

**Defending the Fixed-Period Perspective of
“Generation” in Matthew 24:34:
An Engagement with the Dispensational-
Ethnic Approach of J.B. Hixson**

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Abstract

When reading the Olivet Discourse, one major consideration is what precisely is meant when Jesus said, “This generation shall not pass away...” (Matthew 24:34) J.B. Hixson, in an attempt to unify the Dispensational hermeneutic across the board, proposed that the term “generation” refers to the race of the Jewish people. In this essay, that proposal is directly engaged and refuted through three main points of argument: First, a linguistic argument in contrast to that proposition is given. Then, a Scriptural argument in contrast is given against it. Finally, a refutation of Hixson’s argument directly is made. Readers of preterist, futurist, historicist, and idealist perspectives will all benefit from the counterproposal herein made, which is that “this generation” refers to a period of time rather than a race or cohort of people. If correct, this conclusion could serve to support the conception of the application of the Olivet Discourse to the intervening period between Christ’s crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, or the whole 2000+ year inter-advent period, or the 7-year Tribulation period, depending on one’s eschatological perspective.

The value of this essay comes in its scriptural and exegetical dependency, and in its hitherto unheralded conclusion. While several other interpretations of the phrase “this generation” have been forwarded, the proposition herein made has gone

largely (if not entirely) unrecognized in scholarly and popular literature.

Key Words: Olivet Discourse, Preterism, Futurism, Dispensationalism, Generation.

Introduction

For the better part of two centuries, great debate has occurred over the meaning of the Olivet Discourse. In fact, outside of the book of Revelation as a whole, there may not be a portion of Scripture more hotly debated and more generally disagreed upon than the Olivet Discourse as it exists in the Synoptic Gospels. Even within this broad argument, there are several varied perspectives on the interpretative method to be used when approaching eschatology, such as the Preterist, Historicist, Idealist, and Futurist views.¹ Yet, there is one passage that causes strife not only across these various views, but even within them: namely, the meaning of the phrase “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 (as well as Luke 21:32). Some have endeavored to collect the thoughts of only one sect within an individual perspective in order to establish a majority opinion, such as J.B. Hixson – a notable dispensational author and scholar – who collected the writings of various dispensational (futurist) theologians over the course of the last 150 years, only to conclude that there was no majority opinion on the matter.²

With widely varying interpretations represented in Hixson’s findings, one perspective was notably unrepresented. Many believed that “generation” could mean “race” or “people group”

¹ It could be noted that other positions are ever presenting themselves, such as the increasingly popular *eclectic* approach. These four positions are named because of their widespread popularity, as recognized in Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013) and Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 26-28.

² J.B. Hixson, “The Meaning of ‘This Generation’ in Matthew 24:34”. Accessed via notbywords.org. 2 May 2021.

while others believed that it meant “cohort”, but in a passing statement it was revealed that William Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich, authors of the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, asserted that “generation means age or period of time.”³ This perspective seems to be as likely as any other, and plausibly defensible through linguistic examination and scriptural exegesis. The opposing views also seem to be feasibly refuted with equal thoroughness. For these reasons, it will be herein argued that when Christ used the phrase “this generation”, he was referring to a period of time rather than a group of people. It should be noted that this conclusion does not necessitate either preterism or futurism but could be helpful in clarifying the debate between and amongst the proponents of each.

To introduce the pertinent terms, the Greek phrase most frequently rendered by the English word “generation” in Matthew 24:34 is the word *genea*.⁴ The word in its normative form is used in the Greek New Testament over 40 times and is translated regularly as the English word “generation.” It is noteworthy that this word is most frequently taken to mean generation, as the NASB and other translations render this word as “kind” in Luke 16:8, and this lone exception could be used as an argument for imprecision of understanding on the proper rendering of *genea*. Nonetheless, even with a broadly accepted rendering of the word, there is still some speculation as to the exact meaning of “generation.” One Greek-English lexicon states that there are “three possible meanings of *genea* relevant to the discussion at hand.” The first is that which implies that “*genea*” means “a race, kind, clan, or nation” which seems to be the favored view of the minority translation in the NASB’s Luke 16:8. The second is that it represents a cohort of

³ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Cambridge, 1957), 153.

⁴ Differences exist on the pertinence of the words surrounding the single word *genea*. Some, such as Nelson, place primary importance on *ἡ γενεα αὐτῆ* (*he genea haute*), while others such as Kidder find enough information in the lone word *γενεα* to formulate a perspective.

people within a contemporary era (such as the Baby-Boomers or the Millennials, for a modern equivalent). The third is that *it* can represent “a generation of time, or period of time.”⁵ Both the sufficiency and exclusivity of these three categories are supported by other scholars in more recent literature.⁶

The Linguistic Argument

While it is true that the first two views have enjoyed much more popularity in the theological community thus far, it seems that the ongoing conflict between and amongst advocates of both views would imply dissatisfaction and unfulfillment being found in those views. Prior to the structured development of these viewpoints, theologians regularly referenced the fact that the phrase “this generation” as used in Matthew 24:34 was to be taken as meaning a period of time rather than a group of people. Take, for instance, famed Baptist theologian and predecessor to Charles Spurgeon, John Gill. Gill writes in his *Exposition of the Entire Bible* regarding Matthew 24:34, that “this generation” does not represent “the generation of men in general... nor the generation or people of the Jews... nor the generation of Christians... but it respects that present age.”⁷ The word “age” as used by Gill is obviously indicative of a period of time, as juxtaposed with the word that he uses to describe a cohort of people, “generation of...” Furthermore, one may look to Albert Barnes, the famed Princeton Theologian, who notes that in reference to this passage, generation means “this age; A generation is about thirty or forty years.”⁸ Clearly, Barnes and Gill would agree that “generation” is synonymous with “age” in

⁵ William Arndt, et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 154.

⁶ George E. Meisinger, “The Parable of the Fig Tree” in *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal 2* (1996), 2-3.

⁷ John Gill, “Matthew 24:34” in *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible* (1763).

⁸ Albert Barnes, *Barnes New Testament Notes* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Book House, 1949), 414.

terms of indicating a period of time rather than being related to a group of people.

Advocates of other views, such as those who claim that generation should rightly be interpreted as meaning a race or family of people, argue that the word “*genea*” should be treated as synonymous with the Greek word “*genos*.”⁹ However, the word “*genea*” is used deliberately. First of all, argue H.D.M. Spence and Joseph Exell, the word is used in order that Christ should not “indefinitely postpone a period of infinite importance to his hearers.”¹⁰ That is to say, if Christ had spoken of “this generation” in relation to the race of the Jews or Christians, neither specification would have served any purpose in helping the hearers understand the nearness of His coming. Second of all, argue both Neil Nelson and Larry Pettegrew, the usage of the specific word “*genea*” cannot be interpreted as synonymous with “*genos*” because of the primary pejorative force of the phrase “*he genea*.”¹¹ This force implies that there is a negative connotation applied to the word “generation” which means that whatever generation is being spoken of, it is one trademarked by wickedness and a refusal of the kingship of Christ.¹² Rather, says Nelson, Christ uses the word “*genea*” intentionally, to draw “deliberate connections to the two most notorious generations in the Old Testament: the generation of the flood and the generation of the wilderness wanderings.”¹³ Finally, George Meisinger argues that there is no “clear use” of the word “*genea*” in the New Testament in which it is to mean a race of people.¹⁴

⁹ See Larry D. Pettegrew, “Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse” in *The Masters Seminary Journal* 13:2 (Fall 2002), 186.

¹⁰ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph Exell, “Matthew 24:34” in *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950).

¹¹ Neil D. Nelson, Jr., “‘This Generation’ in Matthew 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective” in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 38:3 (September 1996): 373-385; Pettegrew, “Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse”, 186.

¹² Pettegrew, “Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse,” 186.

¹³ Nelson, “This Generation,” 373.

¹⁴ Meisinger, “The Parable of the Fig Tree,” 2-3.

Therefore, by way of linguistic examination, the word “*genea*” has not historically, nor can it now be taken to mean a race or family of people because of its connection to the word “*genos*”, and Meisinger would seem to assert that there is no place where it can be taken to mean that at all.

There is, on the other hand, ample reason to interpret the word “*genea*” as meaning a period of time. Joseph Kidder argues that while some may make strong arguments for the interpretation of the word meaning something other than time-period in Matthew’s 23rd Chapter, there is a clear presupposition in Matthew’s 24th and 25th Chapters that “*genea*” is to “entail a period of time.”¹⁵ Some may hear this and respond that the hermeneutical method utilized must be applied universally across the book, such that the meaning of “*genea*” in Matthew 23 would have to be the same as that in Matthew 24 and 25. But there are nearly no scholars of any perspective that hold that to be the case. In fact, Matthew 24:34 is such a unique case that J.B. Hixson admits in his survey of the various interpretations of the phrase that in his own viewpoint, all other usages of the word “generation” can be taken to “refer to a literal generation of people living at the same time... with the exception of the usage of the phrase in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:34).”¹⁶ Hixson, an adamant dispensationalist, is a member of the perspective that would require the most famously literal interpretative method, and yet even he has to admit that in the case of Matthew 24:34, the phrase takes on meaning that is at least somewhat abnormal. This is particularly interesting when it is noted that the exact Greek phrase “*he genea haute*” as found in Matthew 24:34, is also found five other times in the Gospel of Matthew alone. Yet, this case is generally agreed upon as being somewhat different in meaning from the others. While Hixson uses irregularity to critique one of the two alternatives to his view, he does not at all address the third option which is

¹⁵ S. Joseph Kidder, “‘This Generation’ in Matthew 24:34” in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21:3 (Autumn 1983): 203-209.

¹⁶ Hixson, “The Meaning of ‘This Generation,’” 21.

that endorsed by Arndt and Gingrich, that “generation means age or period of time without specifying how long.”¹⁷

Arndt and Gingrich assert that the meaning of Christ’s words in Matthew 24:34 would be “this age shall not pass.”¹⁸ This phrase “pass” is also linguistically useful in terms of identifying the intended meaning of the word “*genea*”. The Greek word translated “pass” is *pareleusentai* (normative *parerchomai*) and is defined as “to pass away, to come to an end.”¹⁹ Many scholars, such as Gill, have pointed out that this phrase would not have been used to describe a group of people, particularly those reasonably likely to be in question in Matthew 24:34.²⁰ A cursory look at the next immediate verse in Matthew 24 will give a better understanding of the implied meaning of this phrase. In Matthew 24:35, Christ says, “Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” Neither of the antecedents of the phrase “pass away” are living things that are likely to die. They are existing creations which will meet their end. It stands to reason, then, that Christ’s usage of this phrase can be considered consistent from one verse to the next, and that the “generation” or age that shall not pass is not a group of people, but rather an existing thing that will not meet its end, that is, it is a period of time that will not come to completion until “all these things” be fulfilled. This is consistent with other usages of the word “*genea*” as found in the Bible, as in Ephesians 3:21 where it is rightfully translated “ages”, as well as in Colossians 1:26 where it is likewise translated “ages”. In both cases, the word refers to undefined periods of time, with the actual cohort of people within those periods of time losing their importance.²¹

¹⁷ Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ J. Schneider, “Parerchomai” in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 581-682.

²⁰ Gill, *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*. “Matthew 24:34”

²¹ Meisinger, “The Parable of the Fig Tree” 2-3.

The Scriptural Argument

With a thorough linguistic argument thus made, one must make an examination of the pertinent Scriptures themselves. Contrary to the assertion of some advocates of other perspectives, such as Hixson, Matthew 24:34 should not be examined in a vacuum as though it has no other Scriptures to assist in exegeting the correct meaning.²² Rather, some have claimed that Matthew 24:34 is actually “the third of three Matthean time-indicators” which would connect it not only to other scriptures, but would also firmly ground its meaning in time rather than the alternatives.²³ It can be rightly deduced that much of the confusion regarding the meaning of “this generation” stems from this lack of connection to other scriptures. Joseph Kidder succinctly points out that “seldom, if ever, is there any significant attempt to relate the term to the rest of the chapter.”²⁴ To bridge this gap in interpretation, a brief look at the surrounding verses is merited in order to establish further contextual insights.

First, one may consider verses 32-33, which are usually called simply “the Parable of the Fig Tree.” Hixson establishes that the understanding of many scholars of the 20th Century was skewed by the reestablishment of the nation of Israel towards believing that this parable relates to the Jews being reestablished in Israel. Further, he rightly asserts that the parable has more to do with chronology than ethnicity.²⁵ He is in line with the interpretation of John MacArthur, who holds that the parable serves to indicate that Christ is near.²⁶ This stripping of the Parable of the Fig Tree of its ethnic association is fitting, as in Luke 21:29 it is attested that Christ added, “and

²² Hixson, “The Meaning of “This Generation””, 21.

²³ Richard Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or Futurist?” in *The Masters Seminary Journal* 14:1 (Spring 2003), 20-21.

²⁴ Kidder, “This Generation,” 203.

²⁵ Hixson, “the Meaning of “This Generation””, 21.

²⁶ John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28 New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1989), 62.

all the other trees” to his discussion. John Walvoord even points out that those who would hold that the fig tree is representative of Israel regularly “offer no proof” but rather “accept their interpretation as self-evident.”²⁷ Given these assertions from dispensationalists like Hixson, MacArthur, and Walvoord, it should be taken as no great leap to say that the term “generation”, although widely taken to have connections to an ethnic group, should also be stripped of such a connotation in light of the same method being applied only a verse before. Simply put, if the fig tree in verse 33 does not mean anything ethnic, then it is reasonable to assert that the “generation” in verse 34 does not either.

If one is willing to accept such reasoning, then the conclusion would seem to be equally acceptable. The fig tree is not connected to an ethnic group, but rather is connected to a period of time. This flows naturally with the rest of the content in the Olivet Discourse, which overwhelmingly focuses on exhorting the hearers to be watchful and prepared. There is no need, then, to disconnect this general theme from verse 34. The phrase “generation” should also be treated as relating not to an ethnic group, but to a period of time.

Continuing past verse 34 into verse 35, one will see another phrase already discussed in part. Christ’s claim that “Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” indicates that the end of the generation spoken of in verse 34 is both possible, and due to occur at the time when “all these things shall be fulfilled”. From other scriptures (specifically 2 Peter 3:10) it can be reasonably assumed that the current Heaven and Earth will indeed “pass away” out of existence. Still other scriptures (such as 1 Peter 1:25) attest that the Word of God shall never pass away. Thus, when Christ says that “this generation shall not pass *till* all these things be fulfilled” He is attesting to the fact that whatever “this generation” is, it is not

²⁷ John Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part IV” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:513 (Jan 1972), 21.

like the Word of God, but rather will pass away out of existence like the Heavens and Earth. If this refers to the Jews or the Christians, this is quite an ominous verse indeed, as it leads to the conclusion that the people of God will at some point no longer exist. If it refers to a cohort of people, the conclusion is no better.²⁸ But if “generation” means a period of time, then there is total satisfaction, as time indeed will pass away in eternity.

If the examination of the passage is continued, one will stumble upon the rationale which prompted Neil Nelson’s claim about Christ’s deliberate usage of the word “*genea*,” which he asserted was intended to draw the mind to the two most notorious generations then known – the generation of the flood and the generation of the wandering in the wilderness.²⁹ There is something noteworthy about these two examples in particular, if Nelson is correct about the intention behind Christ’s choice of words. Both of these generations are defined not by their cohort of people, nor by the race of people that they were composed of, but by a period of time.

First, look to the generation of the flood. In the days of the flood, the individuals then alive began to sinfully intermarry (Genesis 6:4), but even in that, there is a manifestation that the *race* of the human species was of no noteworthy consequence.³⁰ Rather than their race, their actions provoked God. The cohort of people alive during the coming of the flood was also of no consequence because there is no note of what they were like

²⁸ There may or may not be implications of real consequence in accepting either of these previous assumptions, depending on what it means to “no longer exist.” Annihilationism may be the ultimate conclusion of those views, which would place them outside of mainline Christianity historically and contemporarily.

²⁹ Nelson, “This Generation,” 373.

³⁰ Time does not permit an explanation of the various interpretations of *who* these individuals were, “the sons of God and the daughters of man,” but whether they were Cainites and Sethites, women and angels, or women and royals (the three most prominent interpretive positions) the racial question is a non-factor.

other than their wickedness. However, there is specific testimony to how long the “generation” of the flood was: 120 years (Genesis 6:3). The coming of the flood was not contingent on any race or class, nor any cohort, nor any final event that served as a trigger point upon which the flood was to come. When the 120 years were up, God came to Noah and told him, “yet seven days and I will cause it to rain.” (Genesis 7:4). The time period was the deciding factor. The people faded into the fray.

Secondly, Christ addresses the generation of the wandering in the wilderness. There was no race or ethnicity to take note of in that group, as they are noted to have come out of Egypt as a “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38). There were various ethnicities and races integrated into the Israelite nation, such as Moses’ Cushite (Ethiopian) wife (Numbers 12:1). Thus, this generation could not be defined as an ethnicity. Rather, when God spoke to Moses regarding this group and their ensuing wandering to come, he clearly defined it with a well-defined time construct. Numbers 14:34 reads, “After the number of days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.” There was no race or even individual that God waited for to die before saying that the generation of wandering in the wilderness could return to the Promised Land. It was not the cohort that God was regarding, but rather the period of time. Hence, in both of the most obvious instances that Christ would have appealed to in order to make His point, the generation spoken of was not one of a race of people, nor was it one of a cohort of individuals living alongside one another but was a specific period of time assigned by God to be fulfilled according to His plan.

While Hixson fails to address this concept in his research, it should be noted that many of those whom he quotes as being advocates of the two other views may just as well have been advocating for the time-bound perspective. Take, for example,

Emil Guers, who Hixson asserts fits into the class of those believing that the proper interpretation is to identify the generation as an “evil class of people who will oppose Jesus’ disciples until the day he returns.”³¹ He derives this assumption from a quote by Guers who labelled that final generation a “wicked generation.”³² However, this is hardly enough to surmise that he held that the word “generation” exclusively referred to the cohort of people alive at that time. After all, the Bible is not at all bereft of examples of periods of time being referred to as “evil” or “wicked”. Take for example Ephesians 5:16, which compels Christians to spend their lives “redeeming the time because the days are evil.” Surely Paul did not mean for the word “days” to be interpreted as referring to a race of people, or a cohort of those living in the time in questions. Elsewhere, in Galatians 1:4, Paul also writes that “[Christ] gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.” This passage actually provides more evidence for the correct interpretation of Matthew 24:34, as the word translated “world” is the Greek word *aion* which is typically translated “age,” but always refers to a period of time. However, if the method of interpretation as prescribed by some scholars was taken, this statement would imply that the Apostle Paul had either described himself as having need of being delivered from a “present evil race” or a “present evil group of people” of which he was a member. Surely, neither of these fits the meaning of what Paul intended, as he was not a member of an “evil race,” else the Bible be made racially prejudiced, nor was Paul a member of an “evil group of people” as he was redeemed when he wrote Galatians. Therefore, the best interpretation is to say that, as with Ephesians 5:16 and Matthew 24:34, the intended “age” or “generation” is the period of time in question, not a group of people or race.

³¹ Hixson, “The Meaning of ‘This Generation’”, 31.

³² Emil Guers, *Israel in the Last Days of the Present Economy* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt, 1862), 363-364.

Examining Counter Arguments

With a firm linguistic and scriptural foundation built, look at the arguments to the contrary. Hixson states that several historical theologians have defended the view that the generation in question refers to the cohort of those alive in the end. However, as he did with Guers, he imposes his own view onto those that he reads. One example is that of Stanley Toussaint, who stated that “the same generation that sees the beginning will see the end.”³³ This is hardly specific enough to gain any insight into such a particular meaning. Dwight Pentecost is treated with the same type of presumption. Rather than elaborating to give a specific stance on the various perspectives, Pentecost only states that “since these signs will all occur in the seven years of Daniel’s seventieth week, this generation that sees the beginning of these signs will ‘not pass away until all these things have happened’, for they will all fall within a brief span of time.”³⁴ With Pentecost’s emphasis on the time frames such as Daniel’s seventieth week and the seven years of the Tribulation Period, as well as his final note of this all falling “within a brief span of time”, it would appear that he may in fact have favored the time-bound interpretation rather than the others as Hixson asserts.

One interesting quotation on the topic came from A.C. Gaebelein, who stated in favor of the view that “generation” meant cohort of those living that “this verse [24:34] has also the meaning that the people living, when the end of the Jewish age sets in, will behold its termination; it will all be accomplished in a small space of time.”³⁵ This is interesting because of the phrase, “also has the meaning.” This phrase implies that he had

³³ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 279.

³⁴ Dwight Pentecost and John Danilson, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan Academic, 2000), 405.

³⁵ A.C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition 2* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1907), 514.

a joined belief regarding the meaning of this phrase. What was this two-sided belief? First, that it referred to a cohort of people (as he says, “the people living”). Second, that it referred to a period of time (as he says in similitude to Pentecost, “a small space of time). Gaebelein and Pentecost’s views provoke an interesting thought, which is that a possible reason for their hesitance to embrace the view that “generation” means a period of time is the imprecise nature of that period. Those who have previously embraced the concept that this word refers to a period of time have often felt the need to define exactly how long that period of time will be, but have developed no consensus.

Trying to define “*genea*” in terms of how many years it is understood to entail has led to much confusion. Barnes noted that “a generation is about thirty or forty years.”³⁶ This is in opposition to the position of Johann Bengel, who claims that “the Jews, however, (as, for example, in Seder Olam), reckon seventy-five years as one generation...”³⁷ Walvoord defined it most broadly, saying that it normally means “a period of thirty to one hundred years.”³⁸ One can easily see that there is anything but a consensus on what exactly the definition of a generation would be in terms of years if one desires to take that approach. From only a few noteworthy scholars, one may believe that it is 30, 40, 75, or up to 100 years, without any real clues as to which is most reliable. Factor in, also, that the generation of the flood is referred to with the same word and that generation lasted 120 years, and the problems are only compounded.

However, does the failure to define *exactly* how long a generation is serve to defeat the argument that the phrase “this generation” in 24:34 refers to a period of time? Certainly not. To deny that there is a determined amount of time escribed to

³⁶ Barnes, *Barnes New Testament Notes*, 414.

³⁷ Johann A. Bengel, “Matthew 24:34” in *Gnomen of the New Testament* (1742), 1062.

³⁸ John Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974), 193.

a period simply because the exact length of that period of time is unknown would be foolish. Grasping this realization, D.A. Carson writes in his exposition of Matthew, “Even if ‘generation’ by itself can have a slightly larger semantic range, to make ‘this generation’ refer to all believers in every age...is highly artificial.”³⁹ Indeed, if argumentation leads to the conclusion that “this generation” refers to a period of time, the failure to recognize the logical necessity that every period of time has a beginning and an end even if that beginning and end is not known is certainly not a strong enough refutation to defeat the argument. Even scholars that Hixson himself quotes as advocating for the cohort view have given nothing more than this line of argumentation, such as Alva McClain.⁴⁰ McClain does not at all explicitly claim to support the cohort view, but is assumed to because of his statement that “the events in the end time will not be interminably drawn out. Once [the events] begin, the same ‘generation’ will see their full accomplishment.”⁴¹ Rather than defending the cohort view, McClain’s statement defends the view that the period of time in which this generation is said to pass will not be “interminably drawn out”, that is, it has a defined beginning and end, and that the same “generation” that sees the beginning will see the end. The association of this statement with a group of people is entirely imposed upon the statement. The same could be done with any of the three views if this quote is removed from its context, but looking at the surrounding statements, McClain’s emphasis on the time-bound nature of this period seems to best

³⁹ D.A. Carson, “Matthew” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Vol. 8. Ed. Frank Ely Gaebelin and J.D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 507.

⁴⁰ Hixson, “The Meaning of This Generation”, 54.

⁴¹ Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God As Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1968), 366.

support the view that the “generation” spoken of is a period of time and not a group of people.

It seems then that those who would argue against the view that “generation” refers to a period of time simply assume that statements made by famed theologians of the past imply their own view, rather than their opposition’s. One primary example is Hixson’s claim that Darrell Bock held to a cohort view because of a quote from his study on Luke in which he said, “this generation refers to the future tribulation generation.”⁴² This quote, once more, does not at all assert that Bock held to a cohort view. There is simply a lack of representation for the time-bound view. Perhaps this is nowhere better shown than in Richard Mayhue’s examination of the “seven plausible views” of Matthew 24:34. Among these views, Mayhue claims that one of the most plausible views to have arisen is that Jesus was wrong, and yet he does not list the time-bound perspective as one of the seven views most plausible.⁴³ Theologians are more acquainted with the view that Christ was wrong than that He may have spoken in terms of time, despite the great evidence herein given for the view.

Conclusion

The phrase “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 has been called “the most difficult phrase to interpret in this complicated eschatological discourse.”⁴⁴ The difficulty in interpreting this phrase is in no small part compounded by the fact that the various perspectives and possible interpretations are often not given transparently. While Mayhue claims to examine the seven “most plausible” interpretations of this phrase, he does not even recognize one of the three views that Arndt and Gingrich list as being plausible, despite these same three being labelled by

⁴² Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 344.

⁴³ Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or Futurist?”, 21.

⁴⁴ J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 2* (Garden City, MI: Doubleday, 1981), 1353.

Meisinger as the *only* plausible interpretations.⁴⁵ With a general failure to address one of the views, it should come as no surprise that this view is broadly unheard of. Yet, the view being unheard of does not eliminate it from contention, as the viewpoints of those who are said to oppose the view, such as Toussaint, Pentecost, Gaebelien, McClain, and Bock, never explicitly define what they mean by “generation” in clear enough terms to definitively state that they would oppose the time-bound view. Their statements could just as easily be attributed to supporting the view as criticizing it.

Furthermore, the scriptural evidence seems to be strongly in support of the view. By examining the immediately surrounding verses of Matthew 24:34, it has been argued that Christ was speaking in terms of time rather than ethnicity, and that this understanding of intent should be universally applied throughout verses 32-35. Looking on to Christ’s reference of generations elsewhere in the chapter, it has been shown that He explicitly spoke of the generation that preceded the flood, and implicitly spoke of the generation of the wandering in the wilderness. The argument that these generations could be recognized as racial or ethnic groups fails, as does the argument that these generations are representative of cohorts of people. These generations are clearly defined as inhabitants of specific periods of time. The absence of a specific timeframe from Christ concerning the “generation” spoken of in Matthew 24:34 was also shown as being insufficient reasoning to refute the argument as a whole.

Finally, the linguistic framework of the passage has been shown to be in support of the time-bound perspective as well. While Matthew 24:34 has been widely recognized as the exception to the rule in terms of understanding the meaning of the Greek word “*genea*”, it is not such an exception that it does not have

⁴⁵ Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or Futurist?”, 21; Arndt and Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 153; Meisinger. “The Parable of the Fig Tree,” 2-3.

a parallel, as Hixson claims.⁴⁶ Rather, the meaning of the word can be gleaned through examining other passages of the like. Without any obvious or regular connection of the words “*genea*” and “*genos*” as is sometimes claimed, and with the pejorative force that is applied by Christ to the phrase “*genea*”, it seems impossible to interpret the phrase as if it refers to a race of people. Its other usage in Pauline literature of the New Testament would make greatly difficult the interpretation that it refers to a cohort or race of people. Thus, the only feasible interpretation is that it refers to a period of time. This is further strengthened by the ensuing Greek word “*parerchomai*” which would rarely be applied to a person or group of individuals and would regularly be applied to the passing of a period of time, as has been shown.

Thus, through linguistic and scriptural examinations, the argument in favor of the time-bound interpretation of Christ’s words “this generation” has been shown to be very strong. In contrast, the arguments in favor of the opposing views have been shown to be both unlikely and weakly developed. Oftentimes, the so-called advocates of opposing views have said nothing that would actually affirm their opposition to the time-bound view at all, meaning that they could not be taken as experts in opposition or support of any view in particular. Perhaps the time-bound view is the answer to the difficulties experienced within the various interpretive views of the Olivet Discourse, but “*few there be that find it.*”

⁴⁶ Hixson, “The Meaning of ‘This Generation’”, 21.

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