

of those who are born about the time the first sign appears.

For this to be the specific sign the disciples were asking for, there would have to be a Biblical clue that gives us an idea of the time involved, and as it happens, there is a Biblical reference to the length of a person's life. **Psalm 90:10** says the length of our days is 70 years, or 80 if we have the strength. A look at current UN research confirms that 70 years is just about what the world wide average lifespan is today, with the longest lifespan averaging around 80. So there you have it.

When's He Coming?

In any countdown to the 2nd coming the year 1948 is viewed as the obvious starting point, because the rebirth of Israel is widely accepted as the preeminent sign of the end times. But as we've seen, the biggest mistake we've made is in adding only 40 years to 1948 when in fact a better number, based on Biblical evidence, is 70-80 years. That would put the 2nd coming somewhere between 2018 and 2028, within most of our lifetimes. Keep in mind that the rapture and 2nd coming are only related to the extent that one must precede the other. The Rapture of the Church is not a date specific event and it could literally happen any moment now. But there are still several other major events that must occur before the 2nd coming.

But to me the real kicker in the Matthew passage we began with is verse 35. Jesus said,

"Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt 24:35).

This is as strong a commitment as you'll find anywhere in Scripture. The Lord will return as promised, and soon. Even Heaven and Earth are not as permanent as His promise.

Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God.

The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords. (Revelation 19:11-16)

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(Written by Jack Kelley)

The Terminal Generation

"I tell you the truth, 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" (Matt 24:34-35).

Shortly after the "Left Behind" series ended, Tim La Haye and Jerry Jenkins published a non-fiction book called "Are We Living In The End Times?" in response to the many questions they received from folks who read their record breaking series. Their goal was to provide insights into Biblical prophecy that would help readers conclude that the correct answer to the question raised in their book's title is a resounding YES.

As I was reading the book, I came across a point that I think bears a closer look. It addresses the length of a Biblical generation and

is significant due to the popular (mis) interpretation of **Matt 24:34** referenced above. Many folks take this verse to mean that the Lord will return within the span of one generation from the time when the first sign appears.

This “one generation” idea has Biblical precedence since all the major prophecies pointing to the first coming were fulfilled within the generation in which the Lord was born. So right away everyone starts speculating on the length of a Biblical generation and that’s where the trouble starts.

But the terms “generation” and “life span” are not equivalent, and Jesus never said the signs would all be fulfilled within the span of one generation, but within the lifetimes of the generation being born when they begin. He said, *“this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”*

What’s A Generation?

When the Israelites refused to go into the Promised Land for fear of the Amorites the Lord condemned all the adults except for Caleb and Joshua to death. He said they’d wander in the desert one year for every day the 12 spies were in the land and during that time all the adults age 20 and over would die. The spies were in the land for 40 days so the term of punishment was set at 40 years. During that 40-year period, the Israelites conducted an average of 85 funerals each day to remind them

of their failure to obey until all the adults had died (**Num. 14**). This event led us to speculate that the length of a generation is 40 years when in fact the Lord had really limited the life span of those adult Israelites to coincide with the term of the punishment.

Then there’s the passage in Genesis where the Lord tells Abraham that his descendants would spend 400 years in Egypt as slaves before coming out with great wealth. And then “in the 4th generation your descendants will come back here (Canaan) for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (**Gen. 15:13-16**). This passage appears to equate 400 years with 4 generations, making a generation 100 years long, but this is not the case. The numbers 400 and 4 refer to two different things. True, the Israelites were in Egypt for about 400 years, but a careful study shows that after Moses led them out, the Israelites who finally crossed the Jordan with Joshua were the 4th generation from the one in which Moses was born.

This mystery can be solved with a quick trip to the dictionary, where the length of a generation is defined as “the average interval of time between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring.” These days no one would wait till age 40 to begin having children, but in Biblical times that was often the case. It took that long for men to learn a trade, build a home, and get

themselves financially secure enough to start a family. And of course the key to the definition lies in the word average, so we know we’re dealing with generalities here.

So What’s The Point?

There are three possible interpretations of **Matt. 24:34** based on the meaning of the Greek word translated “generation”. The first is that it applied to the generation alive when Jesus was speaking. But remember, the context of **Matt. 24** was the second coming and the end of the age, neither of which took place within the lifespan of the generation alive at the time.

The Greek word for “generation” can also mean “race” so some people interpret **Matt. 24:34** to mean that the Jewish race would not become extinct before the Lord returns. While this has been the case, it certainly doesn’t qualify as much of a sign to say that as long as there are Jewish people living on earth it means the Lord could come back.

The third and most logical interpretation of **Matt 24:34** is that the generation being born when the fulfilment of the end times signs begins would still be alive at the Lord’s return. Notice **Matt. 24:34** doesn’t say that no subsequent generations would be born, nor does it say that all the signs would be fulfilled before the birth of the next generation. It says the signs will be fulfilled within the lifetimes