

Brief on Meanings of Generation¹

By Richard Joseph Michael Ibranyi

“Amen I say to you, that this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.”
(Mt. 24:34)

The word “generation” can mean several things: a span of time, a group of people, or procreation.

Span of time

Generation can mean a certain span of time, short or long. Hence it can mean 7, 10, 15, 20, 30, 40, 50, or 100 years; or a whole era, such as the New Testament era; or the whole span of a man’s life. For example,

In the following verse, generation means 10 years, since the Babylonian Captivity lasted for 70 years:

“And when you are come into Babylon, you shall be there many years, and for a long time, even to seven generations: and after that I will bring you away from thence with peace.” (Bar. 6:2)

In the following verses, generation means the whole New Covenant era:

“Amen I say to you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.”
(Mt. 24:34)

“And they will say to you: See here, and see there. Go ye not after, nor follow them: For as the lightning that lighteneth from under heaven, shineth unto the parts that are under heaven, so shall the Son of man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation.” (Lk. 17:23-25)

“But you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people: that you may declare his virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1 Pt. 2:9)

“Amen I say to you, that this generation shall not pass until all these things be done.” (Mk. 13:30)

In the following verses, generation means the whole span of a man’s life:

“Some grow, and some fall off: so is the generation of flesh and blood, one cometh to an end, and another is born.” (Eccus. 14:19)

“My generation is at an end, and it is rolled away from me, as a shepherd’s tent. My life is cut off, as by a weaver: whilst I was yet but beginning, he cut me off: from morning even to night thou wilt make an end of me.” (Isa. 38:12)

“For David, when he had served in his generation, according to the will of God, slept: and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.” (Acts 13:36)

Catholic Commentary on Acts 13:36: “**In his generation:** That is, in his lifetime. And when his generation came to an end when he died, his body saw corruption in the grave.”

A group of people

And generation can mean a certain group of people. For example, in the following verses generation means the evil Pharisees who were living in the time of Jesus’ first coming:

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“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; that build the sepulchres of the prophets, and adorn the monuments of the just, 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 you are witnesses against yourselves, that you are the sons of them that killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. You serpents, generation of vipers, how will you flee from the judgment of hell?” (Mt. 23:29-33)

In the following verses, generation means the people who were living during the time of Jesus’ first coming:

“And sighing deeply in spirit, he saith: Why doth this generation seek a sign? Amen, I say to you, a sign shall not be given to this generation.” (Mk. 8:12)

“The queen of the south shall rise in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them: because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold more than Solomon here.” (Lk. 11:31)

“But whereunto shall I esteem this generation to be like? It is like to children sitting in the market place.” (Mt. 11:16)

In the following verse, generation means believers who are holy and chaste:

“O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory: for the memory thereof is immortal: because it is known both with God and with men.” (Wis. 4:1)

Procreation

Generation can mean procreation, when children are conceived and born. For example, in the following verse generation means birth:

“This is the book of the generation [birth] of Adam. In the day that God created man, he made him to the likeness of God.” (Gen. 5:1)

Adam’s body was not born of a woman but of the slime of the earth. In the following verses, generation means birth records of succeeding procreations; that is, genealogies:

“Of Ruben the eldest son of Israel, by their generations and families and houses and names of every head...” (Num. 1:20)

“These are the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the Lord spoke to Moses in mount Sinai.” (Num. 3:1)

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Mt. 1:1)

“Tell ye of this to your children, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.” (Joel 1:3)

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