Please explain Christ's words in Matthew 24:34, saying that "this generation" would not pass away until "all these things" have taken place.

Actually, Christ's words, as quoted above in the book of Matthew, are also recorded in Mark 13:30 and in Luke 21:32. Christ had been asked privately by four of His disciples (Mark 13:3) "... when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Christ proceeded to describe events which would take place, leading to His Second Coming and to the end of THIS age and the beginning of the Millennium--the NEW age of the wonderful world tomorrow.

He warned against ever-increasing religious deception, wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matthew 24:4-7); as well as religious and national persecution of spiritual and physical "Israel," which persecution is also referred to as the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:9, 15-28; Mark 13:9, 11-23; Luke 21:12-24). He stated that the Great Tribulation will be followed by heavenly signs or cosmic disturbances (Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25-26), which will finally lead to His return in great power and great glory (Matthew 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27: Luke 21:27-28).

It is in THAT context that Jesus added the following words:

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:32-35).

It is clarified in the parallel Scripture in Luke 21:31, that Christ was speaking about His Coming and the establishment of the "kingdom of God" here on earth: "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near." He also made clear that before the Kingdom of God would be established on earth, the gospel or good news of the Kingdom would be "preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations" (Matthew 24:14).

Commentaries are divided on the meaning of Christ's statement that "this generation" would not pass away.

(1) Some erroneously assume that Christ was addressing His disciples at the time prior to His death, and that He was promising them that He would return in their lifetime. These commentaries overlook that Christ was not only addressing His four disciples who had asked Him about the signs of His coming, but that He spoke to ALL of His disciples--present and future. He specifically said in Mark 13:37: "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

Also, whenever the Bible uses the expression "you," it is referring to the physical or spiritual "descendants" of "Israel"--including the modern descendants of the physical nations of the ancient Houses of Israel and Judah, AND the modern descendants of spiritual Israel, which is the Church of God (Galatians 6:16).

Since Jesus did NOT return in the lifetimes of His early disciples, we can rule out the possibility that He was talking about the generation at the time of the Twelve Apostles. He clearly did not mean to tell them that their generation--the people living at the time of the original Apostles--would not die out before His return. Christ could not have meant that, as otherwise, He would have lied. Lying is sinning--a transgression of one of the Ten Commandments--but Christ never sinned (compare 1 Peter 2:22).

(2) Other commentaries state that the word "generation" can mean "race," and that Christ

meant that Israel as a people would not cease to exist before Christ's return (compare The Nelson Study Bible).

Even though it is true that Israel as a people would not cease to exist--and neither would the Church of God (spiritual Israel)--it is doubtful that Jesus had that aspect in mind. Rather, He emphasized the need for His disciples to watch world events and to be ready for His return. He told us that when "these things BEGIN to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28). The context of His statement that "this generation" would not pass away, is clearly the very end time, just prior to His return, not the continuing existence of "Israel" for over 2,000 years. The events described by Christ were meant to be indications for His end-time disciples that He would return soon.

(3) Therefore, some commentaries offer the explanation that "the word describes a particular era in which people will see the end times. That is, the events will occur so rapidly that all will happen within one generation. 'All these things' includes the Antichrist [better, the manifestation of the Beast and the False Prophet, compare Revelation 19:19-20], the tribulation, and more importantly the appearance of Christ in glory" (The Nelson Study Bible).

This is the correct explanation. We need to realize that the Greek word for "generation," i.e., "genea," can describe a particular people at a very specific time--not the entire race throughout many "generations." For instance, Christ spoke on several occasions to His particular "generation" which was alive at the time of His First Coming, and He did NOT mean that THAT generation would not die until His return. Notice Matthew 12:41-42: "The men of Nineveh will RISE UP in the JUDGMENT [the Great White Throne Judgment, after the Millennium, compare Revelation 20:11-12] WITH THIS GENERATION [so they will have also died] and condemn it... The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with THIS generation and condemn it..."

Christ said in Mark 8:12 that no sign from heaven would be given to "this generation" (living at the time of Christ's First Coming), but we just read that heavenly signs WILL be given to a future generation, which will live just prior to His return.

(4) We might wonder how long a "generation" lasts, according to the Bible. We find a biblical definition for the approximate length of a human life in this modern day and age in Psalm 90:10, where we read: "The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away." We also read in God's Word that God sometimes shortens or prolongs human life, and that bloodthirsty and deceitful men may not live out HALF their days (Psalm 55:23). This is an interesting statement in light of the fact that men will be so bloodthirsty and destructive in the end time that Christ will HAVE to come and SHORTEN the days of worldwide warfare, lest ANY man would be saved alive or survive (Matthew 24:22).

At this moment in time, we have not yet seen the beginning of the Great Tribulation, but we have been witnessing ever-increasing religious deception, wars, earthquakes, famines and disease epidemics--events which are described by Christ as the "beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8). These will become more and more visible and frightening in the years to come. We do not know the exact time of Christ's return, but based on the parable of the fig tree, we CAN say that we ARE living today in the very last generation, and that Christ WILL return BEFORE this present generation has "passed away." It is therefore important for us to watch and pray, and to be "ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an HOUR [we] do NOT expect" (Matthew 24:44).

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