



This Generation

Review

In the last chapter, I described Daniel's vision of the seventy weeks as it relates to Christ's Olivet Discourse. I made the case that Daniel's vision covered a wide range of prophetic events on this earth as they relate to Jerusalem and its temple. I demonstrated that Daniel's vision of the seventy weeks and Christ's sermon detailed two separate occasions when the temple will be desolated. The first desolation corresponds to the sixty-ninth week of Daniel and occurred during the fourth-kingdom Roman Empire, or the "legs of iron," in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed. This was a manifestation of God-ordained wrath directed against the unbelieving Jews who rejected their Messiah. This desolation was similar to the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians and is emphasized in Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse.

The second desolation emphasized in Matthew's account corresponds to the seventieth week of the seven-year Tribulation. This is when the desolator, or the Antichrist, enters a rebuilt temple claiming to be God and suspends all sacrifices. When Christians refuse to worship this false god, the Antichrist will make war against the saints during the Great Tribulation. After three and a half years, the Antichrist is destroyed and his reign of terror comes to an end. The completion of the seventy weeks culminates in Christ exercising his reign over this earth during an age of righteous humanity.

This Generation of Jews

Another often misunderstood section of the Olivet Discourse deals with the reference to “this generation” by Christ:

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, *this generation will not pass away until all these things take place*. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day and hour [of his second coming] no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. (Matt. 24:32–36)

Many theologians believe that the reference to all these things occurring in “this generation” is a reference to only the Jews of Christ’s generation who witnessed the temple’s destruction in AD 70. Therefore, there is only one desolation, and the Great Tribulation has already occurred. These theologians are known as partial preterists.

In one section of his Olivet Discourse, Christ is clearly addressing the Jews of his generation in reference to the temple being destroyed during their lifetime. This is indicated by his lament and pronouncement of judgment on the Jews for their rejection of him:

Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon *this generation* [the current generation]. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets . . . See, your house [the temple] is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 23:36–39)

The temple was destroyed about forty years later in AD 70, which would have been within the lifetime of the generation of unfaithful Jews who heard Christ’s lament and judgment. But as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, Daniel’s vision and the Olivet Discourse cover a much broader range of events than merely the destruction of the Second Temple. Daniel’s vision of the seventy weeks also includes the second desolation by the Antichrist when he enters

another temple, and the ultimate restoration of the Ezekiel temple in the messianic kingdom. The reference to “this generation,” therefore, is a reference to both the unfaithful generation in Christ’s day *as well as* a future generation of believing Jews who will experience the messianic kingdom.

Notice that in Christ’s pronouncement of judgment on the Jews of his generation for their unbelief, Christ includes a future generation of Jews who will repent and believe in him:

See, your house is left to you desolate [unbelieving Jews of Christ’s generation]. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord [a future generation of believing Jews].” (Matt. 23:39)

Indeed, there will be a future generation of Jews who will be “blessed” when they, too, believe in Christ.

Jeremiah

We know that Christ was preaching from the book of Daniel, but there is every reason to believe that he was also preaching from the book of Jeremiah in his extended discourse on the events that will occur on this earth before he comes again. In fact, Christ was probably referring to Jeremiah’s understanding of the Jews when he used the phrase “this generation.” Jeremiah described two generations of the Jews. The generation of his day was hardhearted and unfaithful to their covenant with God. They refused to listen to him and to the other prophets God sent. Their transgressions would lead to the destruction of its temple and to their exile. But Jeremiah described another future generation of Jews that will be blessed by God. These “offspring” will be given a new heart under a new covenant. As faithful believers, they will prosper in a restored Jerusalem in the messianic kingdom. In the following passage, Jeremiah described these two different kinds of generations of Jews, beginning with the unfaithful Jews of his generation:

“And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm [unfaithful generation attacked by the Babylonians and sent into

exile], . . . Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah [a faithful generation], . . . For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: “If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.” . . . “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD [Jerusalem restored in the messianic kingdom].” (Jer. 31:28–38)

Despite God having brought them out of bondage in Egypt into the promised land, the Jews in Jeremiah’s day proved to be unfaithful to their covenant with God. As a result, God disciplined them by allowing the Babylonians to sack Jerusalem, destroy their temple, and take them into exile. A similar generation of unfaithful Jews existed in Jesus’ day. When they rejected the Messiah that God sent to them, God used the Romans to sack Jerusalem and destroy the Second Temple.

But someday “the offspring of Israel,” or another generation of Jews, will have faith and will believe in their Messiah. They will experience a new covenant of forgiveness and righteousness springing from a new heart. In this “new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,” God will forgive their iniquity, forget their past sins, and put his law within their hearts so they can obey his commandments. As a result of this change of heart and spiritual transformation, he will be their God, and they will be his righteous people. This leads to the nation’s restoration in the messianic kingdom and an age of righteous humanity “when the city [and its temple] shall be rebuilt for the Lord.” These prophecies concerning this future generation of the righteous “offspring of Israel” inheriting the messianic kingdom are as certain to occur as the fixed operation of the sun, moon, and stars of the heavens and of the earth.

Notice the striking similarities between Jeremiah's reference to the certainty of these prophecies and Christ's:

Jeremiah said: "Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, . . . 'If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.'" (Jer. 31:35-36)

Jesus said: "Truly, I say to you, this generation [of unfaithful and faithful Jews] will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Matt. 24:34-35)

Christ assigns the highest degree of certainty to the fulfillment of these prophecies, for he proclaims that all the prophecies related to unfaithful and faithful generations of Israel are as certain to be fulfilled on this earth as the continued existence and operation of the Genesis heavens and earth!

There was a remnant of faithful Jews in Jesus' day but most of that generation of Jews was hardhearted, blind, unregenerate, and unfaithful. This was true despite the many miraculous signs and wonders that Christ performed. He also demonstrated his love, compassion, and forgiveness in numerous ways and revealed to them an extensive knowledge of the truth about God and the Scriptures. Jesus warned them that it will be more bearable for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for the Jews who ignored this overwhelming evidence and refused to believe in him.

Based on the book of Jeremiah, Christ was saying there are two generations of Israel related to Jerusalem, its temple, and the future. The generation of his day, like the one in Jeremiah's day, killed the prophets sent to them and remained unfaithful. As a result of their hardness of heart, that generation of unfaithful Israel would experience the destruction of their temple in their lifetime as foretold by Daniel. This would be for the horrible transgression of having rejected their own Messiah despite clear evidence that he was in their midst. In the meantime, the baton has passed to believing Gentiles who are experiencing the new covenant.

Another generation, their offspring, however, will respond to the gospel and experience the “new covenant” as faithful believers in the Lord when they say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 23:39). They will experience the restoration of Israel, Jerusalem, and its temple in the messianic kingdom. The nation of Israel will continue to play a strategic role in God’s endgame as long as this Genesis creation exists.

Isaiah also foresaw a future generation of the offspring of Israel who will be given new hearts, which leads to the restoration:

“And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob *who turn from transgression*,” declares the LORD. “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.” (Isa. 59:20–21)

Isaiah foresaw a future generation of faithful Jews who will “turn from transgression.” They will become believers filled with the Holy Spirit. This will lead to the redemption of Israel and the messianic kingdom.

Paul also wrote that the Jews in his day were an unbelieving generation. But based on his reading of Isaiah, Paul foresaw the day when the “offspring of Israel” will experience the new covenant and be given new hearts and minds:

For if you [repentant Gentiles] were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these [repentant Jews], the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel [unrepentant Jews], until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written [in Isaiah], “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins [repentant Jews].” (Rom. 11:24–27)

Based on his reading of Isaiah, Paul described two generations of his fellow Jews: the Jews of his day, who were largely unrepentant and hostile to Christ and the gospel, and a future generation of Jews, who will repent and believe in their Messiah. Paul connected this future generation of repentant Jews to the time when Christ will deliver Israel. And, as predicted by Isaiah, they will then experience the messianic kingdom of righteousness. After the fulfillment of all these things pertaining to Israel and this age, the end of the age is at hand and the second coming “is near, at the very gates”—when heaven and earth will disappear and be replaced with the eternal new heavens and new earth.

Summary

Christ taught that there are two generations of Israel related to Jerusalem, its temple, and the future. The generation of his day, like the one in Jeremiah’s day, was unregenerate and unrepentant and killed the prophets sent to them. As foretold by Daniel, this unfaithful generation will see another destruction of their temple in their lifetime. Another generation, their offspring, will repent and respond to the gospel. They will experience the “new covenant” and be filled with the Holy Spirit. This generation will be blessed when they experience the restoration of Israel, Jerusalem, and its temple in the messianic kingdom during an age of righteous humanity. These prophecies relative to Israel and their offspring are as certain to occur as the fixed operations of the sun and the moon.