

This Generation Shall Not Pass

By Frank Zimmerman

Matthew 24

³⁴ Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

THERE was a common misunderstanding prevalent among Adventists in the mid to late 1800's, that the "generation" referred to in this prophecy given by Christ, was a period of time, covering the average lifespan of a human on this earth (i.e. about 70 years). Most likely the length of this "lifespan" was based on texts such as:

Psalms 90

¹⁰ The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Josiah Litch dated the "generation" from the dark day of 1780, and wrote in 1842:

But if it is understood of a generation of *threescore years and ten*, the age of man, and applied to those who saw the beginning of these signs, sixty-two years ago, then seventy years, or a generation, will not pass away before the last event will take place. About seven years more remain of the generation; but they cannot be fulfilled before Christ comes, without destroying his word of promise.¹

James White wrote, in 1868:

And the very generation of men that live after the three great signs are fulfilled, and who hear and reject the warning message, will drink the unmingled cup of the wrath of God. And those of this very generation who receive the message, suffer disappointment and endure the trials of the waiting

¹ Josiah Litch, *Prophetic Expositions*, Vol. 1, Chap. 5: "The Signs of the Times".

position, will witness the coming of Christ, and exclaim, “Lo! this is our God, we have waited for him.”²

J. N. Loughborough explained it this way:

The Lord’s appointed time for the people to learn a parable of the fig-tree dates this side of 1833. Here is the Lord’s time for the world to be aroused to the great truth that his coming is at the doors, and that his coming will be before the generation who hear that parable shall pass away.³

And again here:

The last of these events—the falling of the stars—was fulfilled in 1833. Since that date we have entered upon the last generation, the generation that shall not pass away until Christ shall come.⁴

Stephen Haskell said:

- Luke 21:28-31. The signs began to come to pass in 1780, and now they have come to pass.
- Matt. 24:33, margin. Saviour at the door.
- Luke 21:32; Matt. 24:34. This generation shall not pass till all these things are fulfilled. DA 632. It must be either the generation addressed by the Saviour or the generation that saw the signs fulfilled.
- Luke 11:29. The generation living in Christ’s day had only one sign, and therefore could not be the one that would not pass away until all things were fulfilled. DA 632, 406.
- Matt. 24:35. God’s word can not fail. DA 234-235.
- Luke 21:34-36. Need of preparation.⁵

A. T. Jones wrote:

And the very generation of men that live after, the three great signs are fulfilled, and who hear and reject the warning

² James White, *Life Incidents*, “Present Position and Work,” 1868.

³ J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement*, Chapter V, “The Second Advent Message,” 1905.

⁴ J. N. Loughborough, *Last Day Tokens*, Chapter 4, “The Last Generation,” 1904.

⁵ Stephen Haskell, *Bible Handbook*, “Second Advent of Christ,” 1919.

message of Heaven, will drink the cup of the unmingled wrath of God.⁶

Jones wrote yet more clearly:

It is a solemn to contemplate, yet we firmly believe it is truth, the signs have been fulfilled, and that the generation which saw the wonderful shower of falling stars in 1833, the last of the signs, will not pass away till the Lord himself shall descend from heaven.⁷

E. J. Waggoner wrote:

Nothing can possibly be more clear than that He will come within one generation from the fulfillment of the signs which He has named, and that no one knows, other than God Himself, what date within that generation will be the day of His coming.⁸

So, according to these statements, many Adventist expositors took a generation as 70 years, and dated it from the last of the “signs in the heavens,” namely the falling stars of 1833. 70 years added to 1833 would be 1903. They never actually mentioned the date, but it was clear from what they expounded that 1903 would mark the very near termination of that time period.

Even in 1903, the last year for this fulfillment according to their understanding, Waggoner still wrote:

His word has been pledged that He will come to the generation that was alive seventy years ago.⁹

However, Waggoner started to entertain the thought that

⁶ A. T. Jones, *An Exposition of Matthew 24*, “This Generation Shall Not Pass,” 1890.

⁷ *Idem*, “This Generation”.

⁸ E. J. Waggoner, *The Present Truth*, “Therefore Be Ye Also Ready,” April 15, 1897.

⁹ E. J. Waggoner, *The Present Truth*, “The Editor’s Private Corner. The Last Generation,” October 1, 1903.

Christ might “tarry” because of His people not being ready:

Some say that Christ’s coming cannot be near, or He would have come before this, if we had entered on the last generation seventy years ago. He does not come because His people are not ready for Him, He is at the door, but He tarrys there in mercy. Those who profess His name would be destroyed if He came upon these and found them unready.¹⁰

This makes me wonder if there was a mini-disappointment when it became clear that the work was not going to end at that time. This could explain some of the anxiety around reorganization in 1901 and how A. T. Jones was very discouraged that this reorganization did not go as he thought was necessary for the quick finishing of the work.

William Miller, by the way, understood the *Matthew* 24 statement differently. He interpreted “this generation” to mean the elect of God:

Here is the great stumbling-block to many. Christ is talking about His elect, His children, and His generation; and not, as some will have it, about the generations that then lived on the earth; for they did undoubtedly pass off, a large share of them; for it was about thirty-six years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

But His kingdom has never been taken from the earth. Although they have been hunted from one part of the earth to another; although they have been driven into caves and dens of mountains; have been slain, burnt, sawn asunder; have wandered as pilgrims and strangers on the earth;—yet the “blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church;” and Christ has had, and will have, a people on the earth, until His second coming. 1 Peter 2:9; “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people,” etc.

The Psalmist says, “A seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.” Psalm 22:30. I humbly believe that Christ has quoted the sentiment contained in the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

102nd Psalm, 25th to last verse:

“Of old have You laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of your hands. They shall perish, but You shall endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shall You change them, and they shall be changed; but You are the same, and your years shall have no end. The children of your servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before You.”

Here we see the Psalmist has expressed the same sentiment that I understand Christ to have given in these two verses, which I conclude is the proper explanation.¹¹

Charles Fitch explains it this way:

What then? “A seed shall serve Him; it shall be counted to the Lord for a generation.” The generation of Christ’s seed, then, shall not pass away from this world, until the things which Christ spoke of are fulfilled.¹²

The Millerite interpretation has stood the test of time, and if anything, may even have more luster, when considered in the light of the question “How long?” in *Daniel* 8:13. I quote from the book, *God’s Way in the Sanctuary*, the first Chapter, “The Landmarks Stand”:

“Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spoke, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?

“And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.”

For a very long time prior to the giving of this vision, the sanctuary and the host had been trodden underfoot with the consequent loss of the daily and the deprivation of the land. It was still to go on for a long time into the future but not

¹¹ William Miller, *Miller’s Works*, Volume 2, *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ about the Year 1843*, Lecture 1, “The Second Appearing of Christ,” 1842.

¹² Charles Fitch, *The Glory of God in the Earth*, “Conclusion,” 1843.

forever. There was to come a time when never more would the sanctuary and the host be trodden underfoot and the daily taken away. That time would be at the end of the two thousand, three hundred days.

With the advent of that date would be the assurance that, inasmuch as God's true people would never again be brought into Babylonian bondage, and would never again be deprived of the sanctuary and the daily, the work would be finished, an end made of sin and sinners, everlasting righteousness brought in, and Christ exalted forever as the King of kings and Prince of Peace.

It must never be overlooked that *Daniel* 8:14 is the answer to the question put in the previous verse. Therefore, the determination of the date when the time period ends is the declaration to God's army that they have before them the perfect opportunity to complete their commission, for they know that never again will they be enslaved, lose the sanctuary and its marvelous High Priest, or the daily ministrations of that priesthood.

Thus the Scripture, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed," ("...restored to its rightful state." RSV), is of priceless value to God's true people. No wonder it is regarded askance by the enemies of God's truth. Let it be. The true sheep will rejoice in possession of so wonderful a gem of living truth. Inspired by its promise, armed by the power of the God who spoke it, they will go forward as the mightiest army in human history, filled with the love, wisdom, character, and power of the Almighty to vanquish the forces of darkness—forever.

Then "...those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." *Daniel* 12:3. RSV¹³

The question, "How long?" of *Daniel* 8, is answered "unto 2300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed (or properly restored)." After 1844, as Fred Wright explained, the message of the gospel, and the connection of the people of God to the

¹³ F. T. Wright, *God's Way in the Sanctuary*, Chapter 1, "The Landmarks Stand."

Sanctuary in heaven and Christ's work there, would never be lost again, so it would go on to completeness.

That's exactly what *Matthew 24* states: "this generation," that is, the people "generated" or "created anew" by the gospel message that the Lord brings at that time, just after the 3 signs appear in the heavens, will not pass away; there will be a continuous line of spiritually-born people who carry the message unto completion, to the "perfect day." *Proverbs 4:18*. There will be no more sliding into bondage and darkness so that the message is entirely lost, and the work of recovery has to start all over again.

Revelation 10:7 states:

Revelation 10

⁷ In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished.

And the seventh angel includes:

Revelation 11

¹⁸ And the nations were angry, and your wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should give reward unto your servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear your name, small and great; and should destroy them which destroy the earth.

The time of the dead to be judged started in 1844. The nations were angry shortly after that. In this volume of Waggoner's articles, there are plenty of references to current events that showed the preparations for war which were taking place in Waggoner's day, and which eventually culminated in the two world wars, as well as many other battles. And the destroying of the earth is going ahead quite well, with the changes in climate, effects of pollution, extinction of species, etc.

The generation of God, those who were regenerated by His everlasting gospel, those who have tasted of the "powers of

the world to come” (*Hebrews 6:5*), will never pass from the earth, until Christ comes. He will have a seed to greet Him at His coming, in spite of their small numbers, and the massive powers arraigned against them, and the very real danger of the extinction of human life on the planet.

But they “will not pass till all these things be fulfilled.”
Thank the Lord!