

The reviewer and his wife found the book to be extremely readable, lively and above all helpful and positive. It is true to Scripture, showing that many sexual problems must be solved by the mental application of Christ's teachings. It provides a lot of medical information, and sources of material are referenced.

This is the kind of book that should be in

every ecclesial library and that can be offered without embarrassment to young people in a Christadelphian home. We are sure also that many not-so-young members of a Christadelphian household will find it a helpful and refreshing book to read, and the reviewer and his wife heartily recommend it to the Brotherhood and the young people in its care.

The Olivet Prophecy

6. Concluding matters

Stephen Hughes

AFTER GIVING THE fig tree parable, Jesus continues: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Mt. 24:34). We have to try to work out which generation is being referred to here. If all things were to be fulfilled in A.D. 70 then all the Olivet Prophecy would be about A.D. 70. However, this is not the case, since we have shown that the Olivet Prophecy contains sections about the return of Jesus to establish the Kingdom. So how do we explain this verse?

One possible explanation is that Jesus is talking about the generation of the sprouting fig tree, that is, 1948 and beyond. In 2004 we are now fifty-six years on from 1948, which is longer than our current understanding of a generation (about twenty-five years). Another interpretation that has been put forward is that the generation that Jesus is referring to in the Olivet Prophecy is the Jewish race from the first century A.D. onwards, who exhibit the same lack of faith as the Jews in Jesus's time.¹

The Jewish generation

The Greek word translated 'generation' in the Olivet Prophecy is *genea*, which according to Strong's means a generation, either the *period* or the *persons*. Strong says that presumably *genea* is a derivative of *genos*, meaning 'nation', 'offspring', 'stock'. We see from this that *genea* has a wider meaning than the English word 'generation'. We understand a generation to mean people from a particular era; for example, we talk of 'our parents' generation'. When we review the use of *genea* and related words in the New Testament we discover that they can refer to a group

of people sharing common characteristics as well as people from a particular era.

The two meanings of 'generation' are seen in the first chapter of Matthew, though the second instance uses *genesis*, not *genea*. The meaning that we are most familiar with is seen in Matthew 1:17: "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations". The meaning that we are not familiar with is in verse 1: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ". Note that "generation" here is singular and not plural and therefore must encompass *all* antecedents of Jesus.

The 'people' meaning of a generation is seen clearly in Matthew 23, the preceding chapter to the Olivet Prophecy, and highly relevant to this discussion. The scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus spoke against in Matthew 23 were in large measure responsible for the spiritual degeneration of the nation, which eventually resulted in the destruction of the nation in A.D. 70. Jesus says of these people:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye *generation* [*gennēma*, a related word to *genea*] of vipers,

1. "Interpreting the Mount Olivet Prophecy", Tony Benson, *The Testimony*, Sept. 1995.

how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (vv. 29-33).

Here Jesus is very clearly linking the behaviour of the current generation with that of past generations. The type of behaviour and thinking of the generation of Jesus's times will not pass away until the Kingdom is established. This change is described in Ezekiel 36:24-27:

"For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them".

Other verses demonstrate the non-local nature of *genea* and *genos*. For example, Mark 7:26: "the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation [*genos*]" . Another verse that demonstrates that *genos* can mean a group of people is 1 Peter 2:9: "But ye are a chosen *generation*, a royal priesthood". This "generation" clearly refers to the saints, who are drawn from all epochs stretching from the Creation till now.

Genea is also used to describe Gentiles: "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation [*genea*], among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:14,15). In this particular case the nation or generation refers to people living in the Greek city of Philippi in the first century. However, we can see that this verse applies equally well to us. Wherever we are in the world, and in whatever era, we live "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation".

As it was in the days of Noah

The last section of the Olivet Prophecy is applicable to both the return of Jesus and A.D. 70. At the end of each age there has always been a crisis of faith; at the time of the Flood, at the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, at the end of both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel, and at A.D. 70. In the Olivet Prophecy Jesus describes the era of his return as being like the days of Noah prior to the Flood.

It is instructive to look back at the time of Noah and see what the major problems were. A chilling account is found in Genesis 6:12,13: "And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth". The implication of these verses is that God had set a certain minimum standard of behaviour for mankind, below which people had sunk by the time Noah was about 480 years old.

The existing generation at any time has a powerful influence on the next. Dramatic events are required to break the cycle. It is quite possible that, if the world had continued on after Noah and his family passed from the scene without Divine intervention, there would never have been another righteous person. There would never have been an Abraham, a Job or a David. Conditions would never have been right for Jesus to come on the scene. The world would have continued on with worsening conditions until incredible depravity was reached, causing enormous misery. It is possible that, if the world had continued on beyond the time of the Flood, it might eventually have been destroyed by a nuclear holocaust (assuming a certain level of technological development). It is also highly likely that infectious diseases related to ungodly behaviour would have ravaged the human race.

The breaking of the similar downward cycle which exists today will occur when Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom. The basic pattern that has been followed throughout history is that the spiritual condition of each generation is worse than the one before. In the Western world this pattern can be seen stretching back a century or so. The pace of decline has accelerated since World War 2 due to modern technology, principally electronic communication.

"Except those days should be shortened"

In relation to what we have been discussing, there is a very interesting passage in Matthew 24: "for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (vv. 21,22). (There are similar words in Mark 13:19,20.) We are told in very clear terms in Luke 17:26-30 that the world at the

time of Jesus's return will be like it was in the days of Noah and Lot.

What about today? What would happen if Jesus were not to come back? There is no doubt that the world would degenerate even further. Just imagine how much suffering there would be over the next thousand years if Jesus were not to return! How many people would die of war, disease and starvation? How many women would be raped? How many people would be murdered? How many people would die from the effects of drug abuse? How many people would commit suicide? How many people would get nothing out of life? The numbers would be truly astronomical.

There can be no doubt that if the world was left to go on without Divine intervention then the situation would arise where God would have no choice but to destroy most of mankind, as happened in the days of Noah. However, things are different this time. Jesus and the saints will shortly arrive on the world stage to establish the Kingdom of God. Matthew 24:22 indicates that God will intervene *before* the point of no return is reached.

A hallmark of the Flood was that people (apart from Noah and his family) had no idea what was about to happen. They had been told by Noah but did not believe him. They rejected the word of God spoken through Noah. People carried on with what they were doing right until the time when the first raindrops began to fall:

"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (vv. 37-39).

These words are strongly reminiscent of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3:

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape".

Another relevant passage is 2 Peter 3:3-6:

". . . knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise

of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they will-ingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished".

What an incredibly accurate description of the sentiments espoused by today's world! The prevailing view, at least in the Western world, is that God did not create the universe, and that there was no Flood.

The lesson for us is that we must not let the everyday, legitimate activities of life take up our attention so much that we are not ready for the return of Jesus. This is very easy to say, but extremely hard to put into practice. We all need to take a hard look at our lives and see how we can reduce all the clutter and put more effort into serving God.

The taking away of the saints

In Matthew 24 and Luke 17 we have some detail about the saints being taken away when Jesus returns: "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Mt. 24:40,41). This is virtually identical to Luke 17:35,36. However, Luke 17 has some extra detail: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left" (v. 34). In the original Greek the words "men" and "women" in these passages are not there (as indicated in the AV by italics) and should be omitted. The Tyndale translation omits these words and gives a better reading.

What are we being told here? First we should note that the activities spoken of—sleeping, working in the field and grinding corn—take place at different times of the day. In the first century A.D. in the Middle East the first part of the day would be spent out in the fields gathering grain, finishing late morning because after that it would be too hot to work out in the open sun. The afternoon activity might be grinding the grain harvested in the morning.

If these verses in Matthew 24 and Luke 17 are dealing with the return of Jesus, we might think that they indicate that we are called away at different times of the day. However, from what we know from similar situations in the past, we are all likely to be called away at the same time.

For example, Noah and his family went into the Ark together and then the Flood came. The Israelites all left Egypt together.

Today saints are to be found in virtually every time zone of the world. Therefore if we are called away at the same time this will be at different local times depending on where we are. For example, when it is midnight in Brisbane where I live it is early afternoon in London and morning in New York.

An objection might be raised about this. What about if we are in the shower? Surely we will have to get dressed first. What about if we are

driving a car? What about sorting out the children? The answer is that there will probably be a preparation period, as there was in the days of Noah and Lot. It is possible that the angels may arrive slightly 'early' in some cases to allow for extra preparation time.

The lesson of the days of Noah, Lot and A.D. 70 are that we need to see this world for what it is, and not to be taken in. God's Word will not pass away, but the current world will. The "times of the Gentiles" are drawing to a close. Let us endeavour to be ready. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus".

(Concluded)