

Final Generation

Do you believe we are the final generation?

It is commonly asserted among many Messianic Believers, and for that matter many evangelical Christians also, that our generation living today is the “final generation.” This is often based on the following statement by Yeshua delivered during His Olivet Discourse on the end-times:

“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matthew 24:34, NASU; cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).

A common claim that is made—especially in some distinct Messianic circles—is that the “final generation” started in 1967 with the recapturing of the Old City of Jerusalem by Israeli forces. Given that the Exodus generation died out in forty years (Numbers 32:13; Psalm 95:10), it is assumed that within a period of about forty years that the end-times and Second Coming must be upon us. Today (2007), this has spurred on a great deal of end-time speculation and prognostication, with many claiming that the world as we know it is coming to an end at breakneck speed. Certain teachers have taken advantage of the paranoia, and have capitalized upon it in more ways than just drawing attention to themselves.

Interestingly enough, there are three major interpretations of Yeshua’s words that exist:

1. The Lord says “this generation will not pass away,” and is referring to the generation that lived during the time that He declared these words. Preterists who believe that the “end-times” actually took place during the First Century, and consider the antichrist of Revelation to be Nero Caesar, are the most common advocates of this view.
2. The Lord says “this generation will not pass away,” and is speaking of a future group of people that will be those who will witness all of the events prior to His return. While it is easy to associate “this generation” with those who have witnessed the rebirth of Israel in the Middle East, there is no Scriptural indication to specifically pinpoint when “this generation” actually began. Yeshua’s two-verse parable of the fig tree is hardly enough to equate the reestablishment of Israel as being the catalyst that began the final generation (Matthew 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-30), especially when Israel in Scripture is associated with the olive tree.
3. When the Lord refers to what the Greek records as *hē genea autē* (ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ), which in most Bibles is rendered as “this generation,” He is referring to something else. As should be noted, *genea* has a variety of possible renderings, including “race, stock, family” and “a race, generation” (LS).¹ Yeshua’s words need not be interpreted regarding a specific “generation” that He either spoke to in the past, or is speaking to in the future, but rather an ethnic group of people that will have survived long enough into the future to be present to experience the end-times.

Of the three options considered, **the author is convinced that the third**—that Yeshua is actually referring to “this race will not pass away”—is most valid. The *Ryrie Study Bible* actually confirms these conclusions, remarking, “No one living when Jesus spoke these words lived to see ‘all these things’ come to pass. However, the Greek word can mean ‘race’ or ‘family,’ which makes good sense here; i.e., the Jewish race will be preserved, in spite of terrible persecution, until the Lord comes.”²

While many Messianics today believe that they are the “final generation,” it seems very unlikely that Yeshua will be able to return soon given the current theological state of the Messianic movement (in 2007). For a

¹ LS, 161.

² Charles C. Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible*, New American Standard (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1490.

movement that often believes it has the answers to “change the world” (especially with a message of Torah restoration)—yet still largely does not even *have a basic theology about God* (among other things)—much is going to have to improve. Likewise, if today’s Messianic movement truly did believe it were living in the “final generation,” then we would see far more attention dedicated to not only spreading the good news and seeing that people repent of their sins, but we would also be preparing people physically—and more importantly psychologically—for the effects of the Great Tribulation.

It seems that the arguments in favor of us living in the “final generation” are delivered more to draw attention to various “prophetic” ministries and sell products, than realistically developing a well reasoned eschatology. We should not try to force God’s hand regarding the fulfillment of prophecy, but rather do all that we can do to provide for a sustainable future for the Messianic community. We should be about the Lord’s work truly equipping Messianic Believers *for the challenges of today*, so that they can be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow—which may include the Great Tribulation. But in order to be more prepared, there is an entire array of theological issues that needs to be considered that most of the Messianic movement since 1967 has avoided (and whether these issues have been avoided *purposefully* or not is hard to determine). If anything, **it is time for us to no longer avoid these issues.**

For a further discussion of this and related issues, consult the author’s article “**Are We Really Ready for the End-Times?**” (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*).