoned and flogged (Acts 5)
- **A.D. 35** Stephen stoned to death as pre-Christian Paul persecutes followers of Jesus
- **A.D. 44** James the apostle beheaded (brother of John); Peter imprisoned as Herod intends to kill him too
- **A.D. 44-48** Famine as mentioned in Acts 11:28 by Agabus
- **A.D. 40s-60s** False Messiahs
- **A.D. 62** James - brother of Jesus - murdered in Jerusalem by unbelieving Jews
- **A.D. 64-65** Peter & Paul killed under Nero's reign
- **A.D. 66** Jewish War begins against Romans

**Matthew 24:30** (NIV) Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples [**tribes** - NET, ESV, NAS] of the earth [*ge* = **land**] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

Jesus *will* physically return one day, but the language from verses 30-31 must be understood in a figurative way. Strange cosmic stuff started happening as the Roman army marched toward Jerusalem beginning in AD 66, and it became obvious that there was trouble coming.

**The Son of Man was coming on the clouds** is "raining cats and dogs" **JUDGMENT** language used over & over in the Scriptures (Ps 68:4, 104:3; Is 19:1; Nahum 1:3; Eze 30:3, Zech 12:10-14).

### **Translations & Interpretations**

1. The "**peoples of the earth**" can be translated "**tribes of the land will mourn**". Indeed this fits the context as everything to this previous point had been referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and dealing with the people of Israel as they are killed or taken captive.
  - **A.D. 68-69** General Vespasian marches to Jerusalem, Nero dies, Roman Civil Wars erupt, and Vespasian leaves for Rome - Followers of Jesus flee to Pella.
  - **A.D. 70** Jerusalem & Temple are besieged & destroyed by Titus (Vespasian's son) after 5 month siege.  
**Jesus 'comes' in judgment** against unbelieving Israel through the Roman army that totally destroys the Temple, most of Jerusalem, kills over 1 million people, and takes thousands captive (Lk 19:41-44, 21:23-24, 23:28-31).

**Matthew 24:31** (NIV) And He will send His **angels** [messengers] with a loud trumpet call, and they will **gather His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

The term **angels** comes from the Greek term **angelos**, simply meaning **messengers**.

- **John the Baptist** and some of his disciples are called **angelos** of God (Mt 11:10; Lk 7:22), so translators rightly call them **messengers**, *not angels*. There are 1) heavenly messengers - angels & 2) earthly messengers like John the Baptist.

The **messengers** of Jesus being sent out to the known world to **gather his elect** (future followers of Jesus) would have been a great encouragement in the midst of hearing about devastating judgment that was coming.

**Matthew 24:34-35** (NIV) Truly I tell you, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The words of Jesus didn't fall to the ground. Jesus warned His apostles about what was coming - wars, earthquakes, famine, plagues, and signs in the heavens. They were to be persecuted and many would be killed...and ALL this was to occur...within ONE GENERATION...THEIR GENERATION. And it DID!

## ***BIG TRUTH: What Jesus said HAS & WILL come true***

There **are future events that we await** (Jesus returns, dead raised, our bodies transformed). But Jesus can be trusted.

- Jesus WILL return. Jesus WILL judge. Jesus WILL reward His faithful & punish the unfaithful.

❓ So what if that were to happen THIS WEEK? What if we KNEW - and we don't - that Jesus was returning NEXT SUNDAY?

### **Books to consider reading:**

- **The Apocalypse Code** by Hank Hanegraaff
- **The Last Days According to Jesus** by Dr. R.C. Sproul
- **The Olivet Discourse Made Easy** by Dr. Ken Gentry
- **Last Days Madness** by Gary DeMar
- **Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary** edited by Steve Gregg
- **Revelation Made Easy** by Dr. Ken Gentry

## **heretoseveyou**

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

\* Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!

\* Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Steve & Debbie Bass** (850-673-7952), **Noel & Patricia Barnes** (813-767-2881), **Tim & Joni Hughey** (850-464-1156), **Rob & Rebecca Leatherberry** (229-232-1087), or **Mark & Dot Mancil** (850-253-5405).

## **discussionquestions**

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. Share about a time you misunderstood a phrase or a term you weren't familiar with. Are there any phrases or words *from today's teaching* that challenged you to reconsider how you read this passage? Explain your answer.
2. **Read Isaiah 13** (the whole chapter) and then **read Matthew 24:29 & Genesis 37:9-10**. Have you ever considered the connection between cosmic language that is pointing to those in authority whom God is bringing judgment on? How is this helpful in trying to interpret Scriptures?
3. **Read Matthew 24:34-35**. Why is it so important in how we understand what "this generation" refers to in light of the context of this passage?
4. **Read Matthew 24:30-33**. Regardless of whether you consider this to refer to the 1st century judgment of Jesus on Jerusalem or the future coming of Jesus, why would people **mourn** the coming of Jesus?
5. If the "angels gathering the elect" is actually earthly messengers taking the gospel to the known world, how would this encourage the first followers of Jesus & how should it encourage US?
6. The BIG TRUTH from today's teaching was: **What Jesus said HAS & WILL come true**. Many Christians have never considered the many fulfilled prophecies that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24. Answer this - is it any less powerful to appreciate prophecies that have been fulfilled compared to looking forward to prophecies yet to be fulfilled?
7. What does God want YOU to do with what we studied today?
8. How can we pray for/care for one another this week? (Pray for one another.)