

Following in The Footsteps of Fathers

“Behold, you have risen up in your fathers’ place, a brood of sinful men”

By: Dallas Kobyłka

The last “generation” of the old covenant system of Israel is a topic of much debate. The study into eschatology makes it mandatory to deal with the expression “this generation,” because the law, the prophets, the Messiah and His apostles make this statement. Much ink has been spilt over the arguments focusing on whom this generation is speaking to, what generation means and whom it is identifying. When discussing the phrase “this generation” in context to eschatology, it is impossible to come to any understanding of the intended usage unless we find out why those statements were being said. This involves tracing back to the source which caused these statements to be declared. If we do not identify the sources of the issue, then we will no doubt miss the meaning and turn it into our own ideas.

The futurist, the preterist, the historicist and just about everyone who reads the bible for their religious view, (whether they know it or not) their views hang on the accuracy of these statements. This topic is of extreme importance and can not be simply “agreed to disagree” upon. The futurist holds the context surrounding “this generation” is an event to come, while the preterist holds this event was identifying the generation the Messiah was speaking to. Obviously both views can not be correct and is why this topic is necessary to discuss and to resolve. The futurist and the preterist both love their Messiah and want to honor His words to the best they can, however they both cannot be right, and the worldview they each have would be radically impacted if their opposition perspective were to be validated.

There are many comparisons and relevant scriptures that have been argued and debated concerning “this generation.” It is not the goal of this article to add to those or exhaust every reference to eschatology generation statements, but to give a few references to where some of this language usage began and the context it was originally used for. By comparing how the Messiah and His contemporaries used the statement we can start to bridge this gap and help with the discourse under biblical agreement.

The first usage we are going to examine takes place in the book of Numbers through chapter thirty-two. Moses has delivered Israel from Egypt, and the time had come for Israel to cross the Jordan and by military force take the promised land, however, not all the sons of Israel sought that land. The sons of Gad and Reuben were pleased to remain before the Jordan, and thusly approached Moses with a request...

Numbers Chapter 32:2 “the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation, saying,

5 “If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession; do not take us across the Jordan.”

6 But Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben, “Shall your brothers go to war while you yourselves sit here?”

At this point, to emphasize what the two sons were asking, Moses relates a reminder to them about when their fathers refused to enter the promised land. This previous event was extremely volatile and one that caused the entire nation of Israel to suffer hardship and death. Moses charges them as following in the footsteps of their fathers and is warning about God judging Israel again in the same way for the same folly.

7 *“Now why are you discouraging the sons of Israel from crossing over into the land which the LORD has given them.”*

8 This *is what your fathers did when I sent them from ^aKadesh-barnea to see the land.*
9 *“For when they went up to the valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the sons of Israel so that they did not go into the land which the LORD had given them.”*

10 *“So the LORD’s anger burned in that day, and He swore, saying,”* 11 *“None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully,*

The great punishment because of people discouraging the sons of Israel to enter the promised land was the purging of the people of Israel with God leaving for Himself just a remnant, the men under twenty years of age. This remnant was the one who was to enter the promised covenant land.

13 *“So the LORD’s anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD was destroyed.”*

Now that Moses has refreshed the issue that the two brothers request (to stay behind and to not enter the promised land) has rekindled, Moses tells them they will cause the same curse to come upon Israel because they are doing exactly what their fathers had done.

Remarkably interesting language being used to describe this event. Moses says the Lord’s anger burned, and God condemned them to the wilderness to kill off those who refused God’s commands. This event lasted one generation which equates to forty years, then after that the faithless all died off due to the judgement of God and the remnant is now prepared to enter God’s promised covenant land.

14 *“Now behold, you have risen up in your fathers’ place, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning anger of the LORD against Israel.”*

15 *“For if you turn away from following Him, He will once more abandon them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people.”*

Moses goes on to use a very telling descriptive word to identify the issue the two sons of Israel’s behaviour is akin to. He says they have replaced their fathers’ deeds with the same actions and describes them as a ‘brood’ of sinful men. This statement is reflective of the statements as found in Matthew 12:34

“You brood of vipers” and Matthew 3:7 with John the Baptist calling the Pharisees and Sadducees as a “brood of vipers.”

Moses continues saying that if the people refuse to follow the Lord because of the actions of the influential “fathers” that God would again abandon them for another forty-year judgement and raise up a remnant to replace them and then destroy them. He will then deliver the remnant into the promises.

In this event with Moses, Gad and Reuben we get a lot of information concerning the word usage of “generation.” Generation is attributed a forty-year time period, and God purposed that forty-year period before destruction. That destruction was because of serpent like tendencies that lead to God’s rejection. We see that Moses identifies how God did this previously, and according to Moses that He would do it again to these children if they also duplicated this error thusly giving us the context that God will do this in the future as well if a future generation is faithless.

Another interesting phrase that appears in this event is “the burning anger of the Lord.” In combination with the word “generation” a parallel is found in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy thirty-one and thirty-two shows God revealing to Moses that Israel will betray the covenant and thusly God will indeed end His relationship with them and will establish a new people in their place. A similar theme to Numbers thirty-two, that Israel will become faithless and thusly God will reject them to the wilderness and destroy Israel and deliver a remnant.

Deuteronomy 31:19 “Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. 20 For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant.”

Deuteronomy 32:19 “The Lord saw it and spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and daughters. 20 And he said, I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. So, I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. 22 For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. 28 “For they are a nation lacking in counsel, and there is no understanding in them. 29 “Would that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern their latter end!”

We learn that after Moses dies Israel will be for a time the covenant nation and that they will come to a point of faithlessness towards God in which the final generation will be destroyed by God’s fiery anger. This parallels the message Moses delivered to Gad and Reuben; a message of faithlessness, a brood of vipers, following in their fathers’ footprints, and a generational judgement that leaves a remnant to be delivered into the promise. We also know that the Messiah will be the causality to the final generation according to Daniel 9:26 “...the messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince to come will destroy the city and sanctuary.”

Daniel 12:4 “And you, Daniel, close the words and seal the book to the time of the end.” Daniel 12:9 “Go your way Daniel, for the words are sealed till the time of the end”

This event we know is talking about Jesus, and the destruction of the city and sanctuary in 70AD. If this is the end, and the messiah is present during this time, (the one who was found worthy to break the seal), would the messiah tell us about the end and the final generation? Let us then compare this warning from the Messiah who came, and was cut off, and the city and sanctuary fell just as Daniel said. We catch up with Jesus who is reprimanding the scribes and Pharisees and identifies a very pertinent character trait.

Matthew 23:29–37

29 “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,** hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,
30 and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’
31 “So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.
32 “Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.”

Jesus pronounces “a woe” which means some kind of trial, distress or calamity is directed at the Scribes and Pharisees for being the children who have come up after their fathers, the fathers who were murderous towards the prophets, who delivered them the words of God. Jesus then charges them with the duplicating of these acts and for filling the measure of their guilt as they follow in their fathers’ footsteps. This is the same message Moses had for Gad and Reuben, and Moses had a specific character trait he referred to when identifying this issue, saying “a brood of sinful men,” this is also what we find immediately following Jesus’s warning.

33 “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?”

This progression of conversation is a direct parallel with Moses, keeping in step with the warning...

Numbers 32:14 “Now behold, you have risen up in your fathers’ place, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning anger of the LORD against Israel.

15 “For if you turn away from following Him, He will once more abandon them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people.”

Jesus then proceeds to declare His intention to send more prophets, then he prophesises that these sons WILL follow their fathers’ footsteps and kill them hence the reason for the declaring of the woe.

Matthew 23:34 “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood Of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between

the temple and the altar.

If Jesus is duplicating the judgement of Moses in Numbers 32 and is proclaiming Israel to be considered for the destruction promised by Moses for again turning away from the word of the Lord, then we MUST see Jesus condemning his audience to a similar forty-year period in which that generation is led to a destruction, so the nonbelieving covenant people are destroyed while the remnant is separated and delivered into the promised land. This is exactly what we see take place as Jesus continues.

Matthew 23:36 **“Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.**
37 **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets** and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.”

According to Jesus: the sentence of hell, His prophets being murdered, there will be a persecution from town to town, and that all the blood guilt accounted from Abel will come upon that generation to whom He was speaking...the forty-years of wilderness to kill off the faithless covenant people.

After Jesus died in 30AD the promised persecution soon followed with the killing of Stephen for preaching Jesus as we read in the Book of Acts 8:1 “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. **And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem...**” For forty-years the church fought back against the resistance of the Pharisees pressing their message forward until the final generation ran out of time. Daniel 9:26 “...**the messiah will be cut off** and have nothing, and **the people of the prince to come will destroy the city and sanctuary.**” Daniel 12:4 “And you, Daniel, close the words and seal the book to **the time of the end.**” Daniel 12:9 “Go your way Daniel, for the words are sealed till **the time of the end.**”

Jesus died 30AD, and in 70AD which is exactly the forty-year generation promised by Jesus (saying then the end would come) saw the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Rome, routed by Titus Augustus. Emperor Vespasian who had two sons, gave Titus charge of the Jewish wars, in which he was successful in burning down both the city and temple, earning the title, “Prince of Youth,” and fulfilling the warning from Moses, the prophecy of Daniel and the prophecy of Jesus.

The term of the last forty-years, that final generation was completed in 70AD. The end of Jerusalem and Israel as Gods covenant people came, and the remnant led by the apostles who were murdered and persecuted to the bitter end, ushered in the new covenant...which was the beginning, because the end had come.

“I cannot but think that it was because God had doomed this city to destruction, as a polluted city, and was resolved to purge his sanctuary by fire, that he cut off those who clung to them with such tender affliction” – Josephus War 4.5.2 323

Matthew 3:7 “But when he (John the Baptist) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, **“You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come.”**”

10 *"The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*

11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; *He will baptize you with* the Holy Spirit and *fire*.

12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but *He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*"

Numbers 32:10 *"So the LORD's anger burned in that day"*

Numbers 32:13 *"So the LORD's anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD was destroyed."*

Deuteronomy 32:19 "The Lord saw it and spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and daughters. 20 And he said, I will hide my face from them; *I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.* So, I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

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