

# METHUSELAH and PAUL

By Cornelius R. Stam

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## *The Wrath and Long-Suffering of God*

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**“And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.”—  
Gen. 5:27.**

Do you believe that?

Do you believe that Methuselah actually lived to become *nine hundred and sixty-nine [969] years old?*

A prominent Modernist minister gave his answer to this question, some years ago, in a weekly religious column run by the New York Herald Tribune.

Said the learned doctor: “Of course we know that no human being could actually live to become nine hundred and sixty-nine years old. That would be impossible.” And he went on to explain that it is “more rational” to assume that the “years” of Genesis 5 refer to lunar cycles rather than solar cycles. In other words, it was his opinion that Methuselah probably lived 969 *moons* or *months* rather than 969 *suns* or *years*. He recalled the fact that various heathen tribes and even our American Indians reckoned by moons rather than by suns and pointed out that according to this reckoning Methuselah reached the respectable age of about 80 years.

*Simple, isn't it!*

But,—

The doctor made a great mistake, which no true Berean could miss.

If the “years” of Genesis 5 are really months instead of years, then in the same chapter we have *fathers of five years old and grandfathers of eleven!*

And that is not all, for if this is the reckoning which is used in the book of Genesis we have nearly *everybody dying at childhood after the flood, and women bearing children one, two and three months apart!*

It may be argued by superficial observers that a different method of reckoning could have been used before the flood from that used after. But a comparison of Gen. 7:11, 8:13 and 9:29 answers that argument. From these verses it is clear that the writer of Genesis, at least, employs the same reckoning throughout. A year is a *year*,—not a month.

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Strange, is it not, how those who find it so difficult to believe the simple statement of Scripture always seem to end up with something far more difficult to believe!

Thousands of the worldly wise find it a strain on their credulity to be asked to believe that *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,”* so they ask us to believe that somehow this vast universe just happened into existence!—that the great heavenly bodies have continued to travel in their orbits these thousands of years after having flown, like chips, from some great central mass of matter which came from who knows where!

*Man created by God in His image!* They would not be so childish as to believe *that*,—so they ask us to believe that it all began with a poor, lonely bit of protoplasm, drifting out on the boundless sea, which finally “decided” that it ought to knuckle down and get somewhere in life!

*And the fall!* Why, nonsense! Man has been climbing upward ever since he emerged from the slime-pit to ascend through the ape family! He can make living more intricate and involved now! He is capable of committing greater crimes! He can wage greater wars,—can wipe out whole cities at a time!

Little wonder that we read in I Cor. 3:19 that *“the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”*

But which is worse, an unbeliever or a religious unbeliever?

Surely those who openly deny the truth are no worse than those who *“change the truth of God into a lie,”*—who brazenly alter the Word of God to make it fit their “more rational” views,—who try to make God tell their lies for them!

If it is folly to *reject* the testimony of God it is far greater folly to *tamper* with it, and those who do so invariably burn their fingers.

The learned doctor who scorned the idea that Methuselah could possibly have lived to become nine hundred and sixty-nine years old only got himself into an embarrassing position with his “more rational” view. More than that, he missed the precious lesson which Methuselah’s age was meant to teach, for there was a very particular reason why God allowed Methuselah to become the oldest man of all history.

## THE DAYS OF NOAH

In I Pet. 3:20 we read that *“the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah.”*

In seeking for the meaning of this statement we should remember first of all that when our Lord would point out that period of history which was most notoriously wicked, He designated “the days of Noah.” (Matt. 24:37).

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The Genesis record has this to say about that depraved generation:

**“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

**“And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.”**

**“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.”**

**“And God said unto Noah, THE END OF ALL FLESH IS COME BEFORE ME; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, BEHOLD, I WILL DESTROY THEM WITH THE EARTH.”**

**(Gen. 6:5, 6, 11, 13).**

These were dark days indeed. Revelry, immorality and violence were the order of the day.

“They did not like to retain God in their knowledge” and God was gradually giving them up to wrath and judgment.

And yet there was a ray of hope.

### THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

God did not deal hastily with the antediluvian world. He did not immediately pour out His wrath upon them.

**“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” (Psa. 103:8).**

This is why we read in that same awful account of the days of Noah:

**“And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: YET HIS DAYS SHALL BE AN HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS.” (Gen. 6:3).**

This one hundred and twenty years is generally taken to be the period “*while the ark was a preparing,*” while Noah, the “*preacher of righteousness,*” in the very building of the ark, warned the world of the judgment to come.

And thus it is that Peter tells us that **“THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD WAITED IN THE DAYS OF NOAH.” (I Pet. 3:20).**

### ANOTHER VIEW

But the longevity of Methuselah affords another view of the longsuffering of God in those awful days.

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In Jude 14 we find that Enoch, Methuselah's father, was a prophet. Among other things he prophesied of the judgment which was to come upon the ungodly world about him.

When Enoch was sixty-five years old he begat a son whom he named Methuselah. That Enoch named his son prophetically seems evident for three reasons which gather forces progressively.

1. Some of our greatest scholars tell us that the name Methuselah means "*When he is dead it shall be sent.*" What it was that should be sent seems obvious, for the coming judgment was the very theme of Enoch's prophetic message.

2. Everybody knows that "Enoch walked with God," but most people overlook the fact that "Enoch walked with God AFTER HE BEGAT METHUSELAH, three hundred years..." (Gen. 5:22). This is important. There was apparently some deep, impelling reason for walking with God *from now on*,—some reason greater than the birth of a child into the home. Was it that the life of this child was bound up with the coming judgment,—that God had revealed to Enoch that the flood would come at the death of his son and that, as a solemn announcement from the Lord, he called the babe *Methuselah*? We believe it was, for

3. The flood DID come at the death of Methuselah. That is easy to determine from the record.

Let us see,—and to simplify matters we will use figures instead of words in quoting the ages of those involved.

**Gen. 5:25, "And Methuselah lived 187 years and begat Lamech:"**

**Gen. 5:28, "And Lamech lived 182 years and begat a son: And he called his name Noah..."**

187 plus 182 equals 369.

At Noah's birth, then, Methuselah was 369 years old.

**Gen. 7:11, "In the 600<sup>th</sup> year of Noah's life...were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened."**

369 plus 600 equals 969.

Methuselah, then, was 969 years old when the flood came.

**Gen. 5:27, "AND ALL THE DAYS OF METHUSELAH WERE NINE HUNDRED SIXTY AND NINE YEARS: AND HE DIED."**

So Methuselah died the year of the flood.

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There is even a hint that the prophecy was fulfilled to the very day, for Gen. 7:11 reads:

“In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, IN THE SECOND MONTH, THE SEVENTEENTH DAY OF THE MONTH, THE SAME DAY, were all the fountains of the great deep broken up...” We can see no reason for this careful notation of the exact time except to emphasize God's fulfillment of the prophecy exactly on time.

All this throws a flood of light upon Peter's inspired statement that “THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD WAITED IN THE DAYS OF NOAH.” It brings out the love and mercy of God and explains why God allowed Methuselah to live of all men the longest.

Surely the members of Noah's family could and should have said, “*How longsuffering God is!* We thought that He would have cut Methuselah off and judged this vile world long ere this, but the prophet's son has lived to be hundreds of years old.”

600—700—800—900—and still he lives on! He is 930 years old now,—that is the age at which Adam died. Will he out live Adam? Yes, still the years add up. Still the longsuffering of God waits! He will not pour out His wrath yet.

Not until Methuselah has become 969 years old—the oldest man of all history—is he taken away and the flood sent.

Now we see why God allowed him to live so long!

And the learned doctor who could not believe such nonsense—who, instead of openly rejecting God's Word, tried to make it mean something else—missed all this.

But what, you say, has Methuselah to do with Paul?

Let us see.

First of all, we must realize that once again the world has been given up to judgment.

## THE WORLD AGAIN GIVEN UP

Our days are very much like “the days of Noah.” Surely no honest person, after reading either the history of the past 1900 years or the newspapers of today will be inclined to take issue with Paul for his appraisal of “*this present evil age.*”

As long as 4,000 years ago God “gave up” and “scattered” the Gentiles for their open rebellion at the tower of Babel, and chose Abram, saying “*I will make of thee a great nation...and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*” (See Gen. 11:8, 9; 12:1-3 and Rom. 1).

Some 2,000 years later this “great nation” joined the Gentiles in their rebellion and they likewise were given up and scattered. (See Luke 21:24 and Rom. 11).

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It is now approximately 1,900 years since the whole world was condemned to wrath and judgment for the second time.

Not only had God's chosen people crucified His Son, but even after God raised Him from the dead they stood by their act,—threatening, beating and imprisoning those who dared to say He was alive.

Not satisfied with the brutal murders of John the Baptist, Christ and Stephen they went even farther:

**“...And at that time there was a GREAT PERSECUTION against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1).**

Jerusalem, the very center of divine religion in the world, had turned against God and against His Christ.

What God's answer will be is clearly foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

**Psa. 2:1-5, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people [“the people of Israel,” according to Acts 4:25-28] imagine a vain thing?**

**“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying,**

**“Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.**

**“HE THAT SITTETH IN THE HEAVENS SHALL LAUGH: THE LORD SHALL HAVE THEM IN DERISION.**

**“THEN SHALL HE SPEAK UNTO THEM IN HIS WRATH, AND VEX THEM IN HIS SORE DISPLEASURE.”**

**Psa. 110:1, “The Lord said unto my Lord, SIT THOU AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES THY FOOTSTOOL.”**

According to these two Psalms alone, God will reply to man's rebellion by judging him and making him Christ's footstool. And so it is that once again the world awaits the wrath and judgment of God.

## PENTECOST AND THE TRIBULATION

While on earth our Lord predicted that *“As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”* (Matt. 24:37).

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At Pentecost, a few years later, it must have seemed that the coming of the Son of man was already very near, for there Peter, pointing to the signs, declared that the “last days” had actually come. (Acts 2:15-20).

This is not strange when we realize that according to both type and prophecy the great tribulation was to follow Pentecost.

In Leviticus 23 the Feast of Trumpets follows the Feast of Pentecost. Since the trumpet in Scripture speaks of war (I Cor. 14:8), this arrangement seems to indicate clearly that after Pentecost, the next number on God’s program was to be the great tribulation,—God’s declaration of war on a Christ-rejecting world.

Also in Joel’s prophecy concerning the “last days,” the pouring out of the Spirit is followed by the terrors which usher in the “day of the Lord.” (See Joel 2:28-31). Little wonder that Joel 2 contains such phrases as “BLOW YE THE TRUMPET” and “SOUND THE ALARM!”

It was Israel’s response to Pentecost which was to bring about the fulfillment of the next number on God’s prophetic program,—the blowing of trumpets and God’s declaration of WAR.

But that was 1900 years ago, and still judgment has not fallen.

## THE JUDGMENT DELAYED

The apostle Peter, who has so much to say about the return of Christ to judge and reign, also has something to say about the delay in His return.

About 27 years after Pentecost Peter wrote these significant words:

**“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days SCOFFERS, walking after their own lusts,**

**“And saying, WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING? FOR SINCE THE FATHERS FELL ASLEEP, ALL THINGS CONTINUE AS THEY WERE FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE CREATION.” (II Pet. 3:3, 4).**

Mark well that these are not the children of God crying “How long!” but *scoffers*, to whom the promise of the Lord’s return seems an empty threat. His long absence causes them to mock at the idea that He will return in judgment.

To this the apostle replies:

**“BUT, BELOVED, BE NOT IGNORANT OF THIS ONE THING, THAT ONE DAY IS WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND YEARS, AND A THOUSAND YEARS AS ONE DAY.” (II Pet. 3:8).**

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Let us thank God that this is not the poor excuse of some modern preacher for the Lord's continued absence. This was written by Peter at the *dawn* of the age of grace.

This element of timelessness is important in the consideration of the delay in the Lord's return, but let us first consider the verse in its context.

## SLACKNESS OR LONGSUFFERING?

Has one day ever seemed like a thousand years to you?

We have heard people say, perhaps, that one day seemed like a month, but one day could scarcely seem like 1,000 years to any of us for few of us have lived to be 100 years!

**“But beloved...ONE DAY IS WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND YEARS...”**

We are so careless about the passing of time. We take God's mercy for granted and allow the moments to fly by as if they meant nothing to Him,—as if it made little difference to Him how long the rejection of Christ continued.

But God is not so indifferent about the passing of time.

He sees the hatred, the greed, the oppression, the murder, the theft, the adultery,—and He *hates* it. He knows the wickedness that has left millions lying dead in the battlefields of the world and other millions mourning and hopeless, sick and wounded, starving and homeless,—and His holy nature burns with wrath against it.

God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and is keenly conscious of every moment that it continues.

Then why does He not send Christ to put a stop to it all?

The very facts we have been considering should prepare us for Peter's explanation of the delay.

**“The Lord is NOT SLACK concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is L-O-N-G-S-U-F-F-E-R-I-N-G to us-ward, NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH, BUT THAT ALL SHOULD COME TO REPENTANCE.” (II Pet. 3:9)**

The scoffers laugh at the idea that Christ will return, and declare that everything is the same as it always was. They *presume* that the delay in Christ's return indicates that He has *forgotten* or is *indifferent* or is *helpless* to do anything about world conditions,—*or even that He does not exist at all!*

But they are wrong, and the apostle, in preparing God's people for the delay, explains that the very opposite is the case. It is not slackness but *longsuffering*, not indifference but *self-control*, not weakness but *strength*.

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When mother's Johnny finds it hard to be good,—when he has an off day,—which requires the greater strength of character, to lose her temper and beat him thoughtlessly, or to exercise self-restraint and discipline him wisely?

Or let us put it this way:

Here, let us say, is a steam boiler containing hundreds of pounds of steam pressure. We increase the pressure. The pressure gauge goes up and up, until finally there is a terrific explosion.

When did the boiler show its strength, when it held the steam or when it exploded? When it *contained* it, of course.

True, it may have *seemed* stronger when it exploded. It may have sent pipes and fittings flying. It may have broken heavy beams and shattered doors and windows, but had the boiler been stronger it would not have exploded so soon. Indeed, it was the weakness of the boiler that caused it to explode at all.

Does God ever “explode?” Certainly not. His mighty power is always under control. Augustine has said that “God is *patient* because He is *eternal*.” It is not slackness but sublime self-restraint that causes Him to postpone the day of wrath.

Those who complain about the silence of God and His seeming indifference to the world's distress, should reflect that when God sent the Prince of Peace into the world they nailed Him to a tree, crying “*Away with Him!*” And they went farther than that, rejecting the glorified, risen Christ, as they had rejected the lowly Jesus.

God cannot speak again until He speaks in wrath. This is the next number of the prophetic program, but rather than speak in wrath He holds His peace and lingers in mercy over this wicked scene.

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After telling us not to count the delay slackness, Peter advises us how we should account for it,—and here is where Paul comes in.

**II Pet. 3:9, “The Lord is NOT SLACK concerning His promise...but is LONGSUFFERING...”**

**II Pet. 3:15, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is S-A-L-V-A-T-I-O-N, EVEN AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN UNTO HIM HATH WRITTEN UNTO YOU.”**

Yes, the longsuffering of our Lord spells one big, blessed word,—S-A-L-V-A-T-I-O-N.

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Now, while Peter's ministry at Pentecost had Israel's *acceptance* of Christ in view and anticipated His soon return to earth to reign on David's throne, Paul's subsequent ministry had the *rejection* of Christ in view and explained His continued absence.

We may long for the Lord Jesus to come and receive us to Himself, but let us never forget that as long as our Savior remains seated at the right hand of God the judgment of the nations cannot come.

In the meantime salvation is offered to sinners everywhere,—not on the basis of any covenant, but by grace,—not according to Old Testament prophecy, but according to the revelation of the mystery revealed to Paul; not in return for works of righteousness, but as a free gift of God.

**“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” (II Tim. 1:9).**

We must remember here, that Paul was not only the revelator, but also the supreme *demonstration* of God's grace.

As in the days of Noah there was one person to whom men could point as an example of God's longsuffering, so it is in this age.

In I Tim. 1:12-15 we find these words, written by Paul to his son in the faith:

**“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;**

**“Who was before A BLASPHEMER, and A PERSECUTOR, and INJURIOUS: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**

**“AND THE GRACE OF OUR LORD WAS EXCEEDING ABUNDANT with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.**

**“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save SINNERS; OF WHOM I AM CHIEF.”**

We must be careful not to make this passage teach that Paul was the *worst* of sinners. It does not say that. It says *chief*, and “chief” does not mean *worst*, nor exactly *first*, but *foremost*. It has to do with *rank*. Hence we find Luke speaking of the “*chief men of the city*,” “*a chief city of...Macedonia*,” “*chief women*” and “*chief man of the island*” in Acts 13:50, 16:12, 17:4 and 28:7.

As we think of the Gentiles in rebellion and the Jews joining the rebellion we must not forget Saul's place in the rebellion.

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In Acts 8, where we read about the great persecution which arose against the followers of Christ, Saul of Tarsus is singled out as the greatest persecutor of all. It says of him, and of him alone: “AS FOR SAUL, HE MADE HAVOCK OF THE CHURCH...” And he himself writes to the Galatians: “Ye have heard...HOW THAT BEYOND MEASURE I PERSECUTED THE CHURCH OF GOD, AND WASTED IT [LAID IT WASTE].” (Gal. 1:13). Add to these two statements the many details which both Luke and he himself supply concerning his mad and relentless persecution of the believers and you will have some idea of the part he played as the *leader* of the rebellion against Christ.

**“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,**

**“And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1, 2).**

But on the way to Damascus, God opened the heavens, reached down and,—*SAVED* him!

And notice, after calling himself the chief of sinners, Paul tells *why* God saved him:

**I Tim. 1:16, “Howbeit FOR THIS CAUSE I obtained mercy, that IN ME FIRST Jesus Christ might shew forth ALL LONGSUFFERING, for A PATTERN to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”**

This was the man whom God was to send forth with the blessed gospel of the grace of God and God was to use him as the great example of that grace. In this passage the word “first” is the very same word which is translated “chief” in I Tim. 1:15. Paul was the *foremost* example of God’s longsuffering.

His conversion, of course, foreshadowed the conversion of Israel, who, like Saul of Tarsus, will turn to Christ when they behold Him in His glory. However, he has an even closer relationship to us.

In I Cor. 15:8 the apostle says that “*last of all He [Christ] was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*”

The phrase “out of due time” is more correctly “before due time,” and alludes to the fact that “*in due time*” Israel will be saved.

But let us ask a few questions here.

When is the due time for Israel to be saved?

You say, That has not yet come. It is still future according to Rom. 11:26.

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And when is the due time for the Gentiles to be saved? You say, that too is future, for according to prophecy the Gentiles were to be saved *through* Israel.

Then are believers today being saved *in* or *out* of due time, as far as prophecy is concerned?

Like Paul, both Jews and Gentiles today are being saved OUT OF DUE TIME,—not according to the covenants but by grace,—not in fulfillment of prophecy but according to God’s secret purpose, *the mystery*.

**“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,**

**“If ye have heard of THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD which is given me to you-ward:**

**“How that BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY...”  
(Eph. 3:1-3).**

So Paul was both the custodian of the grace of God and the supreme demonstration of it.

As in that day men could point to Methuselah as evidence of God’s longsuffering, so today we can point to Paul. That, as we have seen, was one of the particular reasons why God saved him,—“*that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth ALL LONGSUFFERING.*”

As Methuselah demonstrated the *length* of God’s longsuffering, Paul demonstrates the *breadth* of it.

### WHEN WILL IT END?

Once again we are living in a particularly *evil* age.

Once again the world has been given up to judgment.

Once again the longsuffering of God waits.

Once again a *person* symbolizes God’s longsuffering.

Once again the Holy Spirit strives with men.

When will it end? When will the day of grace draw to a close?

Let us consider again II Pet. 3:8.

**“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that ONE DAY IS WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND YEARS, AND A THOUSAND YEARS AS ONE DAY.”**

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Can you tell from that verse when the Lord will come?

Surely not. According to the first part of that verse He could come very, very soon, but according to the last phrase He could stay away for a long, long time. And that is just the attitude in which the Lord would have us,—never setting dates, yet always watching and ready. This element of timelessness is one of the characteristics of the dispensation of grace. If God waits for another moment it is not because He promised to,—it is *grace, pure grace*.

We cannot stress too often the bearing which this has on both the saved and the lost.

To the lost God says,

**“Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation.” (II Cor. 6:2).**

To the saved He says,

**“See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, REDEEMING THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.” (Eph. 5:15, 16).**