

## " *This Generation*" as a Dominical Epithet

In Matthew 3:1-9, the evangelist describes the scene at the Jordan River where John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing. At one point, a group of Pharisees and Sadducees (v.7a) came to John. The Baptist challenges their sincerity and hurls the epithet, "generation of vipers"<sup>1</sup> at them (v. 7b). This episode may well be viewed as foreshadowing the equivalent attitude that Jesus displayed in regard to the Pharisees and other religious leaders of the first century Jews.

In this paper, I propose first to survey the dominical usages of the term *genea* (he *genea aute* = translated as this generation) in the Synoptic Gospels, demonstrating the exclusive nature of this usage as an epithet: then to point out the compatibility of this discourse marker with like components in the Old Testament: and finally, to apply this interpretive principle to Matthew 24:34.

In the table below, the passages where Mark and Luke quote Jesus in his usage of *genea* are compared to similar or equivalent passages in Matthew. Matthew, then, is the focal point of the New Testament portion of this study since it has the greater number of passages containing "this generation."

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

**Table 2**

Matthew		Mark		Luke	
3:7	γεννηματα = translated as "generation" <sup>2</sup> cf. 12:34 and 23:33	none	none	3:7	same as Matthew
<b>11:16</b>	γενεαν = first instance of "this generation" as an epithet	none	none	<b>7:31</b>	same as Matthew
12:39	γενεα = "evil and adulterous generation" . . . no sign given	none	none	11:29	"evil generation" . . . no sign given
none	none	none	none	<b>11:30</b>	Jonah as a sign to Nineveh with Jesus as a sign to γενεα
<b>12:41</b>	γενεας = epithet	none	none	<b>11:32</b>	reversal of order in Matthew - Nineveh
<b>12:42</b>	γενεας = epithet	none	none	<b>11:31</b>	Queen of the south
none	none	none	none	<b>11:50 &amp; 51</b>	epithet
12:45	γενεα = "this wicked generation"	none	none	none	none
16:4	γενεα = "wicked and adulterous" . . . sign of Jonah (cf. 12:39, above)	<b>8:12</b>	epithet similar but details differ	none	none
none	none	8:38	"adulterous and sinful"	none	none
17:17	γενεα = "faithless and perverse" aimed at disciples?	9:19	"faithless" only	9:41	same as Matthew
none	none	none	none	<b>17:25</b>	epithet

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 9:10. It would seem fitting to translate this instance of γεννηματα as "fruit." The mind is moved toward the fruit of viperous activity in the Garden (Gen. 3:1-5) and near Edom (Num. 21:5-6), both of which resulted in death. It also works well in the play on words with the more common term for fruit פֵּרוֹת (perot) in 3:9. It is certainly a curiosity that several modern versions translate γεννηματα as "harvest" (RSV, NASB, NASB-Updated, NIV, Holman).

<b>23:36</b>	<i>γεγεναν</i> = epithet	none	none	none	none
<b>24:34</b>	<i>γεγενα</i> = epithet "shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled"	<b>13:30</b>	". . . all these things be done."	<b>21:32</b>	". . . all be fulfilled"

Instances of the word "generation" in the English Bible - New Testament - KJV

The three places where "generation" is translated from *γεννηματα* are very poignant epithets, being linked to the symbol of a serpent. However, the fact that Mark's gospel does not support this usage makes it difficult to include *γεννηματα* in the scope of this study. Luke's support in Luke 3:7 is not helpful since this study is focused on the dominical usage of *γεγενα*. Therefore, *γεννηματα* will not be considered for the purposes of this paper.

There are a number of instances where Jesus adds adjectives to the root epithet *η γεγενα αυτη*. So, from the table above, Matthew 12:39 is indicative of the other places where additions are made. In 12:39, Jesus responds to the seemingly innocent request of the Pharisees for a sign with a descriptive invective wrapped in enigma. The enquirers are an evil and adulterous generation and their sign, it may be said, was supplied to them by Jonah the prophet. This indignation<sup>3</sup> on Jesus' part may not be interpreted as merely petulant but as an appropriate response to small or missing faith where faith should be in operation. Green's perspective on the point is clear. "God may of his own initiative give a sign ([Luke] 1:36, 2:12), but requests for signs are consistently interpreted negatively."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I am following the definition of indignation that Edwyn Bevan gives in his Gifford Lectures on the wrath of God. "If *dignus*, worthy, implies merit, that the person so described deserves to have some kind of good, honour or love, or whatever it may be, the term *indignus* implies demerit, that the person deserves to go without some kind of good or perhaps to have its opposite, shame instead of honour, pain instead of pleasure. Indignation is thus strictly a strong feeling of demerit in the person against whom it is directed. It is an emotion in so far as it implies a desire, not at present gratified, that the appropriateness which we feel to join together particular kinds of conduct and painful experience, should be realized in actual fact. . ." *Symbolism and Belief* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, first published, 1939, reissued, 1968), 215-6.

<sup>4</sup> Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 79.

This issue of little faith (*απιστοσ*) is seen in another instance of Jesus adding adjectives to the stock epithet. In Matthew 17:17, Jesus couples *απιστοσ* with *διεστραμμενη* to form faithless<sup>5</sup> and perverse. It would seem that Jesus is now indignant with his own disciples who are unable to fulfill his command to them to cast out demons (Mark 6:7). Jesus is clearly equating the behavior of the disciples with the unbelievers and those who go their own way.<sup>6</sup>

The passage in 17:17 is the first of the two passages that are mutually supported by all three of the synoptics. This condition is important because it indicates that none of the synoptics was completely dependent on any of the other two. Matthew agrees with Luke on six occasions and with Mark on three occasions. Mark agrees with Luke on two occasions. Matthew stands alone on two occasions, Mark on one occasion and Luke on two occasions. It is also important as an indicator of a point in Jesus' ministry that all three considered important: too important to leave out of their account. It should be noted that the integrity of all of the authors is very high in that the 1.) include the account in Matthew 17:14-21 which is undoubtedly embarrassing to all of the disciples involved, 2.) include the statement in Matthew 24:34 regarding Christ's return that seems to be a very embarrassing assertion by Jesus. The convergence of the three witnesses at these two points at least signals the absolute accuracy of the written record.

Concerning the written record as a whole, it is important to note that there is no semblance of the dominical usage of *genea* in John's gospel. John, we are told, wrote his own gospel.<sup>7</sup> In so doing, he apparently ignored this epithet or any of its counterparts. John seems to

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce considers *apistos* as being akin to "stupidity" or mere "dullness." This perspective does not fit the context of people who are not practicing faith. A. B. Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1983), 232.

<sup>6</sup> It may well be that this pericope is a direct example of Prov. 4:9-12. The wisdom of Jesus in sending out the disciples in pairs may have extended to having them to fast on alternate days. If the pair that could not drive out the demon had been faithless, both of them would have been adversely impacted. Cf. Ex. 4:14-15.

<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 162. Also, Gary M. Burge, "Interpreting the Gospel of John" in *Interpreting*

favor *o kosmos* for those that were at enmity with Jesus (e.g., John 15:18-19).<sup>8</sup> In similar fashion to the synoptic usage of *γενεα* in the context of tribulation (Matt. 24:34), John uses his stock terminology in relation to tribulation in 16:33. John, however, seems determined to encourage and calm his readers. The synoptic emphasis, in contrast, is designed to motivate the reader to stay alert for danger.

On of the more curious aspects of the usage of *γενεα* as an epithet is that it disappears from the book of Acts. After the single occasion in chapter 2, verse 40, when Peter is preaching at Pentecost, *γενεα* falls into disuse. The Johannine phrase, *ton kosmon* (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:2), is taken over by Paul who uses it liberally in his epistles.<sup>9</sup> James also uses "the world" (1:27, 4:4) as does Peter in 2 Pet. 1:4, etc. It is as if all of those writers at once decided not to use the old stock Hebraic phrase; perhaps they favored one that had broader acceptance.

Having discussed the instances of *γενεα* as an epithet in the New Testament, it is now necessary to point out the important features of its corresponding discourse marker in the Old Testament. The principle Hebrew word that is translated into English as "generation" is *roD*. There are many instances of its application by the Hebraic authors to indicate an unrighteous group or assembly. Below is a list of a number of the key usages with their corresponding LXX translations. Each of these passages will be addressed in sequence.

### Gen 7:1

7:1 And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

סוֹיֵאמֹר יְהוָה לְנֹחַ בֹּא אִתָּךְ וְכָל־בֵּיתְךָ אֵלֶיךָ וְכָל־בְּהֵמַתְּךָ אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדְךָ וְיָבוֹאוּ אִתְּךָ אֶל־הַתֶּבֶת וְאַתָּה וְנֹחַ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדְךָ יָבוֹאוּ אִתְּךָ וְאַתָּה וְנֹחַ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדְךָ יָבוֹאוּ אִתְּךָ וְאַתָּה וְנֹחַ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדְךָ יָבוֹאוּ אִתְּךָ

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*the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, ed. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 364.

<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, "The Johannine Writings" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 134.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor. 1:12; Gal. 4:3; Eph. 2:12; 1 Tim. 1:15. The exception is in Phil. 2:15, see below.

<sup>1</sup>και ειπεν κυριος ο θεος προς νωε εισελθε συ και πας ο οικος σου εις την κιβωτον οτι σε ειδον δικαιον εναντιον μου εν τη γενεα ταυτη

**Deut 1:34-35**

34 And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and swore, saying,  
35 Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swear to give unto your fathers,

35 וְאִם יִרְאֶה אִישׁ בְּדָאֵנָּשִׁי הַיְיָאֵלֶּהָ הַדֶּרֶךְ הַיְיָהִיזֶה הָאֵת הָאֶרֶץ  
הַשְּׁבֵבָה דְאִשְׁרַנְשָׁבְנֵתִי לְהַתְּתֵן דְּלְדָאֲבָרְתֵיכֻן

και ηκουσεν κυριος την φωνην των λογων υμων και παροξυνθεις ωμοσεν λεγων  
<sup>35</sup>ει οψεται τις των ανδρων τουτων την αγαθην ταυτην γην ην ωμοσα τοις πατρασιν αυτων

**Deut 32:5**

5 They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation

5 וְשִׁפְטָה לֹא בְנֵי מוֹמֵהָ דֵּר וְרָקֵשׁ וּפְרָתְלָתָל

ουκ αυτω τεκνα μωμητα γενεα σκολια και διεστραμμενη

**Deut 32:20**

20 And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

20 מוֹיֵאֲמַר דְּאֶסְתִּירָה פָּנַי מִפְּנֵי הַמִּצְוָה יִצְרָאֵל מִהָדָאֲדִטְרִיתִּי וְכִי דֵּר

דְּהִתְהַפְּכֵת הַהִמָּה בְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי מִבְּ

και ειπεν αποστρεψω το προσωπον μου απ' αυτων και δειξω τι εσται αυτοις επ' εσχατων οτι γενεα εξεστραμμενη εστιν υιοι οισ ουκ εστιν πιστις εν αυτοις

**Ps 12:7**

7 Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

7 דְּהִתְהַפְּכֵת יְהוָה יִשְׁמְרֵן וְתִשְׁמְרֵן וְתִשְׁמְרֵן זֶה לְלָל

συ κυριε φυλαξεις ημας και διατηρησεις ημας απο της γενεας ταυτης και εις τον αιωνα

**Ps 78:6-8**

6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: 7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: 8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

8 וְאִם יִהְיוּ דְּפִרְאֲבֵתֵךְ דֵּר סְפִרְר וּמִקְרָה דֵּר אֱלֹהֵיכֻן וְלֵב וְאִם נִצְאָמְנָה אֶתְּ אֱלֹהֵי רֹשׁ

<sup>8</sup>ινα μη γενωνται ως οι πατερες αυτων γενεα σκολια και παραπικραινουσα γενεα ητις ου κατηυθυνεν την καρδιαν αυτης και ουκ επιστωθη μετα του θεου το πνευμα αυτης

**Ps 95:10-11**

10 Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: 11 Unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.

10 דְּאַרְבָּנַי שָׁנָה אֶקְוֶשׁ בְּדַרְ: וְאָדַמְרָ דְּתַפְיָ הַלְבַבְּ הָהָ וְהָהָ  
א\* יִדְוֹ דְרַכְיָ

10 τεσσαρακοντα ετη προσωχθισα τη γενεα εκεινη και ειπα αει πλανωνται τη καρδια κ αι αυτοι ουκ εγνωσαν τασ οδους μου

### Prov 30:11-14

11 There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.

12 There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. 13 There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up.

14 There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

11 הֵרָ אָנֹכִי וְדִקְהַלְלִי וְנִאֲתָ\* וְאִמִּי אֶיְבָרֶךְ

12 הֵרָ שֶׁהָרָ בְּפִי: נִיּוֹ וְנִמְשָׁאתָ אֶ דְרַטְטָ

13 הֵרָ מָה\* רָמוּ: פִּי: נִיּוֹ וְדִפְּדִפְּיוֹ: נִפְּצָאוּ

14 הֵרָ דְמַטְרַבַּת וְשִׁנָּיו: נִיּוֹ וְדִמְדַמְדַּכְלַת מְדַתְלַתְיוֹ יָלְדָאכְלָ דְנִיּוֹ פְּמִינְאִרְטָ

וְנִאֲבִינֵי פְּמִאֲדָ

<sup>11</sup>εκγονον κακον πατερα καταραται την δε μητερα ουκ ευλογει

<sup>12</sup>εκγονον κακον δικαιον εαυτον κρινει την δε εξοδον αυτου ουκ απενιψεν

<sup>13</sup>εκγονον κακον υψηλους οφθαλμους εχει τοις δε βλεφαροις αυτου επαιρεται

<sup>14</sup>εκγονον κακον μαχαιρας τους οδοντας εχει και τασ μυλας τομιδας ωστε αναλίσκειν και κατεσθειν τους ταπεινους απο της γησ και τους πενητας αυτων εξ ανθρωπων

### Jer 7:29

29 Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.

29 גָּזִי נִזְרָרְ וְהִשְׁוֹלִינִי כִי וְצָנְאִי דְלָ\* שְׂפִי וְקִי: נָה וְכִי מְדַאֵס יְהוָה  
מוֹיֶשֶׁשׁ יָאֲתָ\* הֵרָ יָבַרְתָּ

<sup>29</sup>κειραι την κεφαλην σου και απορριπτε και αναλαβε επι χειλεων θρηνον οτι απεδοκιμασεν κυριος και απωσατο την γενεαν την ποιουσαν ταυτα

It is immediately noticeable that the first usage of "generation" as an epithet is found in Genesis 7:1. There should be no reason for surprise in this discovery since mankind, in its depravity, could hardly avoid forming into a society that was bent toward unrighteousness. Although there were no legal restraints against Noah's contemporaries (Rom. 5:13-14), the people were, at minimum, required to avoid the sin of Cain (Jude 11; 1 John 3:10-12). The

generation of violence (Gen. 5:11-13) became the prototype of those who were rejected by God and established for divine wrath against such evildoers as a common assembly (Jude 4; Rev. 3:9). It may well be considered that the wrath of God is always directed against "this generation" (cf. Rom.1:18-25). If so, then at any moment in human history when individuals conform to the generation of violence, those persons are subject to divine punishment (Rom. 3:10). The doctrine of original sin points to the fact that no individual is exempt from being conformed to "this generation" without divine grace that provides the means for setting aside one's natural family heritage, so to speak. The *modus operandi* of deserting one's natural roots is in being joined with the sacrifice of Christ Jesus and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:1-2).

The passage in Deut. 1:35, may be seen as the Lord's declaration of the nature of the Israelites in their conformity to the prototypical generation that was rejected by God in the flood. The eight persons who were saved out of the prototype generation because of Noah's faithfulness are reflected in the salvation of Joshua and Caleb and those who were less than 20 years old in Israel (Deut 1:38-39). The Lord's stock epithet is modified with *ur'h*, this evil generation. This declaration, as noted above, is reflected in several New Testament passages, especially Matthew 12:45. It is interesting to note that the Lord acknowledges, in ironic terms, the Fathers (i.e., Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) of the people. His rejection of them is made more poignant in establishing that they are not true children of the patriarchs. This foreshadowing is found to be fulfilled in Jesus' conflict with "this generation" of his day (cf. John 8:39-40 and Matt. 3:9).

The adjectivally enhanced epithet in Deut. 32:5 compares well with Matthew 17:17. The specific combination of *γενεας σκολια και διεστραμμενη* from the LXX may be found in Paul's encouraging words to the church at Philippi (2:15). It is certainly a curiosity that Paul would use



this phrase, having avoided it in all of the other epistles. One explanation could be that it is a part of the well recognized hymn of 2: 6-11<sup>10</sup> that has been interrupted by the fatherly polemic of verses 12-14. the coupling of *αμεμπτα και ακεπαιοι* in inverse parallel to *σκολια και διεστραμμενη* seems to have a Hebraic flavor that might appeal to the aged prisoner. Of course, the fact that he uses *εν κοσμου* at the end of the verse mitigates against a strictly Hebraic structure. Regardless of any possible link to the hymnic passage of 2:6-11, verse 15 displays its Hebraic quality by directly reflecting the adjectivally enhanced stock epithet from Deut. 32:5.

In the Septuagint, Deuteronomy 32:20 has an adjectival addition that is similar to the *διεστραμμενη* of 32:5. *Εχεστραμμενη* is used for the Hebrew term *תִּהְיֶה֩ פִּכְתָּה֙*. The concept is very nearly the same as in 32:5 where the generation is described as perverse.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis is on perverse utterances with the root favoring the concept of twisted words or deception. This points toward the serpent in the garden and the twisted concepts of the Pharisees that Jesus continually confronted.

In Psalm 12, the psalmist paints a more definitive picture of the *εχεστραμμενη* / *תִּהְיֶה֩ פִּכְתָּה֙* character of a generation and concludes by making a simple poetic connection: *רָעִים* = wicked people that behave in the froward manner described in verses 1-6 and 8. This usage is directly linked to Gen. 7:1 as seen above. It may be considered to have taken on the status of being a standard since there are now two distinct discourse markers that attest to the same condition. These two witnesses to the usage of "this generation" are sufficient to establish acceptance for the simple or stock usage. The stock epithet is found in this form in Ps. 95:10-11 and, as previously discussed, in various places in the synoptic gospels.

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<sup>10</sup> Carson, Moo and Morris, 323-324 and 327.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Brown, with the cooperation of S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. 2nd ed. 5th printing. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 247.

The use of דָּר in Psalm 78:8 is conceptually reflected in the New Testament in Heb. 3:10.

In both passages, the generation is one whose heart is far from the Lord, that errs continually and is going astray. There is also a connection to other New Testament passages that describe the character of the rebellious generation. Matt. 13:10-17 is a passage that demonstrates the connection well since it is not only dominical, but is quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10. Stubbornness, callousness, frowardness, rebelliousness and other terms that indicate the character of "this generation" are adverse conditions of the heart. This condition is directly linked to faithlessness and spiritual insensitivity. The Lord addresses the condition through Moses' polemic in Deut. 10:12-16. Verse 16's command to "circumcise your hearts" is poignant as a remedy for the people described in Matt. 15:8 / Is. 29:13 as having a heart that is far from the Lord.

An analysis of the four verses in Proverbs 30 that each use the term דָּר as a beginning point shows a marked connection to the actions and attitudes of the Pharisees. It is worthwhile to quote Waltke at length in his description of the generation that launches each of these verses:

"'Generation,' however, here designates a distinct sort of children, not the entire contemporary generation, because they envision evil children oppressing their peers. The sayings' four verses also cohere by their common syntax and by the logical development of their common theme. The outer frame portrays their behavior and features their greed in the home (cursing parents, v. 11; see Exod. 21:17; Prov. 20:20) and the public arena (devouring the poor, v. 14). Their inner core, which is linked by the catchwords "its eyes," portrays their spiritual attitude, escalating their arrogance from their self-delusion and incorrigibility (v.12) to their despising others (v.13)."<sup>12</sup>

In the first of these four verses (v.11) the writer is describing a generation that is obviously wicked and disobedient. Jesus accuses the Pharisees and scribes of being guilty of

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 484.

violating the commandment on which this proverb is based. Naturally, these religious leaders of Jesus' day had not overtly and publicly cursed their parents, but Jesus revealed how they had done so by following traditions that subverted the parent/child relationship.

Mark 7:10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: 11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. 12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

The next proverb (v. 12) shows another view of this same generation from the angle of their public appearance. Again we find Jesus pointing out to the Pharisees that their outward show of goodness cannot hide from God's discerning eye their inward wickedness and hatefulness. When it is held high or has a lofty perch, the cup has a clean outside. But when it is brought low, the cup's interior revealed itself to be disgusting.

Luke 11:39 And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. 40 Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?

The third installment in the proverbial description of an evil generation (v.13) shows the hauteur of those who lord it over their fellows. When Jesus describes the perverse person, he never says directly that the Pharisee looks up and holds his head up as he addresses God as his equal, but He does so by contrasting the publican's posture of not being able to raise his eyes off the ground for shame.

Luke 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

In the fourth proverb, the generation (v.14) described is no longer that of many individuals acting in a similar fashion. The picture is suddenly shifted to that of a wild beast that is out of control in its lust to devour the small and weak, those who are in need or who are poor. The generation is possessed by a hatefulness that drives it to go beyond living out their own dream with perfect self-approval to the point of destroying and dominating anyone that opposes them. We find a description of this beast that is similar in Daniel. He describes the ruling force that dominates Israel after the fall of the Greek Empire. Most commentators understand this beast in Daniel as being the Roman Empire but fail to recognize the outcry that bursts forth from the high priest when asked if Pilate should crucify the Jews' king, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15). Having made this declaration, the Pharisees and scribes and priests who participated in the betrayal of Jesus and, ultimately, the nation of Israel, demonstrated their character, the character of the Gentile kingdom that ruled the world and now reigned in their hearts.

Dan 7:7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns.

The character of this beast has been well delineated. Stubborn, rebellious, perverse, froward, willing to give false testimony in court,<sup>13</sup> etc., this generation is reflected in the modus operandi of the Amalekites who attacked the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. The Lord condemned Amalek because they had come upon the Israelites from behind and killed those who were not able to stay close to the main body of the travelers; the old, those who were weak, the young and those who were tired (Deut. 25:17-18). As a result, the Lord declared his perpetual enmity against Amalek as enduring (Ex17:16) **דָּר וְדָר**, "from generation to generation." This generation is depicted in Jeremiah as the generation that is rejected and forsaken by the Lord; **דָּר זִבְרָת** "the generation of his wrath" (Jer. 7:29).

In turning again to the New Testament, it has been well demonstrated that the connections between the Old Testament writers in their use of the term, **דָּר** are overall supportive of the perspective that the equivalent Greek term *γενεα* is used as an epithet in every usage by Jesus. It is important to affirm that this usage applicable throughout the synoptic gospels, even in the case of Matt. 24:34. Loisy and Meyer point out the many different opinions as to the identity of this generation in Christ's eschatological discourse. Some of the offerings are:

The generation that experiences the ruin of Jerusalem -- many commentators.

The generation of the faithful -- Chrysostom, et al.

The human race -- Jerome.

Maldonat (sic) -- le monde entier, (all of creation, per Meyer).

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<sup>13</sup> Waltke, 486. This attribute fits well with the definition of *exstrammenh* discussed earlier.

The Jewish nation -- Jansen, Calovius, Wolf, Heumann, Storr, Dorner, Hebart and Auberlen.<sup>14</sup>

Nelson points out that some follow Robert Maddox in viewing "this generation" as contemporaries of Jesus.

Carson: "This generation" . . . can only with the greatest difficulty be made to mean anything other than the generation living when Jesus spoke."<sup>15</sup>

Boring: "What is clear for Matthew is that the parousia will happen in his own time, among the generation that experienced the presence of Jesus personally . . ."<sup>16</sup>

Hagner: ". . . (η γενεα αυτη, "this generation," is used consistently in the Gospel to refer to Jesus' contemporaries . . .)"<sup>17</sup>

He differs with the conclusions of Darrell Bock who sees this reference as pointing to the generation that is the last generation of all. He concludes that Bock has failed to factor in the "primarily pejorative force of η γενεα αυτη."<sup>18</sup>

The literary approach that Kidder takes is decidedly different than that of Nelson. His approach to Matt. 24:34 relies heavily on analyzing the chiasm that he sees in chapters 23-25.<sup>19</sup> Although his method shows some truly remarkable results, his presuppositions are flawed and the chiasmic mechanism proves to be unreliable. Kidder's first difficulty comes from his claim

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred Loisy, *Les Évangiles Synoptiques, II*, (Haute-Marne: Macon, Protat Frères, Imprimeurs, 1908), 436. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. from 6th German ed. by Peter Christie (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 426-7.

<sup>15</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 507.

<sup>16</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 445.

<sup>17</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1995), 715.

<sup>18</sup> Neil D. Nelson, Jr., "'This Generation' in Matt 24:34: A Literary Perspective" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 38, no. 3. (September, 1996), 382-83.

<sup>19</sup> S. Joseph Kidder, "'This Generation' in Matt. 24:34" in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 21, no. 3. (Autumn 1983), 205.

that Matt. 23-25 is " . . . one broad literary unit, embracing paralleling materials in inverse order (i.e., in chiasmic structure) . . ." <sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, he offers no objective evidence that these three chapters are a broad literary unit. Ware points to Gundry's argument that the farewell to the Jewish nation at the end of Matt. 23 is a clear dividing line between chapter 23 and chapter 24. <sup>21</sup> Nelson expresses the same position. <sup>22</sup> Kidder asks the reader to accept his position even though it is not widely held and without arguing the basis for his position. To him, chapters 23-25 are a unit because of the resident chiasm and the chiasm is to be examined within the broad literary unit. Certainly this approach is circuitous. It becomes evident that Kidder may be more interested in erecting a fascinating chiasm than providing insight into *η γενεα αυτη*. (see below)

### THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW 23-25

J-a. Abomination of Desolation in the holy place (24:15)	b. Gospel proclamation (24:14)
I. The preliminary tribulation (24:9-13) a. Persecution (vss. 9-12) b. Promise of salvation (vs. 13)	I.' The great tribulation (24:16-22) a. Persecution (vss. 16-21) b. Promise of salvation (vs.22)
H. Signs on Earth (24:6-8) wars and rumors of wars; nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom; famines, pestilences, and earthquakes	H.' False messiahs and false prophets (24:23-28)
G. False messiahs (24:5)	G.' Signs in heaven (24:29): sun darkened, moon not giving light, stars falling, powers of heaven shaken
F. End of the Temple and Jerusalem (23:37-24:3)	F.' End of the world, and Second Coming of Christ (24:30-33)
E. "This generation" (23:36): "Amen, I say to you that all these shall come upon this generation"	E.' "This generation" (24:34): "Amen, I say to you that this generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled"
D. Scribes and Pharisees kill the prophets (23:29-35)	D.' Evil servants smite fellow servants, while faithful servants give meat in due season (24:45-51)
C. Externally, scribes and Pharisees appear good, but inside are bad (23:25-28)	C.' Externally, all of the ten virgins have lamps but only five have the oil of internal

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce A. Ware, "Is the Church in View in Matthew 24-25?" in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 138, no. 549 (January-March, 1981), 160.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson, 372.

	preparation (25:1-13)
B. Scribes and Pharisees neglect works of justice, mercy and faith (23:23-24)	B.' The bad servant neglects to multiply his talents, while the good servants do their work of multiplying their talents (25:14-30)
A. Christ's Judgment on "Saying-versus-Doing" (23:1-22)	A.' Christ's Judgment on "Saying-versus-Doing" (25:31-46)
a. Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: <i>Do</i> what they <i>say</i> , but not what they do (23:1-2)	a. Son of Man sits on throne of glory: He separates <i>sayers</i> from <i>doers</i> (25:31-33)
b. Scribes and Pharisees are boastful and pretentious in their works (23:3-6)	b. People at Jesus' left are boastful and pretentious in their works, while those at Jesus' right hand do their works sincerely and unpretentiously (25:35-45)
c. Scribes and Pharisees love public display and titles and authority (23:5-12)	c. People at Jesus' right hand serve humanity as brothers (25:40; cf. 23:8)
d. Scribes and Pharisees give evidence of hypocritical attitude (23:13-22)	d. People at Jesus' left give evidence of hypocritical attitude, while those at Jesus' right hand manifest genuine spirit of service (25:34-35)

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If the benefit of the doubt is applied to Kidder's view of the literary unity of Matt. 23-25, then a second difficulty arises. Continuing from the ellipsis on the above quote, ". . . and, moreover, that within the literary unit the term  $\eta \gammaενεα αυτη$  appears twice---as paralleling elements."<sup>24</sup> What he appears to be saying is that the results that will follow from his analysis will be based on the alignment of the selected paralleling elements within the paralleling materials and reliable meaning will surface. This apparatus is flimsy and depends on producing results that are determined in advance. Are there no other significant syntactic combinations in these three chapters that may be used for the initial alignment of the paralleling materials? Why focus on  $\eta \gammaενεα αυτη$  without rejecting other possibilities?<sup>25</sup> Is it equally valid to establish an enormously broad literary unit and work out a chiasm between  $\eta \gammaενεα αυτη$  from Matt. 24:34 to

<sup>23</sup> Kidder, 204

<sup>24</sup> Kidder, 205.

<sup>25</sup> For example, "the kingdom of heaven" which appears in Matt. 23:13 and 25:1 and again in 25:14.



Matt. 11:16? After all, Kidder promises to “relate the use of the term (generation) in Matt. 24:34 to its even broader context in that Gospel.”<sup>26</sup>

One problem that Kidder overlooks that is seen in his apparatus is that both righteous folk and evildoers are present in the locus of judgment; heaven, in his model. The fact that he singles out the "good works" folk and neglects to mention the evildoers in his commentary points toward his presupposition being worked out, vis a vis, that the good works people are identified with "this generation." In other words, he has forced the pre-tribulation rapture upon his apparatus and ignored any conclusions that might be drawn to the contrary.

It is difficult to avoid illustrating Kidder's methodology from another discipline such as carpentry. A shipment of lumber is delivered for a carpenter to use in building a porch. Instead of making plans and using the boards that match the plan, he begins aligning similar knotholes and fastening boards according to that standard. Eventually, in order to conform the work to some semblance of a porch, he is forced to cut off the ends and fasten them in place to establish the proper dimensions.

C. S. Lewis, in his essay "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" warns that the assured results of modern scholarship need to be subjected to close scrutiny. Lewis makes the point that the application of probability may well dissolve one's sense of assurance when the results depend heavily on sequences that must align properly--even when the probability of the individual components being well aligned is high. The overall structure must produce bad results when its complex network is not properly aligned or an initial alignment is not accurately maintained.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kidder, 203. Kidder does not deliver on this promise, never mentioning any part of Matthew outside chapters 23-25. Perhaps this is due to the essay being a part of a larger body of work that was poorly edited.

<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" in *Christian Reflections*, Walter Hooper, ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, first published 1967, reprinted 1980), 163.

Kidder's conclusion regarding the proper understanding of the identity of *η γενεα αυτη* is based on its appearance in his chiasmic apparatus and its consequent relationship to Matt. 24:30-33. His view, then is that this generation " . . . was to witness the signs in heaven. For lack of good works, the first [generation in Matt. 23:36] was to face the judgment of destruction; watchfulness through good works would bring the second to their judgment of reward."<sup>28</sup> Kidder has jumped from the semantic to the pragmatic with no pause to survey the syntactic.<sup>29</sup> Matt. 24:34 clearly states that " . . . this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." It is impossible to avoid a study of the antecedents to "all these things" in order to locate "this generation" in time. The antecedents are spelled out in 23:37-24:33. If there is any literary device to analyze here, it is surely that Matt. 23:36 and 24:34 operate as the bookends of an inclusio.<sup>30</sup> It is within these bookends that the above mentioned antecedents may be found. The evidence seems to point to these bookends operating as locative in a common sphere and contain events that span many years; generations--from generation to generation. From the eternal viewpoint, might it be possible that this appears as a single, specific generation?

Kidder's method would establish that *η γενεα αυτη* as a discourse marker may suddenly and arbitrarily change meaning. Surely it is inconceivable that a politician who has become well-known for calling his opposition "that gang of thugs" would, on his last day in office, be suddenly understood in using this epithet as referring to his wife and family. It is equally inconceivable that the meaning of the epithet that was first used by the Lord in his indignation toward the violent generation of Noah's day could change when he again uses it a few days

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<sup>28</sup> Kidder, 206. Kidder's view of reward and punishment based on works is disturbing.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley E. Porter, "Discourse Analysis and New Testament Studies: An Introductory Survey" in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, no. 113. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>30</sup> Green, 743, establishes that Luke 20:1 forms an inclusio with 21:38. The latter half of this passage corresponds with Matt. 23:36-Matt. 24:34

before the crucifixion to mean the redeemed. If Jesus had been inconsistent or variable (cf. James 1:17) in his usage, then certainly allowances should be made based on semantic range and other factors. His consistent use of this epithet makes it impossible to interpret his meaning in any way other than that the generation of violence, faithlessness, rebelliousness, enmity, perversion and wickedness will be available for judgment and destruction on the last day.

In conclusion, it has been shown that the semantic features of this study point to Jesus' use of *ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆς* as an epithet and that he was consistent in that usage. The Old Testament has been explored and the relationship between the terms in both Testaments is consistent. The meaning that is attached to the analogous terms in the Old Testament have been examined and compared to those used by Jesus to affirm their status as epithetical. The results of this study compare favorably with those of Nelson whose use of narrative analogy establishes his conclusion that *ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆς* "describes unbelieving, rejecting humanity, unresponsive to God and oblivious to the possibility of facing judgment. "This generation" that opposed the coming of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry stands in solidarity with those who reject and oppose God and his kingdom to the very end."<sup>31</sup>

The application of this principle to the final dominical use of *ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆς* in Matthew 24:34 indicates that here, too, Jesus was referring to evildoers as one single body that persisted from the time of Noah and would be intact at the judgment of his return in power and glory. As such, he is not considering "this generation" through the eyes of human flesh but through the eyes of God who sees all and perceives things as they truly are. His judgment is based upon what he knows to be true, not the outward appearance upon which fallen mankind depends; sons of Adam who are, by and large, *apistos*. It will be, after all, a judgment upon all the wicked of

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<sup>31</sup> Nelson, 383.

the world who consider themselves to be God's people, when they find that others than they have been

" . . . caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

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