

The Last Generation?

(Excerpt from "Is The church In Denial About End-Times?" by PJ Hanley)

As I write this, there is a hurricane out in the Atlantic heading our way. According to the satellite picture, it is huge. Forecasters are saying it will be here in a couple of days. When I look out the window everything looks very peaceful, however thanks to modern technology, I know the calm outside is soon to change. Years ago people were taken off guard by such storms and there was great loss of life. They had no way of knowing ahead of time what was about to happen. They could tell from the sky when the weather was changing or improving, but the origin or path of storms was impossible to know.

This reminds me of Jesus' words to the Jewish leaders:

"When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?" Matt 16:2-3 NASU Emphasis Mine

Jesus scolded these men for not seeing and believing the signs He had given them. They were the ones who studied the prophets day in and day out, whose writings all pointed to the Messiah's arrival. They had waited four centuries since the last prophet, Malachi, had ended his ministry speaking about the coming messenger. They had seen John the Baptist and concluded that he was a prophet. John testified that Jesus was the Messiah and they witnessed His miracles and heard His wonderful teaching. Besides, they had been waiting expectedly for the Messiah to come. Why were they so blind? No generation before had all the signs. No generation before had the proof, and still they were unable to see it. Jesus said they were better at meteorology than prophecy. They were doing a better job guessing at storms than seeing the clear evidence of His ministry.

Just as the technological breakthroughs of the Twentieth Century enable us to know the path of storms in advance, so the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy in the same century lets us see the time of the end with equal clarity. No other century has had the signs we have. No other generation could have known when the end would come. Yes, there were many things they pointed to that sounded right to them, but they could only guess. Interpreting Biblical prophecy was much harder than even primitive meteorology. They knew that time was getting shorter. They saw the sky get red and threatening and could only guess a storm was coming. They saw famines, plaques, earthquakes and corruption in the church, but these were just some of the things mentioned in Scripture. Besides, these things had existed

before. What was the proof they were actually in the end? How could they know they were the ones who would see it? They could only speculate.

Many today believe we can only do the same thing as previous generations. They will agree that the world has changed and that there are many reasons why the end is “possibly” near. They also agree that there are many convincing trends, such as the following: world wars and the threat of nuclear warfare, global alliances and the global economy, the incredible increase of earthquakes, floods and plaques, the unbelievable technological advances, the breakdown of moral values, the rise of and open acceptance of homosexuality, not to mention global terrorism. Believers and unbelievers alike see these as evidence that the end is close. They understand that our generation is different than any other. But they do not see the sign that makes it stand out. They do not see proof that the end is actually here. Their idea of short could be one to two hundred years.

Why This Generation is Different

Most believers and unbelievers alike know that the global situation cannot go on indefinitely. Something has to happen. It is hard to see the current state of world affairs lasting a hundred years, but it is not impossible. If the things already cited were the only signs of the end of the age, then it certainly could happen. The world could limp along this way for one or two hundred years, maybe more. How then do we know for sure the end of the age is here? Are we really just guessing? Are we in the same position as former generations, who anticipated Christ’s return in their lifetimes but never saw it? What makes this generation different?

The answer to that question lies in the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Just as surely as we can see hurricanes out in the Atlantic and study their mass and wind velocity before they come ashore - we can also tell that the end is very near by the fulfillment of prophecy. There is no longer a need to guess. We can see it. No other generation has had the information we have. No other generation has seen the things we see. No other generation has had the ability to put the pieces together because there were some missing. Now however, the end time scenario is forming right before our eyes.

What the Prophets Have Spoken

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” Acts 3:19-21
NASU Emphasis Mine

The above Scripture tells us that Jesus will remain in heaven until the period, at the end of the age, when the restoration prophesied by the prophets of Israel takes place. There is absolutely no mystery in this. The prophets all prophesied the destruction of Israel, her scattering throughout the nations, and her restoration at the end of the age. There is no ambiguity in their writings about this restoration. They were extremely precise. Israel will be re-gathered again in the last days and the Messiah's kingdom established in Jerusalem. This is clearly what Peter is speaking about and what was close to his heart (Acts 1:6), having been taught on the subject by Jesus Himself. Let's look now at some verses that establish this.

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’” Jer 29:11-14 NIV Emphasis Mine

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess,”’ says the LORD.” Jer 30:1-3 NIV Emphasis Mine

“In that day,’ declares the LORD Almighty, ‘I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.’” Jer 30:8-9 NIV

“For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.” Hos 3:4-5 Emphasis Mine

“I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the LORD your God.” Amos 9:14-15 NIV

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.’” Zech 8:7-8 NIV Emphasis Mine

These verses, and scores of others in the prophets, make it clear what restoration Peter was talking about - the restoration of Israel back to the land after 2000 years of wandering and persecution. It is also clear that once the people have been brought back to the land, the Messiah Himself will reign over them. This is the next event, the climax of restoration. Furthermore, this generation, that has seen the restoration of Israel to their homeland, is different than any generation before it. The period of restoration spoken by all the prophets and referenced by Peter, as the time when Messiah would return, is here. Tragically however, the church, having reinterpreted and “spiritualized” the words of the prophets, fails to understand this. Let’s examine now the words of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse regarding this end time restoration.

The Final Generation

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled....and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Luke 21:20-24 NASV

In the above quote, Jesus predicts that Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jewish people scattered to the nations. This was on account of their disobedience and is simply a reiteration of that which was spoken by the prophets from Moses onwards. This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. From that time on, the Jews were scattered throughout the nations, and Jerusalem was trampled underfoot by Gentiles. Jesus did not state that Jerusalem would merely be governed by Gentile rulers (who would lord it over the Jews) as they had since the time of the Gentiles began under Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C. He was clear that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and that Gentiles would trample on it, and that when this trampling ceased the time of the Gentiles would end. When the State of Israel was reborn, the Old City of Jerusalem and, of course, the Temple Mount, was still in Arab hands. Then in 1967, during the six-day war, Israel took possession of it once again after 2,520 years. Since then, the city of Jerusalem has been under Jewish control. Thus, the Times of the Gentiles have come to an end and we are in the period of restoration spoken of by the prophets.

After the word “until” in verse 24, the text immediately jumps to The Day of the Lord indicated by the mention of signs in the sun, moon, and stars (see Joel 2:29-31, Is 13:9-11). That is the end of the age also known as the Great Tribulation. It is next in the text because it is next, period.

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” Luke 21:25-27 NASV

Then Jesus says that when we see these things begin to take place, that we should realize our redemption is very near.

“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:28 NASV Emphasis Mine

When Jesus says, “When you see these things begin to take place” in verse 28, He is not just referring to the cosmic events of the Great Tribulation period mentioned in verses 25 and 26. Luke specifically says that when we see these events (verses 24-26) begin to take place the redemption is very near. Therefore, the restoration of Jerusalem to Jewish sovereignty is the beginning of the end. It is the proof that Israel has been physically restored and it signals the end of the Gentile period. This is further borne out by the verses immediately following concerning the parable of the fig tree.

“And He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.” Luke 21: 29-31 NASV

The fig tree is a reference to Israel restored to the land and beginning to bloom again. We know this from the following passage in Jeremiah, which not only refers to the gathering of the exiles of Judah from Babylon, but also refers to the second re-gathering.

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ And I said, ‘Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad figs, very bad, which cannot be eaten due to rottenness.’ Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans. For I will set My eyes on them for

good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them up and not overthrow them, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.’” Jer 24:3-7 NASU Emphasis Mine

The point being made by Jesus is that when you see Israel beginning to bloom again in her own land, the Kingdom of God is near. Also, when you see the times of the Gentiles coming to an end, the Kingdom is near. Then Jesus makes a startling statement.

“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place.” Luke 21:32 NASV Emphasis Mine

Jesus says that the specific generation which sees the fig tree blossom and the Jews regain control of Jerusalem will not pass away until all things take place. There is no other way to interpret verse 32. The Greek word “GENEA” can be translated “generation” or “race.” None of the translators translated it race because all know that such a statement by Jesus would be ridiculous. (“This race will not pass away until all things take place.”) Likewise, to suggest that Jesus was referring to the generation alive during His ministry is equally ridiculous. Everyone knows that all things did not take place in the first century. But Jesus is very specific. He says that “this generation,” connecting it directly with the generation that sees the beginning of the restoration, will see all of it. This means that the generation born during the recapture of Jerusalem by the Jews, which took place in 1967, is the Final Generation.

The Peace Process

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.” 1Thess 5:2-3 NASU

Almost every day we hear about the “peace process” while violence continues to escalate in the Middle East. But for those of us who study Bible prophecy and wait for Messiah, this is no surprise. We understand the Scriptures to teach that after Israel has come back from all the nations to her land, the peoples round about will attack her and she will long for “peace and security.” Not only has this happened, but all of the nations are now longing for peace and security on account of global terrorism. This is a direct result of the attack on Israel. The book of Daniel tells us that the last seven years of the age will begin with a “peace” treaty between a Western leader, who turns out to be Antichrist, and the state of Israel. This treaty, or covenant, has to do with the Temple Mount and the Holy Place. The current

“Intifada” erupted over this site and will likely continue until this treaty puts an end to it. Then in the middle of this seven-year treaty, Antichrist will break the covenant and set up the Abomination that begins the Great Tribulation. And suddenly, while they are saying peace and security, destruction will come. God promises to deliver a remnant of Israel out of this destruction.

Most Christians today have some understanding of this scenario. But what they don't know is that movement toward this treaty is well underway. It is the very next thing on the horizon. The so-called “roadmap” has set a date for 2005 or 2007. Whether it happens then or not, we will soon find out. My understanding of prophecy leads me to believe it will take about 30 years. Some find it hard to imagine the current situation lasting that long. However, when we consider that it has been going on for over 50 years, it is not too hard to believe it could last another 30. This current war on terror will escalate and consume the whole world, which will be galvanized together to solve the problem. At this time the world leader, who is the Antichrist, will appear and temporarily solve the problem. The breakdown of this treaty will lead to the last great battle over Jerusalem where Jesus Himself will intervene, saving Israel and judging the nations of the world. Then His kingdom will fully come on earth.

No Matter How You Slice It

There will, of course, be some who refuse to look at potential dates, regardless of all the arguments I made in the previous chapters. However, I don't do it with any kind of sensationalism in mind. I merely want to jolt the church to the reality that time is really short. No matter how you “slice it,” we are in the end-times; we are not waiting for them to come. We do not have forever to prepare. If you thought that you had only 30 years left before the end of the world, what would you do? Would it matter to you? Well, why not assume it then? Wouldn't it make a difference in how you live? If the date is wrong and Jesus comes sooner, you won't miss anything. If He tarries longer and I missed something, so what? You will have lived your life for Him with the same expectation as the saints in the First Century.

Another reality that the church must face (and one that would make eschatology a whole lot simpler), is that the prophecies speak about Israel, and not the church. Yes, there is great restoration in the church and God has a great purpose for us to fulfill. However, the prophets spoke about the restoration of all things, which begins, with the restoration of Israel back to their land and to their God. Then the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Are you prepared to accept that you live in the last generation?