

Could Jesus Return in Our Generation?

For 2000 years, Christians have believed Jesus Christ would return to this earth in His "second coming" in their generation. Even though Our Lord knew the church would not see that return for two millennia, He wanted each generation to live as though He would come at anytime for motivational purposes. Our Lord knew He would "go into a far county...and, after a great while...return and demand an accounting," as He taught in His parables. He knew that routine living was an enemy to spiritual motivation in a physical universe. So He presented His second coming in such a way that Christians would be motivated to so live as though He would interrupt their lives and return before their natural life span had ended.

The apostles and the first century church expected Christ's return in their lifetime, which is why they were so motivated to live holy lives and so dedicated to evangelism and reaching the world for Christ. The second and third century church similarly expected His return, even in the face of unbelievable persecution. They were so evangelistic they literally turned the world upside down, and by the fourth century they saw the Roman empire embrace Christianity as the dominant faith. In later centuries, as the Bible was withdrawn from the people, the truth about the second coming waned, as did the fires of evangelism. After the Protestant Reformation, the translating of the Bible into the mother tongues of the people, and the printing press, which made the Bible available to the common people, the study of prophecy and the second coming resumed. After all, one third of the Bible is prophecy, so if one studies the Bible, he studies prophecy. Since the second coming is mentioned more than any other subject in Scripture, except for the doctrine of salvation, it is understandable that prophetic teaching, followed by evangelism, missions, and holy living would return. Historically, that is exactly what happened during the last three centuries - as the Bible had its greatest distribution.

Could our generation witness Christ's second coming?

We are certainly living in momentous days. Events which are unfolding in the Near East. While desperate discussions at peace conferences are taking place, Israel is bent on keeping the west bank of Jordan and determined to throw out the invaders of Palestine, securing the city of Jerusalem, brings the possibility of an outbreak of all-out war. This is all fulfilling Bible prophecies given throughout the Old and New Testaments

The end of this age may be a lot nearer than most believers realize! Violence and terrorism has burst forth upon the world! What could "*never happen here in America - is happening!*"

The age of violence, and terrorism, came with smashing, shattering, pulverizing, disintegrating force to our world, striking a deep sense-of-fear in hearts of men! One statesman stated, "*It's whole sale death, in horrifying form!*"

Something, more divesting than an earthquake, has jarred our world out of its course, and appears to be breaking it to pieces! It seems that a gigantic monster, dislocated by some titanic force, is bearing down on us like a car out of control!

One can hear the grinding, and muttering, of coming disaster. Can it be denied that we are living in momentous days?

Many scientists and statesmen of the world agree that we are living in the most impending period in the recorded history of mankind!

The Prime Minister of England stated, "*We, and all nations, stand at this hour in human history before the portals of supreme catastrophe. What ought we to do? Which way can we turn to save lives, and the future of the world?*"

I quote from a leading newspaper: "*The haunting fear of what may be coming on the world is the obsession and nightmare of millions*"

In such an hour as this, doesn't God's Word have something to say about the possible soon ending of this age in which we live?

Peter says, "*prophecy is a light that shineth in a dark place*" [2 Peter 1:19]

Certainly, God has not been taken by surprise at the ominous turn of world affairs!

The question of this discourse is, "***Does present world events herald Christ's soon coming?***"

If these events which are happening in our day, do indicate the nearness of Christ's return, shouldn't the church and the world be warned about what could very well be the outcome? Should we maintain silent just to avoid being called prophecy mongers, or calamity hollers?

If it can be proven that *ours* could very well be the "***last generation***" of this present Church age, will not the realization of this truth arouse Christians out of lethargy and compel them to fulfill the great commission?

While Christ's return for the church will be altogether unexpected **by the world**, this event will not be unexpected by the enlightened people of God. We cannot know the day or hour which Christ will return, however, the approaching "*end of the age*" can be known, according to what Jesus says. The nearness of the time of the end can be understood, the marks of the closing generation will be clear to the student of God's Word.

What does Scripture teach? Hebrews 10:25 states, "*Let us encourage one another...and all the more as you see the Day approaching;*" Luke 21:28, teaches, "*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near;*" Matthew 24:7-8 states, "*Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains...and* [verses 33-34], "*When you see all these things, you know that **IT** is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened*" [have been fulfilled].

When Jesus states, "***know*** that it [the end of the age] is near," He uses the imperative mood. He is commanding us to "*know*" His coming is near, when certain events happen. How dare anyone say: "*We cannot know*," when Christ commands us to "***know***"! Can anyone believe

that Jesus would tell us, that when certain well-defined events take place, we are to look up in glorious expectancy, and then He will *not* return, leaving us in bitter disappointment, subject to the world's ridicule? God forbid!

The question of this discourse is, "*What are the Scriptural signposts that point to the world's last generation?*" These signs are given most concisely in the 24th chapter of Matthew.

Many Bible readers seem to be confused about the meaning of this passage. It is possible that the reason they are confused is that they have missed the fact that the key to this chapter lies in meaning of the Greek word translated "*generation*."

Jesus says Matthew 24:34, "***Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.***" If one finds the meaning of the word "*generation*," the chapter will lie open before him.

This word "*generation*" is found 41 times in New Testament. There are those who feel that the word "*generation*" is referring to the Jewish nation and believe that Jesus is referring to the fact that the nation of Israel will not pass away before all these things will be fulfilled. However, Jesus is answering the disciples questions concerning the end of the age and giving signs as to the nearness of His return to earth again!

How could the continuance of Israel be a sign of the nearness of Christ's return, when all Scripture declare that Israel will **NEVER** cease from being a nation..*forever*?

No, Jesus was not speaking of the continuance of Israel here!

The key to the meaning of this word, "*generation*," is found earlier in Matthew.23:35, when it states, "*That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias [on you will fall the guilt of all the innocent blood split on the ground]. And, verse 36 states, Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*"

Jesus is stating, "*All those living in that particular period of time were about to crucify Him,*" and within *their* lifetime the judgment upon Jerusalem would fall. This was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, ***before that generation had passed away!***

God deals with mankind this way, judgment falls upon one generation for the sins of centuries. The prediction Jesus made in Matthew 23:35-36 was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem. The word "*generation*" refers to the period of one's lifetime!

The same Greek word "*generation*" that Jesus used in Matthew 23:36 is the same word He used in Matthew 24:34!

The word "*generation*" is used 12 times in Matthew and it always has the meaning of "**people living during the same period of time**"!

Jesus said in Matthew 23, the *generation* that rejected Him would be judged, and they were judged in 70 A.D. Then, He states in Matthew 24, that the "*generation*" that sees certain

events take place, "*would not pass away until all things would come to pass!*"

In this 24th chapter of Matthew, Jesus is answering His disciples' questions about His return to earth and ***the end of the age.*** He describes the events of the last years of this present age, declaring that all things which He speaks of would occupy one generation.

Jesus says, "The generation that witnesses the events described in Matthew 24 are to **know** (*because of these events taking place in their day*) that His return is "*near, even at the door!*"

If these events, spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24, were spread out over several generation, *that* would not indicate His soon return, however, the generation that witnesses them taking place in their day are to **know** that the end is near, even at the door!

Jesus was speaking to His disciples and yet He knew that they *personally* would **not** see these events which He described. Jesus was addressing - *through them* - the **last generation**, which would witness these events which would take place in the end of the age.

Some students have difficulty with the pronoun "**ye**" which Jesus uses in Matthew 24. Jesus states, "**ye shall hear...ye shall see...ye shall witness these things**"

Notice the principle of God's Word. For instance, in Numbers 15:2, God is addressing those to whom He is speaking as though they would enter Canaan, and yet, He knew that they would never enter into Canaan because He had previously said in the chapter *before* this (14:35), that **that** generation would die in the wilderness.

There have been many generations that have read this passage in Matthew 24 and understood that these words Jesus spoke here, refers to the generation which will be on earth when Christ returns for His Church.

Luke also records **part** of this Olivet prophecy and gives that part of this prophecy which was addressed, *personally*, to the disciples. They had asked the question when the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem would take place, and Luke's Gospel gives the part of Christ's message which had an application to their day!

Luke's revelation of this message Jesus gives is found in Luke 21:12-24, and covers the period covering the destruction of Jerusalem.

Matthew, in his Gospel, passes over this period relating to "*when shall these things be?*" [that is, the destruction of the Temple], and confines himself to answering the main part of the disciples questions, "**What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?**" [verse 3].

Matthew is recording Christ's message concerning, not the beginning of the age, with judgment upon Jerusalem, not the entire course of the Church age, but, rather, the end of the age...the *last years of the age...the closing generation!*

The Church will be on the earth during the last generation of this age (except for the final seven years, the Tribulation period)! And, Christ is leaving a message for the Church in the

years *before* the Tribulation [verses 4-7]. He also has a message for the "*Tribulation saints*," including the Jewish residents of Judea, after the Church is removed by translation [verses 8-21].

In verses 1-2, of Matthew 24, Jesus departs out of the Temple and His disciples come to Him and point out the beautiful buildings of the Temple. Jesus says, "*You see all this, I tell you that not a block of stone here will be left standing on one another.*" In verse 3 the disciples ask,

- "*Tell us, when will this happen?* [the destruction of the Temple]
- *How can we tell when You are coming back?*
- *What will be **the** sign of the conclusion of this age?*

There are those who teach that the destruction of Jerusalem, in 70 A.D., fulfilled the prophecies Jesus gives here, however, Jesus' response to all three questions which the disciples asks.

*Signs and **THE** sign*

There are many signs pointing to the nearness of the end of the age and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to set up His kingdom. Both the Old and New Testaments abound in predictions which should be studied carefully, if one wishes to discover with any accuracy how near the end of the present dispensation may be.

Many of the signs were doubtless familiar to Jesus' disciples, for they knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Now they ask if there is one **extraordinary sign**, one conclusive evidence of a speedy consummation and His glorious return. They ask, "*What will be **THE** sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?*"

Jesus answers by warning, "*See to it that no one leads you astray!*" There will be subtle dangers in the end-time. There will be leaders of cults and "isms" who will attempt with appalling success to lead men astray. In contrast to their confused and divergent voices, how simple, direct, and clear is our Jesus' answer to the questions of His disciples.

First, Jesus gives a **negative** answer in order to remove from their minds any possible false conceptions which might cloud the correct understanding of truth. He says in Verses 5-6, "*Many will make use of My name, saying they are the Messiah. You will hear of revolutions and rumors of wars, but do not let this disturb you because all these things must take place, **but the end is not yet!***"

Jesus says, "Bold, arrogant impostors will set themselves up as Christ, however, don't let this disturb you, concluding that such a person is the Anti-Christ of the end time. And, then Jesus said, "There will be conflicts, and rumors of wars, but do not conclude that these are the Armageddon of the end time. "*The end is not yet!*"

What then is to be regarded as the conclusive sign?

After removing from the minds of His questioners two points which otherwise might have hindered their clear comprehension of His teaching, Jesus proceeds to give them a straightforward and illuminating response to their inquiry.

In verse 7, Jesus states, "*For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. **These are the beginning of sorrows**" ...or, as the original reads, "...the beginning of travail pains!"*

The words of Luke distinguishes the negative part of Christ's answer to His disciples from the positive. perhaps clearer than Matthew 24:7. Luke 21:10 states, "**THEN** said He unto them . . ."

Notice the **composite** nature of the sign which Jesus gives. What is it that Jesus declared would be the sign of His coming and the beginning of a period of world trouble comparable to birth pains? The sign is great international conflicts, *accompanied* by famines, plagues, and earthquakes.

"*Nations shall rise against nation*, [Interestingly, the word translated "*nation*" is a word that means "*ethnics, or various groups of those of different national back grounds*, not necessarily countries]

Jesus' prophecy speaks of a world torn apart by conflicts between races and rumors of war, at the same time, it is accompanied by famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. There are four elements in this composite sign!

Jesus said, the generation that witness four great disasters...four unprecedented calamities...all happening simultaneously on earth, will know that this is the ***SIGN*** that the end of the age is near.

The sign of the world's last generation will be a great world conflicts, accompanied by famines, plagues and earthquakes

The language Jesus uses seems to indicate that there will be conflicts between "*ethnic groups*," unprecedented in magnitude and that the other three disasters will also be on an unprecedented scale!

There are four different factors in this sign. All four of these, grouped together, will be "*the beginning of sorrows*." These four events, occurring at the same time, will be **the** unmistakable sign that it is the last generation of this present age.

In verse 8, Jesus said "***All these are the beginning of sorrows***, or travail pains."

I cannot declare that this generation in which we live is **the** generation which Jesus spoke of, however, we need to ask ourselves, "*Has this fourfold sign been given? Has this period of world travail, begun?*"

In understanding just exactly what Jesus was saying in Matthew 24, in answering to His disciples questions, "*When will the destruction of the Temple take place? How can we know when You will return to earth again?*" and, "*What will be **the** sign of the end of this age?*", It is important that we understand the **two divisions** of Jesus' message.

As we have already seen verse 7 gives **the** sign concerning His return to earth, that is, "*World race conflicts - accompanied with famines, pestilences, and earthquakes.*"

When Jesus had given this sign in Matthew 24:7, He then said, "*All these are the beginning of sorrows,*" or the beginning of Tribulation. Beginning with verse 8, and throughout the rest of the chapter is the Tribulation period.

While verse 7 is **the** sign of Christ's return to earth again, beginning with verse 8, is what will take place **after** the church is gone from the earth, *during* the Tribulation period.

It is not my purpose at this junction to get into a discussion on the study of dispensations, and the period of Tribulation, which is to come upon the earth immediately after the church has been translated.

Verses 8 through 15 deals with the first half of the Tribulation period. The description of these verses is the same as the language of the **first half** of the Tribulation period given in Revelation, chapters, 6 - 12.

When we read, "*They deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake. Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate on another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold,*" it is speaking of the same period of the first half of the Tribulation described elsewhere in Scripture.

Beginning with verse 15, Jesus answers the disciple's questions, by saying, "*When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains,*" etc. Verses 15 through 26 describes the **last half** of the Tribulation period, given in Revelation, chapters 13 through 18.

Verses 27 through 31, very clearly, is speaking of the time when Christ will return **with** His saints, *after* the Tribulation period, to set up His kingdom on earth.

Before ending His message, which is in response to the disciples' three questions, Jesus gives the "*Parable of the Fig Tree,*" and then He states, "*So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, **This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.***" Then Jesus makes that great declaration, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.*"

Keep the outline of Matthew 24 in mind:

Verse 2 - Jesus prophecies the destruction of the Temple

Verse 3 - The disciples asks for signs **when** the end would come

Verses 4-6 - Signs which are not **the** sign of the end time.

Verses 7 - **THE** sign of Christ's return to earth!

Verse 8 - The beginning of the Tribulation

Verses 9-14 - The **first** half of the Tribulation

Verses 15-26 - The **last** half of the Tribulation

Verses 27-31 - Christ's return **WITH** His saints to set up His kingdom

Verse 32 - The parable of the Fig Tree [Israel]

Verses 33-35 - Christ's declaration of the last generation of this age

Verses 36-44 - The comparison of Noah's days to the last days

Verses 45-51 The illustration of the two kinds of servants

The seven year "*Tribulation period*" will be a part of the "*last generation*," however, remember, Christ returns **FOR** His Church, to catch His Bride away, **before** the Tribulation period. We must understand that the rapture of the Church will occur *seven years before* His return **WITH** His saints, to set up His kingdom on earth!

Back to our main question, "*Can Jesus return in our generation?*"

The "*generation*" which Jesus spoke of as the last generation of this Church age, will be marked by "*travail pains*" of world conflicts, famines, plagues, and *great* earthquakes. Could this be *our* generation?

Is our *generation* witnessing "*world racial conflicts*"? What about famines, plagues, and earthquakes?

I do not have to print quotations and statistics to show that "*famines*" are world-wide, major, problems of our "*generation*." Just read the newspaper, or watch television, and you will hear and see of the problems of world hunger in our generation.

I read just this week these statements, speaking of various famines around the world, "*Never in the history of the world has a condition of things existed comparable to the ghastly death by famine of whole millions of men, women, and children*". . . "*This famine is unparalleled*". . . "*The famine is beyond doubt the most appalling that has ever happened in the recorded history of man*."

Famines . . . and plagues!

Even without knowing the medical details of these plagues, one can certainly identify AIDS and STDS (*Sexually Transmitted Diseases*), as worldwide problems of "*our generation*." Since the first case of AIDS was reported in 1981, literally millions have been infected. Experts predict AIDS will infect **ten million people** by the year 2000.

Famines, plagues . . . and earthquakes!

And, the fourth part of this "*last generation sign*" is earthquakes. Seismologists tell us that something unusually is going on in nature during the 1990s. Some of the most disastrous "*natural*" catastrophes have

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occurred in both intensity and numbers. Killer earthquakes were "*very rare*" for centuries, numbering perhaps one each decade. The following chart shows how earthquakes have increased during the past five decades according to the U.S. Geological society:

1940s - 4 major, recorded, earthquakes
1950s - 9 major, recorded, earthquakes
1960s - 13 major, recorded, earthquakes

1970s - 56 major, recorded, earthquakes
1980s - 74 major, recorded, earthquakes

If race conflicts, (bringing rumors of war), famines, plagues, and earthquakes, effecting the whole world, are the four elements of the four-fold sign, which Jesus gives as **the** sign of the last generation before the end of the age, how much greater "sign" than what we are witnessing would one have to see before he would be convinced that this might be the last generation?

World-conflicts, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, all happening together in the same generation, is this taking place in our generation? Are these four unprecedented calamities happening in our generation? If our generation is not witnessing this sign, what kind of conflicts, famines, plagues, and earthquakes must be required for a generation to measure up to the sign Jesus gives?

How can we just brush aside the implications of this sign of our generation, as if things will continue on as they are forever?

I am not "date setting!" I cannot say dogmatically that Jesus will return in our generation, however, I do say that "our generation" has more legitimate reasons for believing that Jesus will return in our day than any previous generation!

A "generation" is both definite - and indefinite. Christ, with divine wisdom, uses a term that keeps us from setting a date as to His return. However, Jesus speaks of a certain critical epoch [*a particular period of time marked by distinctive features*] that would witness **the** sign of His return to earth again.

Interestingly, God revealed, not the day, but the *generation* in which He promised to bring Israel into the land of Canaan. Genesis 15:15-16, God said to Abraham, "*Thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the **fourth generation** they [Israel] shall come hither again.*"

God revealed, not the day, but the *generation*, in which Babylon would fall...when the "*times of the Gentiles*" would began and God would put world dominion into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Jeremiah 27:6-7 states, "*And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon...And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him.*" Clearly revealed in these verses is that the fall of Babylon would take place in the "*third*" generation. This prophecy was fulfilled in the lifetime of Belshazzar, the **grandson** of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5:30-31).

God revealed, not the day, but the generation when Christ would *first* appear on earth. Luke 2:26 states, "*It was revealed unto Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*"

God has revealed, not the day, but the "*generation*" in which Jesus will return to earth again!



1948 seems to me to have been a significant turning point in the hastening events of the last days with the year 1948.

In 1948 the State of Israel, after being scattered throughout the world for 2000 years, officially came into existence, a most significant even in the light of Bible Prophecy.

In 1948 the *National Council of Churches*, which could well be the beginning of the gathering together of all unbelieving churches mentioned in Revelation 17, was organized

In 1948 the *Common Market* began when the Hague Congress initiated a Council of Europe.

In 1948 communists over-ran Czechoslovakia and blockaded Berlin. These two events triggered formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In 1948 the Organization of American States (OAS) was formulated.

In 1948 the *space age* began.

In 1948 experiments with liquid hydrogen proved that a rocket could be sent beyond earth's gravitational pull.