

## The Four Generation Cycle and the Character of Each Generation

There is a passage in Proverbs that has intrigued me for years. Its verses seem to form an ancient mirror reflecting back the mistakes of past generations. That mirror is now angled at us.

“A generation curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.  
A generation pure in their own eyes, and is not washed from their filthiness.  
A generation, O how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.  
A generation, whose teeth swords, and their jaw teeth knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from men.” (Proverbs 30:11-14)

In these verses, God has described the heart and attitude of four generations of people. The generations are consecutive, and, unfortunately, all are perpetuating a culture that's living in rebellion toward God. By the fourth generation, the cycle is complete. The sin of the first generation has reached its fullness, and God promises to then eliminate that society from history. This is his way of preserving the earth until his plan for mankind is complete. Since the days of the flood when God became angry and destroyed his creation, to the days of Nimrod when he confused the peoples' languages, this four generation cycle has been used to preserve godly standards on earth.

Read the passage again below. The additional words are not found in the King James text but have been added to the English translation to make reading easier.

“There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.  
There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.  
There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.  
There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.” (Proverbs 30:11-14)

Essentially, the first generation develops a worldview that is not correct. This leads them into a sinful lifestyle. Their worldview is then passed on to the next generation. By the time the second generation reaches an age where they can engage in critical thought, they have already been positioned to evaluate their parents' worldview from a perspective that is almost identical to that worldview. The next generation doesn't stand a chance. The cycle continues.

### Types of Nations

These verses can be applied to generations found in every nation on earth. There are distinct types of nations in the world:

- 1) Nations with access to the Bible (special revelation)
  - a. Israel has always possessed the written law of Moses
  - b. Believing Gentile nations have a knowledge of scripture
- 2) Pagan nations that have access to God's truth (general revelation)
  - a. This would include all other nations that don't have access to the written word of God because the Lord said his absolute standards have been written on men's hearts. Everyone has a conscience to delineate right from wrong. Just like a bird knows to migrate south for the winter, if people follow natural laws they inherently understand just by virtue of being human, they will be blessed by God.

A verse regarding this type of nation is found in Romans:

“When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the

requirements of the law are written on their hearts.” (Romans 2:14, 15)

## Generation Number One: A Generation That Curses Their Fathers

In Deuteronomy 11:18-21, Hebrew parents are told to:

“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.”

The parents had a responsibility to introduce their children to the living creator. The command explains that if each generation strives toward righteousness, they will continue to enjoy the land promised to them by God. If offspring are righteous, the nation has the potential to go on forever, never to be driven from the land.

Proverbs 30:11 is about the beginning of a spiritual and moral decline that will eventually span four generations. The decline begins when one generation curses the righteous ways taught to them by their fathers and refuses to show gratitude to their mothers.

1288 [e]	3808 [e]	517 [e]	853 [e]	7043 [e]	1 [e]	1755 [e]
yə·bā·rêk.	lō	'im·mōw,	wə·'et-	yə·qal·lêl;	'ā·bîw	dō·wr
יְבָרֵךְ:	לֹא	אִמּוֹ	וְאֶת-	יְקַלֵּל	אָבִיו	דֹּר 11
does bless	not	its mother	and	[that] curses	its father	[There is] a generation
V-Piel-Imperf-3ms	Adv-NegPrt	N-fsc   3ms	Conj-w   DirObjM	V-Piel-Imperf-3ms	N-msc   3ms	N-ms

### Curse

Hebrew Word: qalal

Hebrew Pronunciation: /kaw-lal/

Root Meaning: “be light”

Literal Meaning: “small”

Figurative Meaning: “trifling, vile”

Translated Meaning: “to bring contempt, to despise”

The first generation curses the very men who instructed them in the ways of the Lord—their fathers. This generation considers their righteous heritage a trivial, insignificant thing. This is what Esau did in when he decided that a bowl of stew was more valuable than his father’s blessing.

Genesis 25:34 says:

“So Esau despised his birthright.”

Esau was heir to Abraham and Isaac’s estate, which included the covenant with God. Yet Esau “cursed” it all in the name of his immediate need for soup.

In Proverbs, we aren’t just talking about one immature teenager; we’re talking about an entire generation. The parents of this generation have tried to hand them the knowledge of God and his

eternal plan, but their response was like that of Esau. They choose to sell eternity for a moment in time.

This same generation also “did not bless their mothers.”

1288 [e] yə·bā·rêk. יְבָרַךְ does bless V-Piel-Imperf-3ms	3808 [e] lō לֹא not Adv-NegPrt	517 [e] 'im·mōw, אִמּוֹ its mother N-fsc   3ms	853 [e] wə·'et- וְאֶת- and Conj-w   DirObjM	7043 [e] yə·qal·lêl; יְקַלֵּל [that] curses V-Piel-Imperf-3ms	1 [e] 'ā·bîw אָבִיו its father N-msc   3ms	1755 [e] dō·wr דּוֹר 11 [There is] a generation N-ms
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**Bless**

Hebrew Word: barak  
 Hebrew Pronunciation: /baw-rak/  
 Root Meaning: “to kneel”

The association between “kneel” and “bless” is in the old custom of taking a child on one’s knee to pronounce a blessing on him.

The Jewish mother was instrumental in passing down knowledge of God and scripture to her children. We see this in Proverbs 1:8:

“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.”

A generation that “does not bless their mothers” is a generation that does not thank their mother for the good teaching she provided. They aren’t grateful for their godly heritage.

**Generation Number Two: A Generation Who Are Pure in Their Own Eyes**

“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.” (Proverbs 30:12)

7364 [e] ru·ḥāṣ. רִחַץ is washed V-Pual-Perf-3ms	3808 [e] lō לֹא not Adv-NegPrt	6675 [e] ū·miṣ·ṣō·'ā·tōw, וּמִצְצֹתוֹ and [Yet] from its filthiness Conj-w, Prep-m   N-fsc   3ms	5869 [e] bə·'ê·nāw; בְּעֵינָיו in its own eyes Prep-b   N-cdc   3ms	2889 [e] ṭā·hō·wr טָהוֹר [that is] pure Adj-ms	1755 [e] dō·wr דּוֹר 12 [There is] a generation N-ms
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The second generation is raised to reject a universal code of right and wrong. They don’t believe in a holy and righteous God, so they don’t have an ultimate standard to compare themselves to. They are “pure in their own eyes” even though they are full of sin.

This generation creates its own rules and establishes its own value system. They develop theories and philosophies that are logical to the human mind but contrary to the divine view. They are eager to accept *anything* that makes sense after it has been evaluated by a judgment system based solely on human reasoning.

## Generation Number Three: A Haughty and Disdainful Generation

“There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.”  
(Proverbs 30:13)

5375 [e] yin·nā·śê·'ū. Nifal-Imperf-3mp  
6079 [e] wə·'ap·'ap·pāw, Conj-w | N-mdc | 3ms  
5869 [e] 'ê·nāw; N-cdc | 3ms  
7311 [e] rā·mū V-Qal Perf-3mp  
4100 [e] māh- Interrog  
1755 [e] dō·wr N-ms

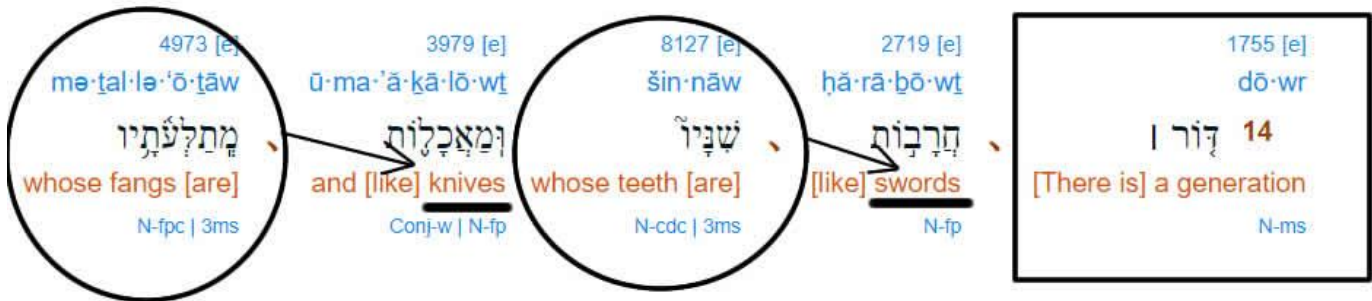
are lifted up and their eyelids  
their eyes lofty are oh how  
[There is] a generation

The NIV says “There are those whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful.” This is a description of the third generation. Their “eyes are so haughty” because they are filled with pride and arrogance. They have been raised by parents who failed to acknowledge the sin nature, so they established their own ethics according to personal preferences. Now they have a very high evaluation of themselves and believe they should get whatever they want. They are self-absorbed and spend all their time fulfilling new desires.

Their “glances are disdainful” because they rationalize that nothing is as important as their own happiness. Thus, the third generation is the “Me Generation.” Children raised by this generation spend their formative years with extremely self-centered parents. Divorce is rampant because the “quest for happiness” is paramount. Doing whatever it takes to “find oneself” is an epidemic. This generation lives constantly looking for something better but often dies unfulfilled and alone thanks to their selfish choices.

## Generation Number Four: A Generation Whose Teeth are Swords, With Knives Set in Their Jaws

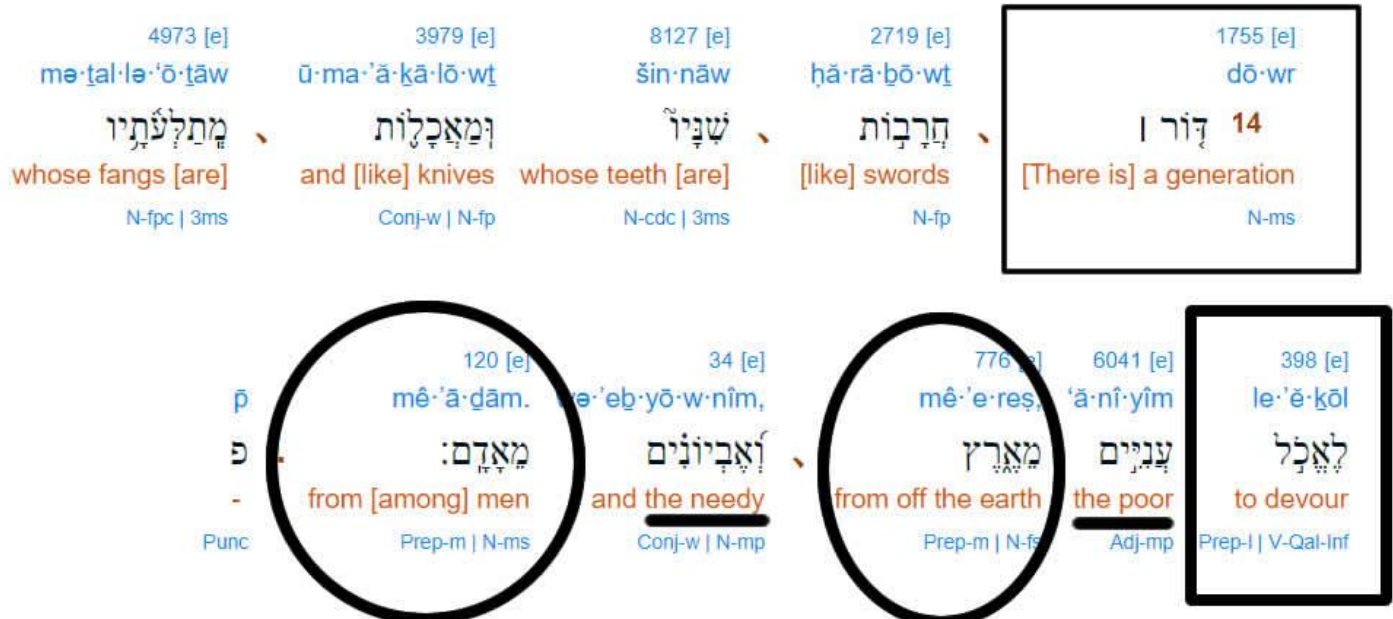
“There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.”  
(Proverbs 30:14)



120 [e] 34 [e] 776 [e] 6041 [e] 398 [e]  
 p mē·'ā·dām. wə·'eb·yō·w·nīm, mē·'e·reṣ; 'ā·nî·yîm le·'ē·kōl  
 פ . מאדם: ואביונים מארץ עניים לאכל  
 - from [among] men and the needy from off the earth the poor to devour  
 Punc Prep-m | N-ms Conj-w | N-mp Prep-m | N-fs Adj-mp Prep-l | V-Qal-Inf

In the four generation sequence, the fourth generation is the most violent. They are oppressive and abusive, taking advantage of anyone who is weak. Their insatiable desires make them cruel. When this generation is old enough to gain control of the government, their tyranny can only be stopped through foreign invasion.

Israel had a generation like this described in Amos 8:4, “You trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land.” This type of behavior indicates the fourth and final generation of a society. In reference to that generation of Israel, God said, “The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.”



### Reflections on David's Fourteenth Psalm

#### Psalm 14

1 The fool says in his heart,  
 'There is no God.'  
 They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;  
 there is no one who does good.'



- 2 The Lord looks down from heaven  
on the sons of men  
to see if there are any who understand,  
any who seek God.
- 3 All have turned aside,  
they have together become corrupt;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one.
- 4 Will evildoers never learn—  
those who devour my people as men eat bread  
and who do not call on the Lord?

The generational cycle is again hinted at here in Psalm 14. It begins when the fool says “there is no God.” This is exactly what happened in the first generation. In verse 2, there is no one left who has a correct understanding of God and his ways. In the same way, a new philosophy for life takes hold in the second generation. God then sees that all have become corrupt. Everyone is sinful and looking only to fulfill their own desires. This is just like the third generation. Next they “devour people as men eat bread.” This is similar to the fourth generation.

### **A Look at Ages in the Scripture**

Before the flood, men lived much longer. Adam is recorded to have lived 930 years, and his son Seth lived to be 912. It is believed that mankind used to live longer because man was created perfect and the earth’s environment was perfect and originally encircled with a layer of water.

When Adam sinned, the fall of man (in a spiritual sense) was complete. Men were totally separated from God. Yet, physically and mentally, Adam and Eve remained perfect. They had no genetic problems. They had no physical malfunctions. Their bodies were better than ours today. This could have resulted in a longer lifespan.

Also, the earth’s environment was perfect at the time. There were no diseases until after the fall of man, and the earth was originally encircled with a layer of water (Genesis 1:6-8). This layer protected mankind from dangerous radiation. During the flood of Noah, this water fell to earth. Since that time, the earth has been exposed to waves of solar radiation. Scientists have learned that ultraviolet light from the sun intensifies the aging process and contributes to skin cancer and cataracts. (An example of this would be the Apollo astronauts who got cataracts an average of seven years earlier than other astronauts.) Scientists also found that ultraviolet exposure alters the immune response by changing cell structure.

Immediately after the flood, men were given less years to live. Noah’s son Shem lived to be 500, and the first generation born after the flood lived an average of 400 years. After the Tower of Babel, we see those numbers cut in half again. Abraham’s father dies at 205, and the years of life continue to decrease with each generation: 209, 207, 200, 119.

Therefore, the length of a generation in Adam’s day was longer than the length of a generation after the flood (Shem’s day). And a generation in Abraham’s day (about 100 years) was longer than a generation in David’s day (40 years). The 40 year generation has remained constant until the present time.

### **What is a Generation?**

Since Israel was established as a nation at Mount Sinai, a “generation” was determined to be a period of time lasting forty years. In Exodus, God made his people wander around in the wilderness for an entire generation. The Old Testament says:

“He made them wander in the desert for forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone.” (Numbers 32:13)

The Hebrew word for generation is “dor.” It means “a revolution of time such as an age or generation, roughly the period of time from one’s birth to one’s maturity, which in the Old Testament corresponds to a period of about 40 years.”<sup>1</sup> When Moses was 80, Joshua was 40. Together, they represented the leadership of the first and second generations.

## **Recognizing 160 Years of Decline**

If the people of a generation turn away from God, they begin a decline that will end with the annihilation of their great-grandchildren. This four generation process takes 160 years, starting with the original sin of the great-grandparents and then passing through three more generations (each 40 years in length). In this way, God is merciful by withholding his final judgment. He grants the nation many years and, therefore, many chances to repent and flee from evil.

This process has been repeated for hundreds of years through many generations. It can be very difficult for a family, culture, or nation to identify the sin of their forefathers, the reason the process began in the first place. Later we will see that this was a problem for the northern ten tribes of Israel when they didn’t repent for the sin of Jeroboam.

## **This Generation**

As we look at our own generation, it can be hard to honestly judge ourselves in light of God’s standards. It’s hard because our society has suffered such an erosion of absolute values. This is combined with the fact that most churches in our nation aren’t helping to reverse this erosion. Instead they consider “an understanding of the Bible” to be one of many optional activities for churchgoers. I have seen full color brochures from churches offering evening activities like the ones below. Can you identify what’s wrong with this list?

Wednesday night choices:

- a) Fishers of Men Basketball League – bring your unsaved friends!
- b) Financial Planning for Families – being a good steward while in debt
- c) The Maker’s Diet – improving your temple God’s way
- d) Overview of the Gospels – for those who want to get serious about the Bible
- e) Children’s Church – Games, Snacks, Contests, Videos, and more!!!
- f) Martha’s Kitchen – Home decorating techniques (\$30 supplies fee)
- g) Solitary Living – Surviving as a single in a postmodern world
- h) Building Committee Meeting

Now don’t get me wrong, these activities aren’t bad. But what’s wrong with this list is that studying the Bible is just one of many options. It’s only for the Christian whose ready to “get serious.” This list gives us insight into many churches today. The underlying assumption is that if you are involved in *any* church activity, you must be walking the straight and narrow. The theory is that if churches get people involved, those people will be committed to attending church. While everyone would agree we need people in churches, it’s not good if the only reason churches are filled is because everyone’s involved with church-related programs and, therefore, feels obligated to go on Sundays. Many people

only get involved with church programs in the first place because they want to have the traditional the stamp of Christian approval. They feel better about themselves if they can say: “I help with church nursery,” or “I’m on worship team,” or “I lead an outreach ministry.”

The purpose of the church is *supposed to be*: communicating the revelation of scripture to believers.

“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is.”  
(Romans 12:2)

Paul tells Timothy:

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”  
(I Timothy 4:13)

Timothy is told to read, preach, and teach the scriptures (I Timothy 4:13) because “faith comes from hearing the message” (Romans 10:17). When people gain an understanding of scripture, they grow in faith as their minds are renewed. They no longer conform to the pattern of the world but are transformed as they start to understand God’s plan for mankind and the standards he’s set into place (Romans 12:1). Only when people have a good grasp on scripture are the local churches fulfilling their purpose. It is then that their congregants can go out into the world and be salt to their generation.

Salt in the ancient world did three things:

- 1) Preserved – salt was added to meat before refrigeration to keep it from rotting
- 2) Prevented – enemies poured salt on cities after they destroyed them to prevent anything from growing on the land ever again
- 3) Added flavor – in the same way we use it today, salt has been used for ages to season food and draw out distinct flavors

Jesus told his disciples that they were the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). This means that those who believe in Jesus are supposed to help **preserve** their culture from moral decay, **prevent** the sins of their fathers from spreading to their generation, and add **flavor** to life by enjoying a happy and meaningful existence as part of God’s plan. This is the purpose of the church as it relates to society, but this “saltiness” only comes after Christians first hear and understand the word of God.

Programs, activities, and social events have, sadly, replaced Bible teaching in our churches. Jesus says that once a church’s saltiness is lost it can never be made salty again. The church is worthless to society if it’s just a building full of people who have very busy schedules (full of church-related activities) but still think and act exactly like their generation. Jesus promised that pagan men will see the worthlessness of such a church and despise it.

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”  
(Matthew 5:13)

A few years ago, I was asked to teach a Sunday school class for young adults (ages 20-30). I decided to teach on apologetics. The theme verse I used was I Peter 3:15, “Always be prepared to



give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (The word “answer” is the Greek word “apologia” which referred to someone giving a defense in court. It’s where we get the words “apologize” and “apologetics.”) Apologetics is all about providing evidence. I taught the class how we knew there must be a God based on logic and science. I defended the authenticity of the scriptures and showed them how the Bible was consistent with ancient manuscripts written during the apostles’ generation.

Even though the class was very interested in the teaching, I got called into one of the pastor’s offices—clearly in trouble. This pastor casually flipped through my teaching notes as he asked, “So is *this* what you’re teaching?” I nodded. He then asked, “Don’t you think it’s a little deep?” Out of respect for his position (and pity for his ignorance), I responded by asking, “What would you like me to teach?” The answer I received was, “Something simple...something more basic.”

“Something more basic” seems to sum up most of our churches today. Being “seeker-friendly” is the key to getting more people through the door, and getting more people through the door is the ultimate goal. “Basic” sermons are required for seekers—sermons that shed light on “How to be a good parent,” or “What to do with work-related stress,” etc. But all such trite mildly-motivational messages mean nothing. Believers today need an understanding of the Bible, *not* another sermon on how to improve their marriages.

The Sunday school class I’d been teaching was full of college graduates who’d been raised in our ultra-secular society. The schools and, in many cases, the churches in which they’d grown up had promoted secular humanism at some level. The government and the media had taken that secular humanist thinking even further. These young adults had spent all their lives dealing with doubts and questions from skeptics concerning the existence of God, the authenticity of scripture, the reality of hell, and the veracity of the Christian faith as a whole. Yet this pastor was telling me that giving the fourth generation some firm answers on why the Bible makes sense wasn’t a good idea.

This type of thinking is the reason so many churches scrambled around in fear, trying save their congregations from the horrible deception of *The Da Vinci Code*. Hollywood releases some dumb fictional movie, and its premise confuses so many believers that most churches dedicate a full six-week sermon series to refuting it. It’s ridiculous, and it should have never happened. I would love to ask all those pastors what they’ve been doing the last few years. Why haven’t they been teaching the scripture? If their congregants had been consistently taught scripture, pastors wouldn’t have had to do damage control over something so absurd. And perhaps if the body of Christ wasn’t so bogged down by church-related activities and programs, they’d actually have more time to learn about the basis for their faith. Apologetics would obviously be a great place to start, but apparently it’s just “too deep” for most modern churches.

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<sup>1</sup> Strong, James, *The New Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Publishers, 2000) p. 413