

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF “THIS GENERATION” IN MATTHEW 23:36?

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NO MAJOR THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINE rests on the meaning of a single phrase. However, a phrase, properly interpreted, often serves as an important signpost on the journey toward a correct theology. This is precisely the case for the phrase “this generation” (ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ) in the sayings of Jesus. This phrase continues to engender debate because of its pivotal role in texts such as the Olivet Discourse.

This article examines the usage of this phrase in Jesus’ judgment against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:36, when He said, “All these things shall come upon this generation.”¹ This article argues that the Old Testament holds an important key for unlocking the meaning of this phrase in Jesus’ discourse.

PROPOSED MEANINGS OF “THIS GENERATION”

Commentators have presented two major proposals for the meaning of this phrase in Matthew 23:36.² The most prevalent view is

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¹ Comparisons to the parallel passage in Luke 11:48–51 will also be made when appropriate.

² A third minor view for this phrase, primarily in its usage in Matthew 24:34, argues that it refers to the entire nation of Israel. See Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros., 1970), 3:52; Edward Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 444, 458; and C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 1034 (note on Matt. 24:34). Some who hold this view see etymological connections between γενεά and γένος (meaning “offspring” or “nation”). See Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*, 52.

that ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη refers to Jesus' Jewish contemporaries. This view asserts that the term γενεά carries a temporal or chronological sense, meaning *a group of people living at a specific time period*. This would fit with the present-day English usage for "generation." Most writers who hold this view assert that the judgment issued by Jesus in this verse was at least partially fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple during the lifetime of His contemporaries.³

A less common proposal is that Jesus was referring to an evil group of people who have existed throughout time. This view asserts a qualitative rather than a temporal sense of γενεά, in which the word means *a group of people with shared characteristics*. In this view the judgment is not the destruction of the temple, but a judgment that will occur in the last days, either in the Tribulation, or eternal condemnation, or both.⁴ The crux of the issue is the specific meaning of γενεά (whether temporal or qualitative) and the nature and timing of the judgment.

³ Defending it to varying degrees, many commentators take this position, including Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 349; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1997), 319; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1995), 678; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 918; John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1993), 668; and Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 343. Although he asserts a temporal meaning here (but not in Matt. 24:34), Stein says the judgment is primarily final judgment that might include the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

See also Joseph Kidder, "This Generation' in Matthew 24:34," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (1983): 203–9; and George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future* (New York: St. Martin's, 1954), 260. While Kidder does not set forth a specific rendering of γενεά, he argues that the judgment is the destruction of the temple ("This Generation' in Matthew 24:34," 203–9). Also Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich view γενεά in this way (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 191). See also preterist works including R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 51–68.

⁴ Neil D. Nelson, "This Generation' in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 369–85; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 472; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 115–17; and Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 502, 532. Ridderbos defends the qualitative sense in several uses of the word, but in Matthew 23:36 he sees both a qualitative and a temporal sense (*Matthew* [Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987], 433).

THE CONTEXT OF "THIS GENERATION" IN MATTHEW 23

Matthew 23 records Jesus' warnings to the scribes and Pharisees about their hypocrisy. He issued His rebuke in classic prophetic style through a series of woe statements of the sort often used by the prophets to communicate God's disapproval and consequent judgment.⁵ Thus in line with the Old Testament prophets Jesus was serving here as a "prosecuting attorney," charging the Jewish leaders for their violation of the Mosaic Law. Their primary violation was that they had "neglected the more important matters of the Law" (v. 23), although, as He later revealed, they would commit the greatest violation of God's Law, namely, shedding innocent blood (v. 34). As a result guilt would fall on them for all the murders of God's righteous servants since the beginning of time (v. 35). While the sentence for this charge is not explicitly stated, in verse 36 Jesus made a statement about judgment when He said, "All these things will come upon this generation." In verses 30–35 three issues must be understood to determine the meaning of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη: (a) Jesus' negative characterization of the scribes and Pharisees, (b) the corporate solidarity between the scribes and Pharisees and those who killed God's servants in the past, and (c) the nature of the charge and the consequent sentence.

JESUS' NEGATIVE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

Jesus' negative characterization of the scribes and Pharisees throughout the chapter comes to a climax in verses 30–35. Three epithets highlight their evil nature. They are "sons of the murderers of the prophets" (υἱοὶ τῶν φονευσάντων τοὺς προφήτας), "serpents" (ὄφεις, the term used of Satan; cf. Gen. 3:1, LXX; 2 Cor. 11:3), and the "offspring of vipers" (γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν).⁶ Because of their evil character Jesus exclaimed, "How will you escape from the punishment of hell?"⁷

Worthy of note is the clear familial aspect in these epithets seen in the terms υἱοὶ, πατέρες, and γεννήματα. At the beginning Jesus took their statement with a simple mention of their *physical* descent ("If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the

⁵ Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 668. For woe oracles in the prophets see Isaiah 3:9–11; 5:8–22; 10:1, 5; 33:1; Jeremiah 13:27; 48:46; and Habbakuk 2:6–20.

⁶ This latter phrase was applied to the Pharisees elsewhere by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7) and Jesus (Matt. 12:34).

⁷ The punishment of γέννα is fitting for the "sons of γέννα" (Matt. 23:15).

prophets" [Matt. 23:30]), and in a clever twist of irony He broadened the sense of υἱός into an affirmation about their *spiritual* descent (v. 31). Jesus stated that their own words "testify" against them that they indeed were "sons" of murderers (v. 31), thereby confirming their own evil nature.⁸ This is reminiscent of other passages in which Jesus derided the scribes and Pharisees for their evil spiritual ancestry.⁹

THE CORPORATE SOLIDARITY BETWEEN THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES AND THOSE WHO KILLED GOD'S SERVANTS IN THE PAST

Another important issue in this context is the corporate solidarity Jesus asserted between the scribes and Pharisees and those of the past who murdered God's servants. They are connected in a "familial" sense by their evil nature, but they are also connected by their crimes and resulting judgment. Jesus first hinted at this in verse 32: "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers."¹⁰ This is most likely a reference to the Jewish leaders adding more sin to the sins their forebears had already committed (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14–16).¹¹

⁸ Luke 11:47–48 speaks similarly. Those who murdered the prophets in the past are called "your fathers," and the word "witnesses" is used of those who "approve the deeds of your fathers."

⁹ John the Baptist used the epithet γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν when he rebuked them for their mistaken notion that they would have access to the messianic kingdom because they were "sons of Abraham" (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). In John 8:44 Jesus denied their claim to both Abraham and God as their father, stating that they were of "their father the devil," who is a "murderer." This context parallels Matthew 23:30–35 in another way, for Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of "seeking to kill" Him (John 8:40). With these connections in mind Jesus may have been affirming not only their evil nature but also their future recompense—the sentence of hell (Matt. 23:33)—based on their spiritual genealogy (cf. Rom. 2:28–29; 4:16; 9:6, 8; Gal. 3:7–9).

¹⁰ This imperative of πληρώω ("make full, fill up") should certainly be considered permissive. While many translate this "fill up the measure of the *guilt* of your fathers," the word "guilt" is absent from the text. Craig S. Keener asserts a forensic sense, stating that it "refers to meriting all the blood (bloodguilt) saved up among past generations, never punished as was deserved" (*Matthew*, New Testament Commentary [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 340). However, no direct parallels in the Gospels or in the Old Testament support this view. (This phrase is absent from Luke's passage.)

¹¹ F. F. Bruce makes this suggestion based on 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16, where Paul wrote that "the Jews who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets . . . always fill up the measure of their sins" (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1982], 48). Paul may in fact be referring in this passage to these words in Matthew. K. Deisner also inserts "sin" instead of "guilt" ("μέτρον κτλ.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967], 632). Blomberg seems to take this position, offering the paraphrase, "Go ahead and complete their dirty work" (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 348).

Hagner writes, "What the fathers began will be completed by their sons."¹² Thus the scribes and Pharisees would join those who had murdered prophets by murdering still more, as the latter "completes" the deeds of the former.

Jesus continued this theme of solidarity between these two groups as He pointed out the charge laid on the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:34–35). Because of their evil nature God *intentionally* would send to the scribes and Pharisees His messengers whom they would persecute and murder, thus proving themselves deserving of punishment.¹³ These messengers include the apostles and others who would be sent to proclaim the gospel.¹⁴ Moreover, the guilt for the previous murders done by their "fathers" would also come on them because of their evil actions. In fact the guilt for all the murders of God's righteous ones would be charged against them.¹⁵ This is clearly indicated by ὅπως at the beginning of verse

¹² Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 672. This idea of completion is seen in the word πληρῶν. The scribes and Pharisees "fill up a measure that someone else has partly filled," in this case, their ancestors (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 827–28).

¹³ This intentionality is seen in the phrase διὰ τοῦτο, best rendered "therefore." What is the antecedent of τοῦτο? Hagner says it refers back to the previous verse and also to the entire final woe statement and even the entire pericope (Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 675). Also Luke 11:49–51 is introduced with διὰ τοῦτο. Thus it may be best to consider the antecedent for τοῦτο in Matthew as including the previous verse but being broader than it. Blomberg reasons, "Jesus refers to God bringing His true message to intransigent people in a way that simply guarantees they will continue to reject it and increase their hostility (v. 34)" (*Matthew*, 348). See also D. Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972), 328.

¹⁴ In Matthew 23:34 Jesus used the three terms προφήτας, σοφούς, and γραμματεῖς ("prophets," "wise men," and "scribes"). But why He did so is difficult to determine. He may have been intensifying the future crimes of the Jewish leaders. In the past the Jewish leaders had murdered God's prophets, and in the future they would murder an even broader range of God's sent ones. Luke 11:49 states that those sent are prophets and "apostles."

Jesus said the prophets, wise men, and scribes whom He would send would be killed, crucified, scourged, and persecuted "from city to city" (Matt. 23:34). This recalls Jesus' similar words in 10:17, 21, 23 (Rosse E. Winkle, "The Jeremiah Model for Jesus in the Temple," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24 [1986]: 164). The present tense of ἀποστέλλω in 23:34 is likely a futuristic present (Luke used the future tense; Luke 11:49). According to Luke's record this statement was given by "the wisdom of God," likely referring to God's plan according to His wisdom (Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 1121–22).

¹⁵ This idea of blood coming (ἐρχομαι) on someone is idiomatic for the guilt of a murder (Deut. 19:10; Acts 5:28; 18:6) and correlates with ἐκζητηθήσεται, "it shall be charged" in Luke 11:51. The blood is described as δίκαιον (Matt. 23:35), which can mean "innocent" (cf. Joel 3:19, LXX; Jon. 1:14) or "righteous," although it may mean both. The present participle describing the bloodshed, ἐκκυννόμενον, refers to the

35. Thus it seems that God intentionally sent messengers to these people, knowing they would be killed, *for the purpose* of having “all the righteous blood shed on earth” come on their killers.¹⁶

The grand scope of this guilt is emphasized by the term πᾶν (“all”). It is also represented geographically, the “blood shed on the earth,” and chronologically, from Abel, the first of God’s righteous ones killed, to Zechariah, the last martyred prophet recorded in the Hebrew Old Testament.¹⁷ Interestingly Jesus attributed the killing of Zechariah to the scribes and Pharisees, for He said he was one “whom *you* murdered” (ἐφονεύσατε). Jesus accused them of directly committing the murder of Zechariah!¹⁸ Corporate solidarity is evident in that the scribes and Pharisees were joined inseparably with those who murdered God’s righteous ones in the past. In fact at this point Jesus was probably speaking of the entire group of evil-doers, consisting of the ancestors who killed the prophets in the past and their spiritual sons who would murder still more in the

murders that happened in the past and are continuing into the present. Luke employed a perfect participle (ἐκκεχυμένου), which yields a similar idea.

¹⁶ The conjunction ὅπως with the aorist subjunctive of ἐρχομαι at the beginning of verse 35 should be understood as a statement of purpose similar to ἵνα. See Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 718; and F. Blass, A. DeBrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 186. Purpose rather than result implies that this is referring back to the sending of God’s messengers more than to the killing of the ones sent. It should be noted that Luke 11:50 has ἵνα in place of ὅπως.

¹⁷ In Luke 11:50 Abel is called a prophet. This probably is used in a general sense because of his proclaiming God’s truth rather than holding the prophetic office. Abel’s actions testified of his faith and showed his righteousness, even without words (Heb. 11:4). However, Matthew simply referred to those “righteous” (δίκαιος) who were killed, including the “righteous” (δίκαιος) Abel. Zechariah was most likely the son of Jehoida the priest who was murdered in the court of the temple (2 Chron. 24:20–22). Striking similarities exist between this account, which records Zechariah’s cry for God to avenge his “blood,” and Jesus’ reference in Matthew to the murder that took place in the temple. In fact the record of Zechariah’s death became the symbol for the way Israel treated the prophets (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 759). Since 2 Chronicles was no doubt the last book in the Old Testament canon at that time, Zechariah would have been the last Old Testament prophet in the biblical record (see R. Laird Harris, “Chronicles and the Canon in New Testament Times,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 [1990]: 75, 78–79; and J. Barton Payne, “Zachariah Who Perished,” *Grace Journal* 8 [1967], 33–35). The view should be rejected that this is the Zechariah whose death in the last siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 69 was recounted by Josephus. The aorist tense verb ἐφονεύσατε implies that this murder was a past, completed event. For more problems with this theory see Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 759.

¹⁸ The solidarity Jesus was affirming was with those whom Zechariah warned, “Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you” (2 Chron. 24:20).

future.¹⁹ Jesus included these murderers in one group, thus affirming their corporate responsibility for their crimes.

THE NATURE OF THE CHARGE AND THE CONSEQUENT SENTENCE

The third issue concerns the nature of the charge brought against the scribes and Pharisees, that of being held accountable for "all the righteous blood shed on earth." What was so significant about their murder of these "prophets and wise men and scribes" that would warrant such a charge? Some scholars say the primary reason for this was the scribes and Pharisees' abominable act of persecuting and murdering the Messiah Himself.²⁰ But this does not seem correct because the reference is not to one individual who is murdered but to the group of people who were being sent (seen in the use of the plural throughout). While the charge certainly must include their persecuting and crucifying Jesus, the emphasis seems to be not on that singular act but on their persecution and murder of more of God's messengers.²¹ These messengers were unique, for they carried the message of the Messiah and the salvation to be found only in Him. The treatment of these messengers signified the Jewish leaders' rejection of this message of salvation through the Messiah.²² In fact throughout Scripture persecution of a prophet is

¹⁹ This second-person verb used of those who murdered Zechariah may indicate a shift in Jesus' audience that may have occurred previously in the pericope, a switch from the specific group of Jewish leaders to this entire group of murderous people. Although no syntactical markers indicate the exact occurrence of this shift, verse 33 is most plausible. The Lucan account may also support this possibility. Those to whom God was sending His messengers were not limited to the scribes and Pharisees. The third-person plural pronoun "them" (αὐτούς) in Luke 11:49 may refer to the scribes and Pharisees or to this broader group from both the past and present. Thus the thought that Jesus in Matthew 23:36 may have shifted His audience to this broader group is quite possible.

²⁰ Keener, *Matthew*, 340–41.

²¹ If the intent of this passage was to communicate that the singular persecution and murder of the Messiah incurred such judgment, one might expect Jesus to have accused the Jewish leaders of killing "the greatest prophet of all" or another specific messianic term. Luke 11 also refers to the persecution of a group of messengers.

²² One might argue that the murder of the Messiah was the pinnacle of wrongdoing based on the parable in Mark 12 and Luke 20 about the judgment on the wicked tenant farmers for killing the vineyard owner's son. However, even there the emphasis may be not the murder itself but the rejection of the claim of the son as seen in his murder. As John Nolland states, "The parable is interested in the rejection by the leaders of the claim of God made upon His people through the ministry of Jesus. The death of the son may, within the parabolic narrative, be no more than a powerful image for this rejection" (*Luke 18:35–24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas Word, 1993], 949).

associated with the rejection of the prophet's message.²³ Moreover, Scripture speaks clearly about the judgment that will come on people who reject the message of the Messiah.²⁴ Thus their rejection of the message of Christ resulted in all the murders of God's righteous ones being charged against them.

This analysis also sheds light on the nature of the sentence for such a charge. Since these people rejected the Messiah's message by killing God's messengers, they were also rejecting the message of salvation and thus were headed for eschatological judgment (cf. Heb. 12:24–25).²⁵ Each time the epithet γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν (“offspring of vipers”) is used, these individuals were warned of their impending judgment in the last days (Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33; Luke 3:7).²⁶ Other verses connect the shed blood of God's servants and eschatological judgment.²⁷ Jesus' words, “How shall you escape the sentence of hell?” (Matt. 23:33), clearly speak of eternal judgment.²⁸ Thus the judgment in verses 31–36 is not an earthly judg-

²³ See 2 Chronicles 24:20–21 and Jeremiah 18:18; 20:1–2.

²⁴ In Deuteronomy 18:19 God spoke of the coming prophet like Moses. “And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he will speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.” Centuries later Peter confirmed the messianic nature of Moses' words. “Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people’” (Acts 3:22–23). One who rejects those who proclaim the *message* of this prophet, Jesus, would also be rejecting *Him*. “The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me” (Luke 10:16).

²⁵ Stein, *Luke*, 343.

²⁶ John the Baptist warned the scribes and Pharisees to “flee the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7), which, as Hagner states, is the equivalent of “the judgment of hell” (Matt. 23:33) (*Matthew 14–28*, 672). Joel B. Green concurs that this judgment is at the end of the age (*The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 175). Hans Scharen suggests that this wrath will be poured out during the Tribulation but will extend through the final judgment (“Gehenna in the Synoptics, Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 [October–December 1992]: 467).

²⁷ First Thessalonians 2:16 states that the “utmost wrath” (ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος) has come on “the Jews who killed Jesus and the prophets,” seemingly a reference to end-time judgment. Paul also wrote that this group will “fill up the measure of their sins.” Also several striking passages in Revelation connect the shed blood of God's “servants” with the meting out of judgment in the final days (Rev. 6:9–11; 16:4–6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2).

²⁸ For an analysis of γέεννα (“hell”) referring to the final eschatological judgment for the wicked see Scharen, “Gehenna in the Synoptics, Part 2,” 454–70. He says that τῆς γέεννης is a genitive of apposition (i.e., “the judgment which is Gehenna” [*ibid.*, 466]).

ment of the destruction of Jerusalem, but an eschatological one concerning the destiny of those who reject the gospel message.

In verses 30–35 three things have been established. First, the scribes and Pharisees are described as having an evil, rebellious nature as well as an evil spiritual genealogy. Second, they are in a group that includes the same evil, rebellious people who murdered God's messengers in the past. Third, God placed on them a hefty charge, laying on them the guilt for all the murders of God's righteous ones. For this, only one judgment makes sense: the wrath that will be poured out by God in the end times.

THE SOURCE FOR "THIS GENERATION" IN OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

Verse 36 concludes this pericope with Jesus' statement, "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation." It seems best to understand the antecedent for "all these things" (ταῦτα πάντα) as the preceding words "all the righteous blood shed on earth."²⁹ Thus "this generation" will be held guilty for all the murders of God's righteous ones.

The appearance of the term γενεά, which has not occurred elsewhere in the passage, raises questions about its source. As already mentioned, this is not the only place Jesus used this term in referring to the scribes and Pharisees, nor is it the first occurrence in Matthew (cf. 11:16; 12:39, 41–42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 24:34).³⁰ Notably, of the nine occurrences of γενεά two refer to "an evil and adulterous generation" (12:39; 16:4), one to an "unbelieving and perverted generation" (17:17; Luke 9:41), and another to "this evil generation" (Matt. 12:45).³¹ The adjectives used with γενεά raise questions. Did Jesus take these terms from another source? Was He pointing His audience back to an idea or passage in the Old Testament?

²⁹ "All these things" may also refer to God's sending His messengers and even the sentence to hell (v. 34). However, it seems preferable to see the antecedent as in the immediate verse only. There may be a connection between πάντα (v. 36) and πᾶν (v. 35). Also the parallel passage in Luke 11:50 states directly "the blood of all the prophets" is "charged against this generation."

³⁰ In the Lucan parallel passage γενεά appears twice (Luke 11:50–51).

³¹ Jesus referred to "this adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38); in Acts 2:40 Peter spoke of his Jewish audience as "this perverse generation"; and Paul wrote of "a crooked and perverse generation" (Phil. 2:15).

Two verses in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32) include striking parallels to this phrase in Jesus' teaching.³² The first is in verse 5, "They have acted corruptly toward Him, they are not His children, because of their defect; but are *a perverse and crooked generation*" (italics added); and the other is in verse 20, "I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are *a perverse generation*, sons in whom there is no faithfulness" (italics added). The Septuagint is comparable to the Greek in the New Testament passages. Deuteronomy 32:5 reads γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη, and verse 20 has γενεὰ ἐξεστραμμένη. The term διεστραμμένη ("perverse") is used in Matthew 17:17; Luke 9:4; and Philippians 2:15, and ἐξεστραμμένη has the same root. While σκολιός ("crooked") is not found in the Gospels, it is used in Acts 2:40 and Philippians 2:15 to describe a "*crooked generation*." These uses carry the same sense as the phrases in the Gospels. Thus there is merit in examining the Song of Moses for clues to Jesus' intention in using this term.

Several significant facts may be noted about "this generation" in the context of the Song of Moses. First, as the adjectives indicate, this γενεά is characterized by an evil and rebellious nature. They are not only "perverse and crooked"; they are also "foolish" (Deut. 32:6, 21).³³ They have "acted corruptly" (v. 5), worshiped idols (vv. 16–17), and provoked God to anger (vv. 16, 21). Furthermore this evil nature is depicted through familial terminology.³⁴ God is their "father" who bought, made, and established them (v. 6). He is also the one who "begot" them and "gave birth" to them (v. 18); hence they are "His sons and daughters" (v. 19). They are "not His children [lit., 'sons'] because of their defect" (v. 5),³⁵ and they

³² Others who have noted this connection include Colin Brown, "γενεά," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 2:36; R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Vancouver, BC: Regent, 1998), 70; Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 83–84; Nelson, "This Generation," in Matt 24:34," 373–75; and Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 536.

³³ The word נָקַל ("foolish") was often used of heathen nations who reviled God's name (cf. Ps. 74:18). See Louis Goldberg, "נָקַל," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:547.

³⁴ This familial sense is also seen in other Old Testament occurrences of בָּנִים that could aptly be translated "sons" (e.g., Ps. 112:2 has בָּנִים in synonymous parallelism with יְרֵמָה ["descendants"]).

³⁵ The Hebrew syntax of the phrase "not His children because of their defect" is notoriously difficult. A literal translation reads, "He has dealt corruptly with him not his children their defect." Several solutions have been offered. See Peter C.

are "sons in whom is no faithfulness" (v. 20). Both the evil nature of this generation and the familial themes related to it certainly are echoed in Jesus' characterization of the scribes and Pharisees and "this generation" in the Gospels.

Also worth noting is the point that the primary sense of דור ("generation") seems to be qualitative, which is supported by several scholars.³⁶ Emphasis is on the *nature* of this group as unfaithful. Hence "a perverse generation" is essentially an epithet for "unfaithful sons" (v. 20). There is nothing here that indicates the temporal, chronological sense of דור; instead such a rendering seems untenable. Even the overall intent of the song goes against such a meaning. This song was to be a witness against the sons of Israel when they would forsake the Lord after entering the promised land (31:19). It was to be a witness for many years to come, for God told Moses that "it shall not be forgotten [by] their descendants" (v. 21). Thus it does not speak of a single instance of rebellion by one specific "generation" (in the English sense), but it speaks of the rebellion of the Israelites that would occur continually throughout future years. This דור would exist throughout many years to come. Thus based on the Song of Moses it seems appropriate to understand דור as qualitative and to see the words "perverse and crooked" as referring to God's "unfaithful sons," whom He disowned because of their rebellion.

Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 377; and Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 301. The best view is that of the majority of the translators who take לא כְּנִי as the predicate with מִם as an adverbial accusative: "not His children, owing to their defect."

³⁶ Robert Culver defines דור as "a class of men distinguished by a certain moral or spiritual character" ("דור," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:187). Along these same lines F. J. Neuberg suggests the sense of "assembly" in several occurrences in which the translation "generation" does not convey the sense adequately (Pss. 14:5; 24:6; 49:19 [v. 20, Heb.]; 73:15; 84:10 [v. 11, Heb.]; 112:2) ("An Unrecognized Meaning of Hebrew DŌR," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 9 [1950]: 215–17). This meaning has also been confirmed by P. R. Ackroyd in several passages where he says דור refers "to the men of different types thought of as 'communities' or 'groups.'" He confirms the occurrences cited by Neuberg and adds Psalm 95:10; Proverbs 30:11–14; Jeremiah 7:29; Isaiah 38:12; and 53:8 ("The Meaning of Hebrew דור Considered," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13 [1968]: 3–10). Nelson also confirms this qualitative sense of דור. To Culver's references Nelson adds Psalm 12:7 (v. 8, Heb.), "You, O Lord, will keep them [the godly]; you will preserve him from *this generation* (דורו זו) forever" (italics added). As Nelson points out, זו נְדִיר clearly refers to the wicked people described throughout the psalm, a group in which the godly do not belong ("This Generation" in Matt 24:34," 374). The verse seems to be stating a timeless principle of God's preserving the godly, for He will preserve them "forever." Thus it would be awkward for David to be referring only to those who lived during his lifetime.

Clearly this allegation against a “perverse and crooked generation” is leveled at Israel and to some extent it prophesies of a historical judgment on the nation. However, the song concludes with a statement that seems to imply a different kind of judgment on a different group of people. Deuteronomy 32:43 states, “Rejoice, O nations, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance on His adversaries, and will atone for His land and His people.” Although some see the “adversaries” here and in verse 41 as a reference to the enemy nations that God uses to bring judgment on Israel, there is good warrant to understand them as *all* the enemies of God, including the rebellious Israelites (that “generation”) characterized throughout the song.³⁷ Keil and Delitzsch support this rendering, stating that “adversaries” includes all who worshiped other gods, and even idol-worshiping Israelites who would incur the vengeance of God.³⁸ This view is supported by several factors related to the song and also seems to be the way subsequent prophets understood this statement.³⁹

³⁷ For the view that “adversaries” refers to the enemy nations of Israel see Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 389; and J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 302–4.

³⁸ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Commentary on the Old Testament (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 490–91; cf. George A. F. Knight, *The Song of Moses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 134.

³⁹ First, everywhere this song is discussed it is framed as something that would witness against Israel, not against Israel’s enemies (עַוְוָה with אֵל is best rendered “against”; cf. Deut. 4:26; 31:26; Jer. 42:5). Second, while the syntax of the poem is difficult, it is plausible that even verses that some attribute to judgment on the enemies of Israel are actually a continuation of judgment against Israel (vv. 28–42). Third, it makes little sense for God to call the “nations” to rejoice (v. 43) if they are the ones on whom He is pouring out His wrath. Fourth, later prophets understood that this oath by God to render vengeance on His adversaries refers to His judgment on rebellious Israelites. For example God proclaimed, “I will be relieved of My adversaries and avenge Myself on My foes” (Isa. 1:24). This certainly parallels the wording of Deuteronomy 32:41 and 43 with the use of both אֵל (“adversary”) and אָוֶן (“avenge”). Isaiah exposed the sin of the rebellious Israelites, describing them as sons who rebelled against the God who raised them (Isa. 1:2) and acted corruptly (v. 4 אָוֶן); cf. Deut. 32:5) and as an offspring of evildoers (Isa. 1:4). He described the inhabitants of Jerusalem as “murderers” (v. 21) and its rulers as rebels who defend neither orphans nor widows (v. 23). Immediately after these descriptions God promised to carry out vengeance on His adversaries (vv. 24–25). Thus it is evident that these adversaries were rebellious Israelites, unfaithful sons, who turned their back on God, and that Isaiah viewed God’s promise to render vengeance on His adversaries in the Song of Moses as applicable in this case to rebellious Israelites. See John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 25. These are the “rebels” and “sinners,” “those who forsake Yahweh” who will be “crushed” and “perish” (v. 28, author’s translations). This seems to refer to judgment in the last days. No historical judgment on Jerusalem would have resulted in only

Furthermore, related to God's promise to render vengeance on His adversaries is His commitment to "avenge the blood of His servants" (v. 43), which most likely refers to His prophets, not the nation as a whole.⁴⁰ The idea of God avenging their blood is a common Old Testament theme. Characteristic of this role, God would administer justice by requiring a life or lives in exchange for that of His murdered one(s).⁴¹ In fact this avenging was done not only on enemy nations, but even against Israelites.⁴² Keil and Delitzsch correctly note that the servants "are not the nation of Israel as a whole, but the faithful servants whom the Lord had at all times among His people, and who were persecuted, oppressed, and put to death by the ungodly."⁴³ Certainly there are echoes of this commitment in Matthew 23:34–35 related to the shed blood of God's messengers.⁴⁴

Thus the "perverse and crooked generation" in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32) consists of rebellious Israelites, unfaithful "sons" whom God had disowned. God promised to render vengeance on this group of enemies and thus to avenge the blood of His servants. Also "His servants" and "His people" are to rejoice "with the nations" because of these acts of judgment against His enemies and on behalf of His servants.⁴⁵

evildoers being destroyed. Jeremiah made similar declarations about God "avenging" (צַדִּיק) Himself against rebellious Israelites (Jer. 5:9, 29; 9:9 [v. 8, Heb.]).

⁴⁰ Although this can be generally applied to God's people, the prophets are repeatedly referred to throughout the Old Testament as God's servants (e.g., 2 Kings 17:23; 21:10; 24:2; Jer. 25:4; Dan. 9:10; Amos 3:7).

⁴¹ On the Old Testament theme of bloodguiltiness and the role of a blood avenger see James E. Priest, "A Comparative Study of Bloodshed in Bible and Talmud," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (June 1988): 145–51. For God's commitment to avenge the blood of His servants see 2 Kings 9:7; 2 Chronicles 24:22; Psalm 79:10; and Joel 3:21.

⁴² When Elisha sent a young man to anoint Jehu as king over Israel, he passed on the word of the Lord to "strike the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD" (2 Kings 9:7). This wording is the same as in Deuteronomy 32:43. The command was to avenge the death of the prophets whom Jezebel had murdered (1 Kings 18:4).

⁴³ Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 492.

⁴⁴ Keener also notes this connection (*Matthew*, 340). Mounce says the judgment of God on Babylon in Revelation to avenge the blood of the martyrs is a fulfillment of God's promise in Deuteronomy 32:43 (*The Book of Revelation*, 342).

⁴⁵ Isaiah 1:27 also speaks of a similar group that is an object of God's mercy. They are the "repentant ones" of Zion, contrasted with the "sinners" who are destroyed. In Romans 15:10 Paul quoted Deuteronomy 32:43 to state that the nations can rejoice because salvation has come to them.

A PROPOSED REFERENT FOR “THIS GENERATION”

On the basis of the evidence from the context of Matthew 23:36 and especially from the connections to the Song of Moses, a tenable understanding of “this generation” can be proposed. It seems unlikely that ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ refers to the group of Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries living at that specific time period. As this study has sought to demonstrate, several factors work against this interpretation. First, the solidarity that Jesus asserted between the scribes and Pharisees and those who murdered God’s messengers in the past is certainly well established in verses 34–35. Thus it seems best, as suggested, to understand the epithet “this generation” in verse 36 as referring to the entire corporate entity composed of people from the past and present, not just the Jews of that time period. As Gundry writes, Jesus’ “involving them in the bygone murder of an OT prophet (v 35) shows that he does not take ‘this generation’ in a sense chronologically limited to Jesus’ contemporaries. . . . In other words, if the ‘you’ who constitute ‘this generation’ includes those who murdered Zechariah in OT times, ‘this generation’ can hardly bear the chronological limitation usually imposed on it.”⁴⁶

Second, the nature of the charge (that of *all* the bloodguilt for present and past martyrdom) that is brought against this γενεὰ seems to be too weighty a charge to be laid on just one group of Jews living at a certain time period. As has been asserted, the charge was not based simply on the specific act of killing the Messiah but on the killing of all those whom God sends who carry His message of salvation. That God would lay all the bloodguiltiness of millions of murders on only one group of people who happened to rebel at an especially “unlucky” time in history hardly seems consistent with His justice or with biblical theology as a whole.⁴⁷

Third, the only sentence that correlates with this heavy charge against “this generation” is eschatological judgment, including eternal condemnation, a judgment confirmed in both Old and New Testaments. While the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple

⁴⁶ Gundry, *Matthew*, 472.

⁴⁷ Many commentators have found this issue difficult. William Hendriksen, who supports a temporal rendering, addresses this issue as follows: “Responsibility increases with the years. Every new generation that fails to take to heart the lessons of the preceding generation is adding to its own guilt and therefore also to the severity of its punishment. This is clear, for example, from such passages as Prov. 29:1; Jer. 7:16; Ezek. 14:14; Luke 13:34. And see especially Dan. 5:22” (*Luke*, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], 643). See also Lenski, *The Interpretation of Matthew’s Gospel*, 918–19. Hendriksen’s scriptural support is unconvincing at best, and Lenski, who espouses a similar view, offers no support.

was certainly devastating to the Jews of that time period, to correlate with the charge, one would have to prove it was exceedingly more devastating than the historical judgments that happened to Israel in the past, but this is difficult to assert.

Fourth, the parallel to Deuteronomy 32 does not support the temporal sense. To the contrary, a temporal sense in this passage is simply untenable.⁴⁸

If the temporal understanding of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη is untenable, the second option must be considered, namely, *a group of people with shared characteristics*. While this view is not the most popular, it is not without support within the scholarly community. A significant (although often unacknowledged) body of evidence supports the qualitative meaning of γενεά. As Gundry points out, this phrase has a "qualitative sense concerning the 'unbelieving and perverted' in the whole of Israel's history."⁴⁹ Brown acknowledges this meaning for several of its occurrences in Matthew. He states that this phrase refers to "a class of people who in this world stand over against the children of light." He adds that in these cases "the temporal 'genealogical' element is completely absent."⁵⁰ Ridderbos says that in Mark 13:30 and its parallels this phrase has a qualitative sense, referring to "the people of this particular disposition and frame of mind who are averse to Jesus and His words." He even states that this is "the usual meaning" for this phrase while the temporal meaning often "recedes into the background" or is "ignored."⁵¹ Even some who assert that the temporal sense of γενεά is the primary meaning in the Gospels concur that inseparable from

⁴⁸ Several facts suggest that it is unlikely that ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη refers to the nation of Israel as a whole. First, this γενεά is held accountable for murders committed by non-Israelites, which hardly seems a reasonable charge to level against Israel, not to mention the lack of biblical support for such a notion. Second, the judgment on this γενεά is most likely eternal, as implied in Matthew 23, made clear in Matthew 12, and quite possibly asserted in the related Old Testament passages as well. Third, the "perverse and crooked generation" in the Song of Moses most likely refers to rebellious individuals within the nation, not the nation as a whole.

⁴⁹ He ascribes this meaning to its occurrences in Matthew 11:16; 12:39, 41–42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 24:34; Mark 13:30; and Luke 21:32 (Gundry, *Matthew*, 472).

⁵⁰ Brown, "γενεά," 36. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich also affirm that "this generation" refers to "those exhibiting common characteristics or interests," although Luke 16:8 is the only occurrence listed under this heading (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 191). This same qualitative meaning was previously established for the use of דור throughout the Old Testament (see note 36).

⁵¹ Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 502, 535. Strangely Ridderbos sees the temporal meaning as primary and the qualitative sense secondary in Matthew 23:36.

it is this qualitative, unfavorable connotation.⁵² Furthermore occurrences in extrabiblical literature also support this view.⁵³

In a significant study Nelson analyzes the phrase ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη in Matthew 24:34 (“This generation will not pass away until all these things take place”), and he concludes that it refers to “a wicked kind of people who reject Jesus and face eschatological judgment.”⁵⁴ Regarding 23:36 Nelson states that the scribes and Pharisees “comprise a corporate kind of evil generation . . . with their fathers who killed the prophets . . . and with those who would murder Jesus’ messengers until the time of the *parousia*. . . Those who comprise ‘this generation’ are hypocritical . . . self-exalting . . . spiritually blind . . . lawless . . . and foolish. . . They will kill and crucify disciples . . . lead many astray . . . and they are sentenced to hell.”⁵⁵

On the basis of etymology some writers object to this view that “this generation” refers to a group of rebellious people throughout time. They observe that this meaning is unrelated to the basic “genealogical” meaning of γενεά, which is almost certainly derived from the root γεν- (“birth”). As Turner states, “Lexical support for the idea that the word means ‘nation’ or ‘kind of people’ is marginal if not nonexistent.”⁵⁶ Perhaps the way languages evolve may allow for an emerging definition of γενεά as a “type” of people. However, is one justified in employing a nongenealogical definition for γενεά when in almost every other usage the word carries a genealogical sense?

⁵² Friedrich Büchsel, “γενεά κτλ.,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (1967), 663. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich also do not separate this qualitative sense from the temporal, but they say that each generation is “defined in terms of specific characteristics” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 191).

⁵³ *Jubilees* 23:14 offers an interesting exposition concerning “an evil generation.” “And all these [calamities] will come on an evil generation, which transgresses on the earth: their works are uncleanness and fornication, and pollution and abominations” (“The Book of Jubilees,” in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles [Oxford: Clarendon, 1913], 2:48–49). See also Büchsel, “γενεά κτλ.,” 1:662.

⁵⁴ Nelson states that in Matthew 24:34 ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη refers to “that type of consummately evil and unbelieving people who deceive and persecute the disciples of Christ until the time of the *parousia*, when the true followers of Jesus are vindicated and ‘this generation’ passes away in judgment” (“‘This Generation,’ in Matt 23:34,” 369).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁵⁶ David L. Turner, “The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1–41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,” *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (spring 1989): 22.

The answer lies in Deuteronomy 32:20, where $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ carries an inherent familial idea. As was mentioned, the "perverse generation" stands in parallelism with unfaithful "sons" who had rejected their "father." This familial sense is also confirmed in Matthew 23:31–32, where Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees were "sons of those who murdered the prophets" and an "offspring" of vipers. This same aspect is seen in other verses that use $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$.⁵⁷ Therefore rather than defining $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ as a *kind* of people, it should be defined with its clear genealogical sense, except that the family connection is not natural descent but spiritual descent.⁵⁸ This correlates directly with the basic meaning for $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ asserted in the lexicons. This is "a term relating to the product of the act of generating and with special reference to kinship, frequently used of familial connections and ancestry. Generally, those descended from a common ancestor, a 'clan.'"⁵⁹ The term is also used in extrabiblical literature to designate "a family."⁶⁰ In fact this understanding of $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ is more primary than the temporal idea, which is a secondary sense derived from this basic meaning.⁶¹ So a denial of the temporal sense of this term is not necessarily, as Turner states, a "convenient" way to "redefine" $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$.⁶² It is instead an assertion of the most basic definition for the term. Thus it is best to understand "this generation" as referring to *an evil spiritual family existing throughout time, who killed God's messengers in the past, will murder still more, and will be charged and sentenced to judgment for their crimes in the last days.*

⁵⁷ In Matthew 12:41 Jesus' rebuke of the generation ($\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$) that searches for a sign is followed by His illustration of the evil spirit returning to the "house" from which it was exorcised, thereby indicating the state of this "evil generation" (v. 45). Then Jesus said, "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (v. 50). Clearly Jesus was affirming the importance of spiritual not physical kinship (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 208). In Philippians 2:15 blameless and innocent "children of God" are contrasted with the "crooked and perverse generation."

⁵⁸ Büchsel in fact suggests a possible interpretation for $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ in the allusion to Isaiah 53:8 in Acts 8:33 as "spiritual progeny," apparently seeing the possibilities for a metaphorical meaning (" $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ κτλ.," 1:663).

⁵⁹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 191.

⁶⁰ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 122.

⁶¹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 191. See also Büchsel, " $\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ κτλ.," 1:662.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23.

CONCLUSION

In using the phrase ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη Jesus was referring to the wicked people of *all* time, those before the Messiah and those after. These individuals are grouped together corporately in guilt and in judgment as an evil “family” whose spiritual origins are not from God. They are held accountable for all the murders of God’s righteous messengers, including the Messiah and those who would bring His message. They blatantly reject the message of the Messiah and the only hope of atonement for their crimes. This group includes Israelites who would forsake God and His commandments and thus be “disowned” by God, thereby becoming His enemies on whom He would render vengeance. Their judgment will be meted out in the last days and includes the sentence of hell.

Any other rendering diminishes the force of Jesus’ words. Jesus was not giving the nation of Israel another warning about an earthly punishment such as the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Instead His message dealt with issues of *eternal* significance. Those in the nation of Israel who shed the blood of God’s prophets will not escape His wrath. These issues, in fact, lie at the heart of the Song of Moses’ triumphant call for God’s people to “rejoice,” for He will “avenge the blood of His servants, render vengeance on His adversaries, and atone for His land and His people.”