recorded at Matthew 24:32, 33, Jesus said: “Now learn from the fig tree as an illustration this point: Just as soon as its young branch grows tender and it puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. Likewise also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near at the doors.” (Compare Mark 13:28-30; Luke 21:30-32.) Then, at Matthew 24:34, we read: “Truly I say to you that this generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur.”

13 Jesus said that it was his disciples, soon to be anointed with holy spirit, who should be able to draw certain conclusions when they saw “all these things” occur. So Jesus must have been referring to his disciples when he made the statement: “This generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur.”

14 Unlike unbelievers, Jesus’ disciples would not only see the sign but also understand its significance. They would “learn” from the features of that sign and “know” their true meaning. They would fully appreciate that “he is near at the doors.” While it is true that both unbelieving Jews and faithful anointed Christians saw a limited fulfillment of Jesus’ words in the first century, only his anointed followers back then could learn from these events—could understand the true meaning of what they saw.

15 Those without spiritual understanding today have felt that there has been no “striking observableness” with regard to the sign of Jesus’ presence. They reason that everything is continuing on as it did in the past. (2 Pet. 3:4) On the other hand, Christ’s faithful anointed brothers, the modern-day John class, have recognized this sign as if it were a flash of lightning and have understood its true meaning. As a class, these anointed ones make up the modern-day “generation” of contemporaries that will not pass away “until all these things occur.”* This suggests that some who are Christ’s anointed brothers will still be alive on earth when the foretold great tribulation begins.

* The time period during which “this generation” lives seems to correspond to the period covered by the first vision in the book of Revelation. (Rev. 1:10-3:22) This feature of the Lord’s day extends from 1914 until the last of the faithful anointed ones dies and is resurrected.—See Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand! page 24, paragraph 4.

15. (a) Who make up the modern-day “generation” that Jesus referred to? (b) Why are we not able to calculate the exact length of “this generation”? (See the box on page 25.)

16 More might recognize the sign:
"What is happening to me in heaven."
Importantly, the anointed one who has not yet died in heaven, we now believe, will have a role to play in the present. We have presented the reasons why this is so, but we don’t know when. Jesus said: “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7) We are just to be ready spiritually as well as physically. (Matt. 24:44)

16. What is the significance of Christ’s teachings on the “times” and “seasons”?”

Can We Calculate the Length of “This Generation”?  

The word “generation” usually refers to people of various ages whose lives overlap during a particular time period or event. For example, Exodus 1:6 tells us: “Eventually Joseph died, and also all his brothers and all that generation.” Joseph and his brothers varied in age, but they shared a common experience during the same time period. Included in “that generation” were some of Joseph’s brothers who were born before him. Some of these outlived Joseph. (Gen. 50:24) Others of “that generation,” such as Benjamin, were born after Joseph was born and may have lived on after he died.

So when the term “generation” is used with reference to people living at a particular time, the exact length of that time cannot be stated except that it does have an end and would not be excessively long. Therefore, by using the term “this generation,” as recorded at Matthew 24:34, Jesus did not give his disciples a formula to enable them to determine when “the last days” would end. Rather, Jesus went on to emphasize that they would not know “that day and hour.”—2 Tim. 3:1; Matt. 24:36.

“Keep on the Watch”  
16 More is needed, though, than merely recognizing the sign. Jesus went on to say: “What I say to you I say to all, Keep on the watch.” (Mark 13:37) This is of utmost importance to all of us today whether of the anointed or of the great crowd. Nine decades have passed since Jesus was installed as King in heaven in 1914. As challenging as it may be, we must prove ourselves ready and keep on the watch. Understanding that Christ is present invisibly in Kingdom power helps us to do that. It also alerts us to the fact that soon he will come to destroy his enemies “at an hour that [we] do not think likely.”—Luke 12:40.

17 Our understanding of the meaning of Christ’s presence helps to intensify our feelings of urgency. We know that Jesus is already present and has been reigning invisibly as King in heaven since 1914. Soon he will come to destroy the wicked and bring about vast changes to this entire globe. We should therefore be more determined than ever to take an active part in the work that Jesus foretold when he said: “This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end [telos] will come.”—Matt. 24:14.

How Would You Answer?
- How do we know that Jesus’ presence is an extended period of time?
- Who recognize the sign of Jesus’ presence and understand what it means?
- The modern-day generation mentioned at Matthew 24:34 is made up of whom?
- Why are we unable to calculate the exact length of “this generation”?

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