

Matthew 24:34 NASB

³⁴ Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

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Preterists have long boasted that Matthew 24:34 is the **key** to unlocking the timing of the events in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21). They claim that the events of the Matthean discourse can be seen through the lens of (vs.34) and therefore utilize this text as **the** backdrop to their interpretation. Here is what leading partial-preterist Gary DeMar says:

“This generation” in Matthew 24:34 and the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21 refers to the generation of Jesus' day. Following this biblical evidence, most Bible commentators have interpreted “this generation” in this way, understanding that all the signs in the Olivet Discourse referred to events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in AD 70. This interpretation is neither new nor unusual. Bible expositors throughout church history have held this same view.”¹

DeMar and other preterists have placed an incredible amount of weight on a singular phrase (**this generation**) and depend heavily on their understanding that “this generation” refers **exclusively** to the contemporaries of Jesus’ day. As a futurist, I have problems with this assertion. If it can be demonstrated that the preteristic assertion regarding “this generation” is correct, then it can be concluded that the events that surround the discourse and much of Revelation 6-19 **could** be argued for a first century fulfillment, and that is exactly what the preteristic interpretation is

¹ Taken from American Vision: <https://americanvision.org/posts/this-generation-and-brood-of-vipers/>, Dated: Dec 17, 2021.

arguing for. However, in placing so much weight on a singular phrase, there is much that can be argued against the preteristic position. DeMar in another article states,

“There **may be unbelief in the future among other generations**, but Jesus clearly identifies the people of His day as being **part of a present “perverted generation.”**”²

In making this concession DeMar has allowed for the possibility that *genea* **could** speak to a future perverted generation. With that, an obvious question must be asked, **could** it not also speak to a generation that existed prior the contemporaries of Jesus? This question will be answered in more detail below.

I am convinced that the preteristic interpretation lacks consistency with the overall message of the scriptures and the backdrop of the *genea* in the ***Old Testament***. From my perspective preterists have depended far too much on their assertion that “this generation” is ***exclusive*** to the contemporaries of Jesus. To prove this point, I want to show how Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. (partial preterist) relies ***heavily*** on Matthew 24:34 to make his case throughout his blogs.

Here are some examples:

“Did Christ come on the clouds in AD 70? This language certainly could be used of the second advent. **But once again, just three verses later Jesus states very clearly and forcefully: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matt 24:34). Thus, we must recognize this as referring to the AD 70 event.**”³

² Taken from American Vision: <https://americanvision.org/7618/exegetical-this-generation-matthew-24/>, Dated: April 3, 2013.

³ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Postmillennialism & The Great Tribulation (Part 7)* PMW 2020-053., <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2020/07/07/postmillennialism-the-great-tribulation-7/>

“Another confusing feature of Christ’s prophecy is found in Matthew 24:31: “And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” Is this speaking of the rapture? Did it occur in AD 70? **Whatever this verse means, we must recall once again that Jesus affirms only three verses later that “all these things” will take place in “this generation” (Matt 24:34).**”⁴

“First, Matthew 24:34 states that “all these things” shall occur in “this generation.” **We must notice that verse 34 appears just thirteen verses after verse 21. Therefore, “the great tribulation” must be one of “these things” to occur in “this generation.”**”⁵

“Thus, a quick survey of the biblical and the historical records show that many of the prophecies in Matthew 24 come to pass in the first century. **This fits perfectly with the time-frame of Matthew 24:34 where our Lord asserts: “this generation shall not pass until all these things take place.”** Therefore, we see that postmillennialism is not negatively impacted by the great tribulation passage — thus far.”⁶

“**Thus, in Matthew 24:34,** Jesus warns: “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” **The ones to whom he is speaking** (his first-century disciples, Matt 24:1–2) **will recognize the judgments in the Lord’s great tribulation proclamation. This is a very clear and dogmatic statement.** We must note that he states here that this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

That includes the great tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24:21. Matthew 24:34

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Postmillennialism & The Great Tribulation (Part 6)* PMW 2020-052., <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2020/07/03/postmillennialism-the-great-tribulation-6/>

⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Postmillennialism & The Great Tribulation (Part 4)* PMW 2020-050., <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2020/06/26/postmillennialism-the-great-tribulation-4/>

employs virtually identical language to the Matthew 23:36 statement regarding the soon-coming persecution of Christians: “Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation.”⁷

A blatantly clear trend begins to arise when reading preteristic material. Matthew 24:34 becomes the *lens* for their interpretation of the Olivet Discourse. No matter the challenges faced in the text, the preterist can rest assured that everything must have been fulfilled within the period of the 1st century, simply because they have assumed that *this generation* refers to the *contemporaries* of Jesus. However, is that really the case? Or are the preterists just reading everything through a singular text and assuming without warrant that it must fit the first century?

Now, let me be fair, preterism (in both its forms) do not exclusively use this argument to defend their position, that is to say that this isn't their *only* argument. I have read enough from the preteristic side to know that they can build other arguments (i.e. time texts, Neronic dating, the beast, the seven kings, and Nero, etc.) from the Scriptures to defend their position. However, I believe that none of these arguments (except for maybe the Neronic dating) is as heavily weighted as Matthew 24:34. In *almost every* conversation that I have had on this subject, Matthew 24:34 is the *first* place that the preterist starts. I genuinely believe that they think *this* is the strongest argument they have, not that it is the *only* argument they have. So, with that said, I want to start by addressing this pillar of preterism, because I believe when you bring forward a charge against their interpretation of Matthew 24:34 the preteristic position starts to waiver.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the preterist has wrongly understood who the generation is that Jesus is focused on throughout the Gospels and have wrongly limited

⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Postmillennialism & The Great Tribulation (Part 2)* PMW 2020-048., <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2020/06/19/postmillennialism-the-great-tribulation-2/>

“*this generation*” to a singular group of people (*i.e. the contemporaries of Jesus*). I hope to demonstrate the qualitative nature of *genea* and that it is rooted in the themes of the seed of the serpent (*Gen. 3*), the flood narrative (*Gen. 7*), the Song of Moses (*Deut. 32*), and refers to a *trans-historical class of people* used in the pejorative in almost all pertinent cases in the New Testament. I also hope to demonstrate that this *trans-historical people* includes (past generations) tied to Cain, through to the contemporaries of Jesus, and will extend down until the return of Christ. My view of *genea* is not limited to a singular group identified in the New Testament, my view extends and encompasses what I believe is more of the biblical data.

If my thesis is correct, it would completely undercut the preteristic interpretation and would provide a sufficient alternative that is consistent with the preteristic concerns regarding the immediate audience, but would also include the past and future generations that were intended to be in view and have been neglected by the preterist.

“Generation” – A General Overview

How are we to understand the term “*this generation*”. Scholars often disagree on its usage, however, there does seem to be a clear understanding of how Jesus intended us to understand the word.

The word “*generation*” means “*origin, lineage, birth*” as seen in Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament words. The Greek word “*generation*” (*genea*) is used most often in the New Testament in a *qualitative* (type), not *quantitative* (time) sense to describe a *type* of people. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon states that *genea* has at least four definitions (1. a begetting, birth, nativity; 2. passively, that which has been begotten, men of the same stock, a family; 3. the

whole multitude of men living at the same time: 4. an age).⁸ Thayer leverages the third definition (the whole multitude of men living at the same time) for Matthew 24:34, and states that it is *“used especially of the Jewish race living at one and the same period.”*⁹ However, he doesn’t add Matthew 24:34 into the section of verses tied to Jewish race living at one and the same period. He adds the following verses into that section, but Matthew 24:34 isn’t one of them: Matthew 11:16; Matthew 12:39, 41f, 45; Matthew 16:4; Matthew 23:36; Mark 8:12, 38; Luke 11:29f, 32, 50; Luke 17:25; Acts 13:36; Hebrews 3:10.¹⁰ To me that is quite interesting! Why would it not be included in this section, or repeated? Perhaps because it was meant to function outside of the realm of a limited perspective of a singular Jewish race living at one and the same period. Thayer does group together 3 texts (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 1:48) which leads me to believe they are joined together and have the same general meaning of a whole multitude of men living at the same time. If that is the case, the general understanding of *πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί* *must be speaking of the contemporaries of Jesus*. So, whatever, position we take from here, there must be *some* relevance of *“this generation”* tied to the original audience that Jesus spoke to, a point I am sure my preterists friend would be happy to hear. However, it isn’t limited by time to *only* a singular quantitative generation (which is where I believe the preterist errs).

There are 37 mentions of *“generation”* in the New Testament and there appears to be three clear usages of the word:

(Generation – Successive Lineage) – 8 Total Usages

This refers to lineages that follow one after another. Here are some examples:

⁸ γενεά in Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1074.htm>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

Matthew 1:17 NASB

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Acts 14:16 NASB

In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways

Ephesians 3:5 NASB

which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.

Colossians 1:26 NASB

that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints

(Generation – Restrictive Lineage) – 2 Total Usages

This refers to generations that are restricted to someone's lifetime. Here are some examples:

Acts 8:33 NASB

“In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.”

Acts 13:36 NASB

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;

(Generation – Pejorative) – 27 Total Usages

This refers to generations that have a negative qualifier associated to them. It functions as a qualitative statement about a type of people. In the biblical case it relates to the spiritual condition of the people. Here are some examples:

Matthew 11:16 NASB

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children,

Matthew 12:39-45 NASB

But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; [40] for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [41] The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. [42] The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. [43] “Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. [44] Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. [45] Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”

Matthew 17:17 NASB

And Jesus answered and said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.”

Matthew 23:36 NASB

Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Mark 8:12 NASB

Sighing deeply in His spirit, He *said, “Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation

Luke 11:29-32, 50-51 NASB

As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, “This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. [30] For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. [31] The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. [32] The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. [50] so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, [51] from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’

Luke 17:25 NASB

But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Philippians 2:15 NASB

that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

Having established some cases for the wording of *this generation* we can confidently exclude options 1-2 from being viable for Matthew 24:34, because the entire tone of the section is geared toward the culmination of the previous usage of *genea* throughout the gospels. Jesus must be continuing his condemnation from Matthew 23:36 forward into the Olivet Discourse. Jesus must be speaking of the same wicked and evil *generation* that He was prior.

Before moving backwards toward the Old Testament, we must consider a few important facts about how we interpret Jesus' words:

- Jesus often uses and depends upon *Mosaic* language
- Jesus often draws from *Old Testament themes*
- Jesus often connects *themes to people*

With a few of these considerations in mind, I want us to work through what I believe is the bridge into the Old Testament, and it comes just prior to the discourse, it also includes the terms (*this generation*).

The Missing Piece – Matthew 23:34-36

After exposing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees there is a small section where I believe

Jesus bridges the gap between the Old and New Testaments. This text will allow us to see that Jesus is drawing out a theme from the Old Testament, specifically rooted from the beginning of the fall and applying it to His direct audience. The text is Matthew 23:34-36:

“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 flog in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,* ³⁵ so that upon you *will 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. ³⁶ Truly I say to you, *all these things will come upon this generation.*”

In a text filled with important details we have *one* piece of information that stands out. In (vs.35), the second person plural “you” is used of the scribes and Pharisees as being the agents that murdered Abel down to Zechariah:

35 so that upon *you will 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.*

Take a step back for a moment. Is Jesus accusing the scribes and Pharisees of His day for the bloodshed of Abel down to Zechariah? How could it be possible that the guilt of righteous bloodshed on earth be accounted to this tiny group of religious leaders at the time of Jesus? How can Jesus (using the second person plural “you”) be saying that they murdered Zechariah? They weren’t even around to have committed these murders. How then could the guilt for these murders be tied to them? I believe the answer to these questions will become clearer as we proceed forward.

More important to this is why start all the way back at Abel? Why include Abel in this list? The religious zealots of Jesus' day didn't kill Abel, so why did Jesus mention Abel? There must be some reason to tie this group together (Abel -> Zechariah). We know that there are themes that tie together Abel -> Zechariah (they are righteous vs.35). Clearly, those that are killing (vs.34), crucifying (vs. 34), flogging (vs.34), persecuting (vs.34) are those that stand in opposition to those that are righteous. So, we have two groups here (righteous and unrighteous). The bloodshed of the righteous fall on the hands of the unrighteous. Well, we know that the sins of our fathers cannot fall on us, as per the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 24:16 NASB

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin alone.

Ezekiel 18:19-20 NASB

19 “Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not suffer the punishment for the father’s guilt?’ When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has kept all My statutes and done them, he shall certainly live. 20 The person who sins will die. A son will not suffer the punishment for the father’s guilt, nor will a father suffer the punishment for the son’s guilt; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

Unless we figure out what connection there is between those tied to *Cain* and those that are standing before Jesus, we will completely miss the point. Nelson states:

“Matthew's Jesus was speaking about evil, faithless contemporaries in his use of *hē genea haute* in 11:16; 12:39, 41, 45; 16:4; cf. 17:17. **But the contemporaries of Christ did not murder Zechariah son of Berechiah (23:35-36), and thus "this generation" in 23:36 extends beyond Jesus' contemporaries to include murderers back to the time of Abel and forward to those who would kill and crucify and persecute disciples until Jesus returns (23:34-39).**”¹¹

So, there must be some sort of connective element. The theme that I believe Jesus is drawing out for us the theme of *good and evil (righteous and unrighteous)* and this was a theme that was brought out in Genesis at the fall of man (Gen. 3). We must start there if we are to understand the relationship with the point Jesus is making here.

Genesis 3:15

In order to understand why Jesus starts with Abel, it is important for us to go back to Abel and Cain and where they originate from. Cain and Abel are offspring of Adam and Eve. The Lord said in Genesis 3:15 that there would 2 groups of enemies (the woman's offspring and the serpent's offspring). These 2 groups would battle each other and would be enemies.

And I will **make enemies Of you and the woman, And of your offspring and her Descendant;** He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise Him on the heel.”

Abel must be tied to the woman (because he is the righteous offspring). We know that from the woman the Lord Jesus would come (the singular offspring and the corporate representative).

¹¹ Neil D. Nelson, Jr. “*This Generation*” in *Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective*, JETS 38/3 (September 1996), 381, f.n. 37.

Abel, as one that was righteous would fall under the woman's offspring. Cain on the other hand was clearly wicked and evil and was tied to the serpent. John confirms this in his epistle:

1 John 3:12 NASB

not as Cain, **who was of the evil one and murdered his brother**. And for what reason did he murder him? Because **his own deeds were evil**, but his **brothers were righteous**.

John tells us that Cain was “of” [ἐκ] the “evil one” [πονηροῦ]. Thayer tells us that πονηροῦ is used to speak of the devil.¹² Therefore, we see the tie between Cain and the devil. It was Cain who was the *unrighteous* one, who had *evil* deeds. Cain is the offspring spoken of in Genesis 3:15 that would clash against the seed of the woman (Abel). Jesus, in pointing back to Cain has a clear point He is making. He wants his audience to know that He is tying them (scribes and Pharisees) back to Cain the first murderer and those that come down the line of Cain as a wicked/evil people. This theme continues throughout the Old Testament.

Now, picture for a moment who Jesus is speaking to during his day? He is speaking to the religious leaders (who are wicked, unbelieving, and perverted). Jesus uses the same terminology as John does in his epistle of Cain in John 8:

John 8:44 NASB

You are **of your father the devil**, and you want to do the **desires of your father**. **He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.**

¹² Thayer, πονηροῦ, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4190.htm>

Cain	Of the Devil (1 John 2:13)
Religious Leaders	Of the Devil (John 8:44)

Take a moment to swallow that one. Jesus is saying to the scribe and Pharisees, that *they* are directly tied to the evil and wicked generation, the seed of the serpent, the ones that are offspring of the devil himself. The devil is their father, a direct allusion to Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 7:1

Moving from Genesis 3:15 to Genesis 7:1 we see the Septuagint speaking of another “generation”:

καὶ εἶπεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Νωε εἰσελθε σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκός σου εἰς τὴν κιβωτόν ὅτι σὲ εἶδον δίκαιον ἐναντίον μου ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ

The NIV picks up on this in its translation:

The Lord then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous **in this generation**.”

Neil D. Nelson, Jr. draws this out when he writes,

“Matthew seems to have deliberately juxtaposed the phrase “this generation” with his account of the days of Noah in 24:37-39 in order to echo the notorious generation of the flood (Gen 7:1 LXX). The flood generation is a type of “this generation” that sees the end signs, just as the flood itself typifies the judgment that will occur at the parousia. “This

generation" in 24:34 **represents a long line of unbelieving, unresponsive people from the time of Noah to the end of the age.**"¹³

Nelson correctly sees the juxtaposition of the phrase "this generation" and the allusion (echo) of Noah's generation of the flood. Note, that both in Noah's day and in the day of Jesus, there are wicked and evil men that are being dealt with. Genesis 7 confirms for us that there is a generation during the days of Noah that represent another group tied to the seed of the serpent. There was another evil and wicked generation that was present during those days.

Now, if that weren't enough, let's look at another clear connection in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 32:5, 20

In the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, we see *genea* used to describe a *type* of people that existed during the days of Moses. Let's look at *genea* from the LXX:

Deuteronomy 32:5 LXX

“ἡμάρτοσαν οὐκ αὐτῷ τέκνα μωμητὰ **γενεὰ** σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη”

Deuteronomy 32:5 NASB

They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; **But are a perverse and crooked generation.**

Deuteronomy 32:20 LXX

“καὶ εἶπεν ἀποστρέψω τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἀπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ δείξω τί ἔσται αὐτοῖς ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων ὅτι **γενεὰ** ἐξεστραμμένη ἐστὶν υἱοὶ οἷς οὐκ ἔστιν πίστις ἐν αὐτοῖς”

¹³ Neil D. Nelson, Jr. "This Generation" in *Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective*, JETS 38/3 (September 1996), 383-384.

Deuteronomy 32:20 NASB:

“Then He said, ‘I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; For they are a **perverse generation**, Sons in whom is no faithfulness.

Take a look at what we have in these two texts. Moses is condemning a *generation* that existed at his time and uses the same language that Jesus will start using in the gospels. Notice the terminology:

- *They acted corruptly*
- *They are not His children*
- *They have a defect*
- *They are a perverse and crooked generation*
- *God will hide His face from them*
- *They are a perverse generation*
- *They are sons in whom there is no faithfulness*

Several scholars have tied these texts with Jesus’ usage of *genea*:

“The Song of Moses in Deut. 32 (vv. 5 and 20) seems here to have had a certain influence on the wording.”¹⁴

“This is conclusive evidence that the phrase “this generation” conveys a technical meaning referring to the trans-historical offspring of wickedness, as it does in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:5, 20).”¹⁵

¹⁴ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, 36.

¹⁵ Brock Hollett, *Debunking Preterism: How Over-Realized Eschatology Misses the Not Yet of Bible Prophecy*, Kindle, (Morris Publishing, 2018), Location 1703.

“Their unbelief when Jesus was present doing mighty deeds echoes the unbelief of those who were delivered from Egypt by God’s mighty deeds and then grumbled in the wilderness. Moses wrote, “They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation” (Deuteronomy 32:5 – “generation” is *genea* in the LXX). Since this was part of Moses’ song it was not just for people then alive but future generations: “For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 31:9). The people in Jesus’ day had the same characteristics as those in Moses’ day and those carried on after Jesus’ ascension just as they did after Moses’ death.”¹⁶

“His use of the phrase (*hē genea haute*) has deliberate connections to the two most notorious generations in the OT: the generation of the flood, and the generation of the wilderness wanderings. Adjectives like "evil," "perverse," "adulterous" and "faithless" (Matt 11:39,45; 16:4; 17:17) come from the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32; cf. especially w. 5, 20).”¹⁷

Hebrews picks up on this language as well, describing this generation:

Hebrews 3:10 NASB

Therefore I was angry with **this generation**, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they did not know My ways’

¹⁶ Bob DeWaay, “This Generation” and it’s Preterist Exegetical Misuse. Website: https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue100b.htm#_edn4

¹⁷ Neil D. Nelson, Jr. “*This Generation*” in *Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective*, JETS 38/3 (September 1996), 373-374.

Was the author of Hebrews speaking of the generation alive at the time of this writing? Or a generation that existed in the past, at the time of Moses? Hebrews 3:1-11 confirms that the Mosaic period is in view and that God was angry with (*this generation*) of Israelites. We are beginning to see a trend arising from the Old Testament.

Conclusion: There was indicated in Genesis 3:15 that there were 2 groups (seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent) that would exist in constant friction with one another that we can clearly tie to Abel and Cain. This wicked generation existed during the days of the flood (as seen in Genesis 7) and appear again in Deuteronomy 32. I believe that this is the terminology that Jesus draws from in the Gospels and will now seek to demonstrate this.

Moving to the Gospels

It is clear that in seeing how Moses is using “this generation” that he had a specific group in mind and was speaking to a specific audience (cf. Genesis 3:15, Genesis 7:1, Deuteronomy 32:5, 20). Now, the question that must be asked, is Jesus referring to a singular audience (restricted only to the 1st century) or were Moses and Jesus speaking of the same generation? My position is the latter. I believe that both Moses and Jesus were speaking of a *trans-historical* (type/class) of people. Bringing together our findings from the Old Testament with Moses’ writings and Jesus’ writings we will see how Jesus is drawing from Moses very clearly. Let’s look at how Jesus is using *genea* in the Gospel of Matthew:

Matthew 11:16 NASB

“But to what shall I compare **this generation**? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call out to the other children,

Matthew 12:39-45 NASB

But He answered and said to them, “An evil and **adulterous generation** craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; [40] for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [41] The men of Nineveh will stand up with this **generation** at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. [42] The Queen of the South will rise up with this **generation at the judgment** and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. [43] “Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. [44] Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. [45] Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this **evil generation.**”

Matthew 17:17 NASB

And Jesus answered and said, “**You unbelieving and perverted generation**, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.”

Matthew 23:36 NASB

Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon **this generation.**

Mark 8:12 NASB

Sighing deeply in His spirit, He *said, “Why does this **generation** seek for a sign? **Truly**

I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation

Luke 11:29-32, 50-51 NASB

As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, “**This generation is a wicked**

generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.

[30] For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this

generation. [31] The Queen of the South will rise up with the men **of this generation at**

the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear

the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. [32] The

men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it,

because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than

Jonah is here. [50] **so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of**

the world, may be charged against this generation, [51] **from the blood of Abel to**

the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes,

I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’

Luke 17:25 NASB

But first He must suffer many things and be **rejected by this generation**.

Just reading through these texts, one should see a clear parallel with Moses’ usage. Let’s put

them side-by-side to compare:

Moses	Jesus	Combined Usages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They acted corruptly</i> • <i>They are not His children</i> • <i>They have a defect</i> • <i>They are a perverse and crooked generation</i> • <i>God will hide His face from them</i> • <i>They are a perverse generation</i> • <i>They are sons in whom there is no faithfulness</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They are an evil and adulterous generation</i> • <i>They crave for a sign</i> • <i>The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at judgment</i> • <i>They are an evil generation</i> • <i>They are an unbelieving and perverted generation</i> • <i>They would reject the Messiah</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They acted corruptly</i> • <i>They are not His children</i> • <i>They have a defect</i> • <i>They are a perverse and crooked generation</i> • <i>God will hide His face from them</i> • <i>They are sons in whom there is no faithfulness</i> • <i>They are an evil and adulterous generation</i> • <i>They crave for a sign</i> • <i>The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at judgment</i> • <i>They are an unbelieving and perverted generation</i> • <i>They would reject the Messiah</i>

There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus is leveraging Mosaic terminology and pointing us to the same group of people that have existed from the beginning. Matthew 23:34-36 is tying together a type/class of people that have existed from the very beginning and the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day *fit* within that class of people because they are of their father the devil. Let's summarize our findings:

This generation = Trans-historical, wicked, evil, unbelieving type/class of people, that are at enmity with the seed of the woman. They are responsible for the slaughter of the righteous and have blood on their hands since Abel. They are the serpent's offspring.

Further Proof – Matthew 25:31-33

If what I have brought together wasn't enough to compel you, let's look at another indicator at the end of the discourse.

Matthew 25:31-33 NASB

³¹ “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and **He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;** ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left.

Two groups are mentioned here:

- *The Sheep*
- *The Goats*

Sound at all familiar?

- *The Sheep (The Seed of the Woman) – The Righteous*

- *The Goats (The Seed of the Serpent) – The Unrighteous*

We are again drawn back to the clash between two groups and *that* is the group that Jesus has in mind in the Olivet Discourse and that is why the discourse finishes with the separation of the two groups. The two groups will be separated at last when Jesus comes back at the parousia, which Matthew 24:27-31 outlines, just prior to the statement in (vs.34).

Concluding Observations

After dealing with these texts we can now return to Matthew 24:34 and understand it as Moses and Jesus intended.

Matthew 24:34 NASB

³⁴ *Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*

Jesus is saying that “this evil and wicked generation (i.e. *the seed of the serpent*) will NOT pass away, even though their house would be made desolate (Mt. 23:38-24:2) until all these things (tied to the Olivet Discourse) take place.” *This generation* makes up those tied to seed of the serpent from Abel down to Zechariah and those that were the contemporaries of Jesus and those down to the 2nd coming of Christ. *Genea* is **not restricted** to a **singular** generation. It isn’t a static term that means the generation *only* at the time of Christ. As we have seen it stems back further than the contemporaries, down the line to the contemporaries and will persist (not pass away) until the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse. That is what the text is showing.

Let’s quickly recap as to avoid misunderstandings.

- *This generation comes from the seed of the serpent in Genesis 3:15*

- *This generation is drawn from Mosaic language found in Genesis 7:1, Deut. 32:5,20 and reaches back to Cain (Mt. 23:34-36) to demonstrate that the generation in view is one that is trans-historical.*
- *This generation is in the pejorative and describes a type/class of people*
- *This generation includes those from Cain down to the 2nd coming of Christ*
- *This generation makes up the offspring of the devil, the seed of the serpent, the goats*
- *This generation will exist until the 2nd coming of Christ*
- *This generation is past, present, future (to the writings of the Scripture)*
- *This generation is not exclusive to the contemporaries of Jesus only, but includes them*

I am convinced that my position best exemplifies the evidence and provides the only position whereas preteristic and futuristic concerns are accounted for and not ignored. It best fits with the data and explains the early usages which I believe can be overlooked by futurists and preterists.

Here is the trail from Genesis 3:15-Matthew 25:31:34. Clearly, we can see how the ‘seed’ travels from the beginning to the return of Christ, and that type/class of people will exist until alongside the ‘seed’ of the woman until the return of Christ.

Gn. 3:15 → Gn. 7:1 → Dt. 32:5,20 → Mt.12:39-45 → Mt. 17:17 → Mt. 23:34-36 → Mt. 24:34 → Mt. 25:31-34

For Further Reading:

- Bob DeWaay, "This Generation" and it's Preterist Exegetical Misuse
<https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue100b.htm>
- Richard Mayhue, Jesus a Preterist or Futurist?
https://www.academia.edu/1422806/Jesus_A_Preterist_or_Futurist

- Brock Hollett, *Debunking Preterism: How Over-Realized Eschatology Misses the Not Yet of Bible Prophecy*, Kindle, (Morris Publishing, 2018), Location 1703.
- Neil D. Nelson, Jr. « This Generation » in Matt 24 :34 : A Literary Critical Perspective https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/38/38-3/JETS_38-3_Nelson_369-386.pdf

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