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Which generation of people will be living when the King of kings and Lord of lords makes his trek back to Planet Earth at the end of this age? Will the European, Asian, and Mideast leaders we see on television and read about in the newspaper every day be involved in the endtime battle called “Armageddon”?

According to Isaiah, the prophet, God knows every generation that will ever be born. “Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he” (Isa. 41:4). God also has a plan for every generation: “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations” (Psalm 90:1).

The prophetic Word indicates one generation that will not pass away completely; that is, not everyone in that generation will die. Some people will be taken directly from Planet Earth after an instantaneous, miraculous change into supernatural minds and bodies, for eternal residence in heaven. The Generation Mystery

We know from the Scriptures that the first generation began with Adam and Eve. Noah was the tenth generation. Which generation of people was Christ talking about that would see his return when he said: “...This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled?” (Matt. 24:34). The answer to this 2000-year-old question may be closer than we think, if the many prophecies we see converging on the horizon continue their march towards fulfillment in the 21st century.

The unfolding of the “end times” prophetic scenario before our eyes should prompt us to keep our Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other as we piece the prophetic puzzle together.

Matthew 24:30-36 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory...Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this

generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

The Generation of His Coming

Perhaps the most intriguing and controversial prophetic passage in the Bible is contained in the Olivet Discourse. This dynamic “end times” message by Jesus, contained in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21, describes major events that will impact the Jewish people just before the Lord returns to set up his kingdom.

This remarkable prophecy, given by Jesus on Mount Olivet after leaving the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, was his response to three questions from His disciples.

1. “When shall these things be
2. “And what shall be the sign of thy coming”
3. “and [what shall be the sign] of the end of the world (age)?”

His answer to those questions alludes to the generation that will be living on the earth when Christ returns. Some believe that the generation Jesus was talking about in the Olivet Discourse was the generation that passed away in 70 A.D. But that does not fit within the context of a literal return of Christ back to earth, as described in the Scriptures preceding and following the parable of the fig tree. When the many signals Christ gave for the Tribulation in his Olivet discourse begin to occur at the same time, with greater frequency and intensity, the end-time generation can know Jesus’ coming is near.

ANALYZING THE TERM: A GENERATION

One might raise several questions about the unique generation described by Jesus, and other generations that are described in the Bible.

- What is a generation?
- When does a generation begin?
- When does a generation end?
- How long is a generation?
- And, which generation was Christ talking about?

What is a generation?

According to The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, a “generation” can be defined in several ways, including:

- the entire body of individuals born and living at about the same time; the average number of years between the birth of parents and the birth of their

offspring; and

- a group of individuals who are roughly the same age and who have similar ideas and attitudes

The generation described in Jeremiah 7:29,30 seems to best fit the generation described in the parable of the fig tree that will be present when Christ returns: “Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.” When does a generation begin?

The word “seed” in the Old Testament was used to describe the lineage of offspring before and after conception. God’s promises to Abraham and his descendants are given in the book of Genesis: “And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee...And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations” (Genesis 17: 6-9).

Offspring in the Bible were sometimes referred to as “seed” and other times associated with “generations,” as shown in the book of Psalms: “A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation” (Psalm 22:30).

The prophet Jeremiah’s generation and ministry began before he was born but was not manifested until after his birth. About this, the Scripture says: “Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:4,5).

When does a generation end?

A generation ends at the death of an individual or at the death of those individuals who are living at about the same time. For example, the death of King David is described in Acts 13:36: “for David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption...”

The men who took over after the death of Joshua represented a new generation that was displeasing to God. God’s Word says: “And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old...and also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.” Joshua’s generation ended when he and those who were about his age died. An abundance of evidence in the Scriptures points to physical life beginning at conception and ending at death.

How long is a generation?

One of the most perplexing and sought-after figures among students of Bible prophecy is the length of a generation. There is much disagreement among both secular and religious writers

concerning the length of a generation. Is the length of a generation forty years, as believed by many? Israel as Fig Tree

When Israel became a nation in 1948, some believed that Israel's birth date marked the beginning of the generation that would see all the events leading up to the second coming of Christ. This theory was based upon the generation alluded to in the parable of the fig tree, in which the fig tree was symbolic of the nation Israel. "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mark 13: 28-33).

Many people believe that the birth of Israel in 1948 marked the beginning of the generation that would be alive at Christ's return.

End-Time Generation Puzzle

In 1988, when forty years had passed without fulfillment of any of the events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ, the forty-year generation theory fell into disrepute. Either 1948 had not been the starting date for the generation described in the fig tree parable, or a generation must be longer than 40 years.

Additional arguments put forth claimed that 1967, the year Jerusalem was captured by Israel, or some other future date could be the birth of the generation that would see the return of Christ. Some proponents of the "end times" generation theory questioned whether forty years was actually the length of a generation today. Is there any evidence to suggest that the length of a generation is longer than forty years? Just how long is a generation today? Is there an answer to the generation question?

The Longevity of Mankind

Numerous theories have been put forth concerning the length of a generation without defining clearly what a generation was, when it began, or when it ended. As discussed earlier, a generation, as described in the Bible, begins at conception and ends at death. The length of a generation is not an arbitrary period of time that occurs within the life span of an individual or group of people.

Joshua's age at the time of death, 110 years (including 9 months gestation), was the length of the generation he represented. Some of his generation died before him and some after him. Consequently, the average life span of a person or group of people living at about the same time constitutes the length of that generation.

The length of a generation has not always been constant since the days of Adam and Eve. Before the biblical flood, the average life span of man was over 900 years. Today, if a person

lives to be a hundred years old, it is a special occasion in which the person is accorded celebrity status.

The Flood's Effects

In order to understand how long a generation is today, it will be helpful to know what the length of a generation was before the Flood and what happened to the life span of man immediately following the Flood. Has man's life span increased, decreased or stayed the same down through the centuries?

Before the Flood: Life span of the patriarchs averaged around 930 years.

The life span of the patriarchs decreased from generation to generation as a result of the earth's changing environment brought about by the breakup of the "fountains of the deep" located within the earth and the "windows of heaven" spoken of in Genesis 7:11.

These catastrophic occurrences, according to some scientific authorities, disrupted a protective environmental shield that had prevented the earth from receiving damaging ultraviolet rays from the sun. With the deterioration of that shield, things upon earth, including human life, began to degenerate and deteriorate at a much faster rate. Life span decreased as a result.

After the Flood: Life span of man began to decrease rapidly

Noah and his family lived on both sides of the flood. Noah was 500 years old when the flood waters covered the earth. He lived 350 years after the flood and was 950 years of age at his death. After the flood, Shem, Noah's son, lived to be 500 years. He was nearly 100 years old when the flood occurred. He lived an additional 500 years after the flood. The age of each successive generation continued to decrease to the point that Abraham lived to be only 175 years old. The regression of age continues with Abraham's son Isaac living to be 180, Jacob 147, Joseph 110, Levi 137, Kohath 133, and Amram, who was Moses' father, 137.

The Wilderness Generation

Again it should be noted that perhaps the most widely held belief for the length of a generation is forty years. A forty-year period was required for the disobedient generation of Moses' day to die off in the wilderness.

Those who hold to the forty-year generation concept do not take into account the total age of those who had sinned against the Lord. The curse was to be against the men who had reached twenty years of age. God Word tells us, regarding the matter: "Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the Lord. And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the Lord, was consumed" (Numbers 32: 11,13; also Psalm 95: 8-11).

After the forty-year judgment period was completed, there were no men left older than 60 years of age except Joshua and Caleb. Although Joshua was not a descendant of Moses or Aaron, he represented the succeeding generation that was to enter the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb were the only two males permitted to live after the Lord cursed the rebellious generation that would not return and retake their land in Canaan. So forty years could not have been the length of that generation, but it was the time God allotted for that generation to die off. Most of the recorded life spans during this time were well over 40 years. Aaron was 123, Moses 120, Joshua 110, and Caleb was over 85 when their generations died off.

The Generation of Job

Some believe a generation to be 35 years. This is based upon a passage in the last chapter of the book of Job. Following Job's lengthy trial, the Lord blessed him with great possessions and many sons and daughters. The Bible says: "After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations" (Job 42:16).

Thirty-five, as the length of a generation, is arrived at by dividing the one hundred and forty years mentioned in above by four, the number of generations Job saw. Since a new generation normally begins every twenty to forty years, we would expect Job to see several generations of offspring, which is exactly what happened. Thirty-five years would come closer to representing the length between generations, usually referred to as "the generation gap."

Job was well over 140 years old, so he would not fit the mold if the length of a generation during his days was taken to be thirty-five years.

THE LIFE SPAN OF MAN STABILIZES

We recall that the average length of a generation was about 930 years for those living before the Flood but decreased to around 120 years by the time Moses crossed the Red Sea and began his forty-year sojourn in the wilderness of Sinai. Since there are not very many 120-year-old men walking around today, it is apparent that the average lifespan is no longer 120 years.

Eli, a high priest and judge of Israel whose life bridged the 13th and 12th centuries BC, died at the age of 98 years. According to the Scriptures, he was considered to be a "very old" person at the time of his death.

The oldest, fully authenticated age in recent times (122 years) is Jeanne Louise Calment, who was born in France on February 21, 1875, and died on August 4, 1997. Maud Farris-Luse, recognized in 2001 as the world's oldest person (115 years) by the Guinness Book of World Records, was born on January 21, 1887 in the state of Michigan, and died March 18, 2002. Obviously, these cases are exceptions and do not represent the average lifespan of mankind today.

Additional Views On Life Span

Additional views for the life span of man (i.e., the length of a generation) include 100, 80, 70,

60, 50, and 20 years. A more recent theory divides the 2166 years from Abraham's birth to the birth of Christ by the 42 generations listed in Matthew chapter 1 to give a generation length of 51.57 years. Due to space limitations, these views will not be discussed except for the 70-80 year generation concept.

A View from the Psalmist

Disregarding untimely or unnatural deaths due to epidemics, famine and war, there is evidence in the Scriptures and in recent history to support a 70-80 year life span for the past 3000 years. The evidence for a 70-80 year lifespan was present during the 10th century B.C. during the reign of King David (c. 1010-970).

About 400-500 years after the Exodus (c. 1450 B.C.), the life span of man seemed to level off at around 70-80 years. This was around 1000 B.C. during the days of Kings Saul, David, and Solomon. Perhaps the most significant declaration in the Bible for the life span of man is given in Psalm 90. The Psalmist states that the life span of man is seventy years with eighty years being the upper range of normal life expectancy: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God...For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night...For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: We spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away...So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Return, O Lord, how long?"

Ironically, Moses, who lived to be 120 years old, is credited with writing this Psalm during the 15th century B.C. Moses may have been suggesting a new life span for man, since the 70-80 year statement does not coincide with his age or the age of his contemporaries, Aaron and Joshua.

According to conservative scholars, Moses was born around 1526 B.C., led the Exodus from Egypt in c.1446 B.C., and died about 1406 B.C., the year Joshua crossed over the Jordan River into Canaan. About 400 years after Moses' death, David began his reign of 40 years that would end around 970 B.C.

The Generation of David

As David approached the end of his life, he was considered to be an old man by those living at that time. The Scripture tells us: "So when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel" (1 Chronicles 23:1). The significant years of David's life are given in 2 Samuel 5:4: "David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years." "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years..." (1 Kings 2:10).

Acts 13:36 concludes: "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption..." The Scriptures reveal that

David served his generation and was seventy years old when he died.

A contemporary of David, Barzillai the Gileadite, was considered to be an old man during the days of King David's reign. The Scriptures report: "Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old...And Barzillai said unto the King, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old...let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother" (2 Samuel 19: 32-37).

Both David at 70 years and Barzillai at 80 years were considered to be "old" and "very aged" men nearly 3000 years ago, and both of their life spans coincided with the 70-80 years described in Psalm 90.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

Around 200 years after David's death, Isaiah prophesied: "Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king..." (Isaiah 23:15).

The concept of 70 years as the life span for kings may have been established after David's death at seventy years. When Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity in 606, 597, and 586 B.C. by King Nebuchadnezzar, it was to be for seventy years. The Bible tells: "Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath. For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight saith the Lord..." (Jeremiah 7:29-30).

The capture of the Southern Kingdom of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar brought Ezekiel and Daniel to the land of Babylon. After Babylon's capture by the Medes in 539 BC., Daniel began reading from the book of Jeremiah about the captivity that had been prophesied by Jeremiah: "In the first year of his reign, I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem..." (Daniel 9:2).

The length of time appointed for the rejection of this "evil" generation was seventy years. If the age of the Jewish generation rejected by God was twenty years and up, as with Moses' generation in the wilderness, then those still living in Babylon would have been over ninety years old when the seventy-year period ended. Most of the generation taken into captivity had already died or were too old to make the journey back to the Promised Land. Daniel was a youth when taken captive and was probably in his eighties or nineties.

The Generation of Christ

Shortly after Christ's birth, Jesus was brought to Jerusalem to be dedicated to the Lord. Anna, who was considered to be very old at the time Christ was born, was present at the temple: "And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God

with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:36, 37).

Christ described the generation of his day as evil and accused them of killing, crucifying, and persecuting the prophets, wise men, and scribes that he had sent to them. He also prophesied that he would be rejected by His generation. Because of their stubbornness and failure to recognize “the time of their visitation,” Christ pronounced judgment upon the city of Jerusalem and declared: “all these things shall come upon this generation” (i.e., the generation of Christ).

We know that Christ did not live out the full length of his generation, which raises the question: “Who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.” (Acts 8:33; Isaiah 53:8). Christ said in Luke 11:30 “For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.”

That raises an interesting question! Has God appointed a “man of God” to be a sign to each generation of people? Jesus Christ, who was “cut off” or killed as prophesied in Daniel 9:26, was to represent the evil generation of his day. How long would Christ’s generation have been if he had not died an early death?

Most Bible scholars believe Christ was crucified between 30-33 A.D. If that was the case, the wicked generation that the time of Christ represented was judged 40 years later when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. The last vestige of Jewish resistance was wiped out at Masada in 73-75 A.D. The destruction prophesied upon the generation that crucified the Lord was complete.

Historians tell us that Jesus Christ was born sometime before the turn of the century (2-8 B.C.) with 4 B.C. being the most popular view. Assuming that the generation that Christ described had expired by 75 A.D., the length of that generation would have been between seventy and eighty years.

Extra-biblical Confirmation

As discussed earlier, the Psalmist declared that the life span of man was 70-80 years. The extra-biblical book of Jubilees, which was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls during the middle of the twentieth century (1947-1956), has an interesting account of the regression of man’s age that coincides with the description given in Psalm 90:9,10. This ancient document, believed to have been written sometime between 150 and 105 B.C., describes the regression of man’s age from the generation of Adam down to a generation that will receive a great punishment from the Lord. I recommend those who want to go more in-depth, read that account.

LIFE SPAN OF MAN TODAY

Evidence discussed thus far indicates that the life span of man leveled off at around 70 to 80 years during the reigns of King Saul, David, and Solomon and has remained about the same for the past 3000 years (1000 BC to 2000 AD). Fluctuations in lifespan have occurred due to

war, famine, disease and other factors. People are most likely to grow old in rich countries, where there are sufficient medical and sanitary facilities, clean drinking water and enough food at their disposal. In poor countries, these facilities often are insufficient, with the result that infant and child mortality is very high.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, life expectancy today is only 37.13 years in Zimbabwe, 47.49 years in Kenya, and 48.09 years in South Africa but is 63.24 years in Brazil, 63.69 years in Egypt, 67.34 years in Russia, 71.62 years in China, 79.87 years in Australia and 80.80 years in Japan. Most of the countries in Europe and North America have life spans between 70 and 80 years. The life expectancy of those living in the United States in 1850 was less than 40 years but increased to 47.3 years by 1900 and then mushroomed to 76.7 years (1999) by the end of the 20th century.²

If 70 to 80 years still represents the length of a generation, as described in Psalm 90:9,10, one would expect the life span of those living today to be close to that figure. According to the 2002 World Almanac and Book of Facts, the average life expectancy in the United States is 77.26 years (74.37 years for males and 80.05 years for females). For Israel it is 78.71 years (76.69 years for males and 80.84 years for females). The average life expectancy at birth for Israel is projected to be 81.6 years in the year 2025.³

THE FIG TREE GENERATION

In the parable of the fig tree, Jesus talked about a generation of people (perhaps Jews and Gentiles) that would be living at the time he returned to earth to establish his kingdom. With Israel back in their land after almost 2000 years of dispersion and other end-time prophecies coming into focus, the Jewish people now living in Israel could very well be the generation Christ was talking about.

Perhaps this Generation?

Luke's version of the fig tree parable, which mentions the fig tree (Israel) and all the trees, (nations of the world) (Judges 9:8-20) states: "And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you. This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (Luke 21:29-33).

If the length of David's generation, Christ's generation, and those living today is 70-80 years (a 3000 year span), it would be reasonable to conclude that the generation Christ was talking about in the parable of the fig tree will also be 70-80 years in length. If the fig tree in this parable represents the nation of Israel, as many prophetic scholars believe, and the generation that is described has a lifespan of 70 to 80 years, then we see several strong indicators that the generation Christ was talking about has already been born. That would mean that the return of Jesus Christ to establish his reign for a thousand years is close at hand. The indicators we have

seen include:

- the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948 (Isaiah 66:8),
- the Jerusalem controversy in the end times (Zechariah 12:1-3),
- preparations for rebuilding the Jewish Temple (Revelation 11:1,2),
- ongoing negotiations for a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians (Daniel 9:27)

The Most Significant End-Time Prophecy

The end-time events described in the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation could not have taken place without Israel back in their land. Israel's return to the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the 20th century after dispersion by the Roman armies in 70 A.D. is the most important event that signals the soon return of Jesus Christ. Israel's rebirth as a nation has also served as a catalyst for other end-time prophecies that are beginning to converge on the world scene. The pieces necessary for development of the end-time prophetic puzzle began to fall in place between the middle of the 19th and first half of the 20th century when the Jewish people began coming back to their homeland in record numbers.

A movement called Zionism encouraged the Jewish people to return to the "Promised Land" and brought about the Balfour Declaration in 1917, a statement by Great Britain that supported a home for the Jewish people. After much negotiation and endorsement of a partition resolution by the United Nations in 1947, the rebirth of Israel (Isaiah 66:7-9) took place on May 15, 1948. Following a period of wars between the Jewish and Arab nations in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, peace negotiations have been ongoing and will continue until a covenant (Daniel 9:27) is confirmed between "the prince that shall come" (Antichrist) and the nation of Israel.

GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

Christians who take the Bible seriously should be actively watching the prophetic shadows that are appearing in today's headlines. The primary purpose of God's prophetic Word is to point people to Jesus Christ, "the author and finisher of our faith."

A Chosen Generation

As we entertain the possibility that we may be the generation Jesus was talking about in the fig tree parable nearly 2000 years ago, we are admonished by the Scriptures to watch and be prepared. As stated clearly by Jesus in Matthew and Mark, no man knows the day or the hour of his coming but the Father only. The same Jesus, however, was very angry with the Pharisees and Scribes for not discerning "the signs of the times" and not knowing the "time of their visitation." In these thought-provoking and challenging times in which we are living, we need to be informed and discerning like "the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do..." (1 Chronicles 12:32).

One day there will be a generation of Christians that will escape the grip of death and be

ushered into heaven, the “final frontier” for believers. The generation that is “left behind” will face the ruthless tyranny of a global dictatorship. The world stage is now being set for the closing act of this dispensation, and the climax of world history, Christ’s return, is drawing near. As God’s children, we may very well be the generation that is chosen to “escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21: 34-36). That possibility is certainly worth pondering!
