a time of “great tribulation,” Jesus added: “Concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Matthew 24:3-36; Mark 13:3-32) We do not need to know the exact timing of events. Rather, our focus must be on being watchful, cultivating strong faith, and keeping busy in Jehovah’s service—not on calculating a date. Jesus concluded his great prophecy by saying: “Keep looking, keep awake, for you do not know when the appointed time is... Keep on the watch... What I say to you I say to all, Keep on the watch.” (Mark 13:33-37) Danger lurks in the shadows of today’s world. We must keep awake! —Romans 13:11-13.

6 Not only must we pay attention to the inspired prophecies concerning these final days of a wicked system but we must anchor our faith primarily on the precious sacrifice of Christ Jesus and God’s marvelous promises based thereon. (Hebrews 6:17-19; 9:14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2 Peter 1:16-19) Eager to see the end of this evil system, Jehovah’s people have at times speculated about the time when the “great tribulation” would break out, even tying this to calculations of what is the lifetime of a generation since 1914. However, we “bring a heart of wisdom in,” not by speculating about how many years or days make up a generation, but by thinking about how we “count our days” in bringing joyful praise to Jehovah. (Psalm 90:12) Rather than provide a rule for measuring time, the term “generation” as used by Jesus refers principally to contemporary people of a certain historical period, with their identifying characteristics.*

* See Volume 1, page 918, of Insight on the Scriptures, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.
8 Yes, the complete triumph of the Messianic Kingdom is at hand! Is anything to be gained, then, by looking for dates or by speculating about the literal lifetime of a "generation"? Far from it! Habakkuk 2:3 clearly states: "The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it keeps panting on to the end, and it will not tell a lie. Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late." Jehovah's day of accounting hastens ever closer.—Jeremiah 25:31-33; Malachi 4:1.

9 When Christ's Kingdom rule began in 1914, Satan was hurled down to earth. This has meant "woe for the earth . . . because the Devil has come down to you, having great anger, knowing he has a short period of time." (Revelation 12:12) That time is short, indeed, compared with the thousands of years of Satan's rulership. The Kingdom is at hand, and so is Jehovah's day and hour for executing judgment on this wicked generation!—Proverbs 3:25; 10:24, 25.

The "Generation" That Passes Away

10 Let us examine more closely Jesus' statement at Matthew 24:34, 35: "Truly I say to you that this generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away." Jesus' words that follow show that 'nobody knows that day and hour.' Far more important, he shows that we must avoid the snares surrounding us in this generation. Thus Jesus adds: "For just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be." (Matthew 24:36-39) Jesus here compared the generation of his day to that of Noah's day.—Genesis 6:5, 9; footnote.

11 This was not the first time that the apostles heard Jesus make this comparison of 'generations,' for some days earlier he had stated concerning himself: "The Son of man . . . must undergo many sufferings and be rejected by this generation. Moreover, just as it occurred in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of man." (Luke 17:24-26) Thus, Matthew chapter 24 and Luke chapter 17 make the same comparison. In Noah's day "all flesh [that] had ruined its way on the earth" and that was destroyed at the Flood was "this generation." In Jesus' day the apostate Jewish people that were rejecting Jesus was "this generation."—Genesis 6:11, 12; 7:1.

12 Therefore, in the final fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy today, "this generation" apparently refers to the peoples of earth who see the sign of Christ's presence but fail to mend their ways. In contrast, we as Jesus' disciples refuse to be molded by the life-style of "this generation." Though in the world, we must be no part of it, "for the appointed time is near." (Revelation 1:3; John 17:16) The apostle Paul admonishes

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8. How do Jehovah's prophets stress the need to keep awake?
9. What developments since 1914 show that the time is short?
10. How is "this generation" like that of Noah's day?

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11. What comparison of 'generations' did Jesus make, as reported by Matthew and Luke?