METHUSELAH

The name "Methuselah" is a compound of the Hebrew "*Meth*" (tm, participle of *Muth* = tWm) whose root meaning is "death" or "to die" (thus we have: [*when*] he dies or his death) and the root "*Shalach*" (jlv) whose principal meaning is "to send" or "it shall be sent" as may be seen in nearly any lexicon.[1]

Accordingly, these may be combined to read: "[*When*] he is dead, it (i.e., judgment, the Flood of Noah – the Deluge) shall be sent" (Thomas Newberry[2]); or as Dr. John Brown[3] renders: "At his death shall be the breaking out" (viz. of the Flood), or even Stedman's: "his death shall bring it" (i.e., the Flood) which he goes on to loosely translate: "when he dies, it will come".[4]

The definition encountered in most modern material, "man of the dart or spear",[5] is based on the vowel "points" which are said to be "like a noun"[6] and the secondary meaning of "*Shalach*". However, the points[7] are recent additions to the text (c.600 AD).

The secondary meaning of "*Shalach*" is "to be thrown or cast forth with great force or speed".[8] From this, some have concluded that "*Shalach*" should be translated "missile", "dart", or "spear"; however, such is merely a derived meaning. As stated in the above first paragraph, reference to any lexicon will reveal that its real primary meaning is "to send". Moreover, Shalach is a *verb*, not a noun, and this changes the meaning entirely!

Furthermore, the first portion is not derived from "*matu*" ("man") as is repeatedly insisted on in modern references but from "*meth*" which is a participle derived from the verb "*muth*".[9] (see "*meth*" in the above first paragraph: again, it means "to die")

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[1] Alfred Jones, *Dictionary of Old Testament Proper Names*, rpt., (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Pub., 1990), p. 249 [originally pub. as: *The Proper Names of the Old Testament Scriptures*, (London: S. Bagster & Sons, 1856)].

[2] Thomas Newberry, *The Newberry Reference Bible* (also known as *The Englishman's Bible*), Gen.5:21, p. 4. Newberry (1811-1901), one of our primary sources, dedicated himself to 25 years of diligent study of the Bible in the original Hebrew and Greek languages [Elgin S. Moyer, *Who Was Who in Church History*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), p. 304].

[3] John Brown, *The Self-Interpreting Bible,* The Authorized Bible with Explanatory Notes, (Edinburgh: A. Fullarton Co., 1873), p. 9.

[4] Ray C. Stedman, *The Beginnings*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1978), pp. 56-59. Others who concur with these or similar renderings are: Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary,* Vol. I, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1830) p. 68, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1981), Genesis 5:27, p. 34; Dr. Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 155; Arthur W. Pink, *Gleaning Genesis*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1922), p. 78; J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore The Book*, Vol. I, 1960, p. 34; E.W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Pub., 1990), p. 10; Finis J. Dake, *Dakes Annotated Reference Bible*, (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Bible Sales, Inc., 1963), p. 5; C.E. Putnam, *Did Moses Know?*, (Chicago Ill: 1918), pp. 24-25; Dr. Peter S. Ruckman, *The Book of Genesis*, (Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1980; [1st prt. 1969]), p. 167; George Williams, *The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Pub., 1953), p. 12; H.L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Pub., 1986), p. 10.

[5] For example, Strong's Reference Number: 4968 (Derived from: 4962, 7973). H.G. Stigers prefers "of God", *A Commentary on Genesis*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976).

[6] *Liberty Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1983), p. 29.

[7] These points (found above, beneath or within the Hebrew letters of the alphabet) serve as vowels and aid in pronunciation.

[8] The source is the Hebrew Christian scholar, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, as cited in *The in-depth Journal of Creation*, Vol. 17 (3) 2003, p. 17.

[9] Alfred Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 249; Young's Analytical Concordance, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), see: Index-Lexicon, p. 26, column 5.

Yet regardless whether "*matu*" or "*meth*" is used,[10] "spear" or "dart" is not given as the meaning of "*Shalach*" in the lexicons. Hence, even were "*matu*" correct and intended to mean "man" a literal translation would still not be "man of the dart or spear" but "a man sent".[11] Moreover, the Hebrew letter w ("waw", pronounced "vav") between "*matu*" and "*shalach*" gives "*matu*" a verbal force.[12] The "waw" thus militates against translating "*matu*" as the noun "man" and leads us to select our second option – the verb "to die" – as the true meaning. Thus, "when he dies it shall be sent" is seen to better fit the Hebrew parsing of the name in question.

Indeed, this definition is substantiated by the actual historical data recorded in Scripture. Chronological studies unmistakably reveal that Methuselah did, in fact, die during the very year of the Flood.[13] This fact should be the preferred guide for determining the meaning rather than vowel points that were added to the text nearly 4,000 years after Methuselah was named or the taking of a derived meaning over a primary with regard to "*shalach*".

Thus, the student has two choices. The name "Methuselah" could mean either "man of the spear" or "when he dies it shall be sent". In view of the fact that the latter precisely fits the actual historical facts to the very year, how can anyone remain undecided between the two?

To those who would still cleave to "man of the spear", the converse is there still confronting them. That is, the undeniable awkward fact glares back at them – the latter choice has been shown to better fit the Hebrew parsing of the name, and it directly fits the historical facts. Surely, no honest seeker could now conclude that the year of Methuselah's death being the same as the year of the Flood was a mere coincidence and bore no relation to the significance of his name when given a choice of the two meanings. Is not this more than an unhappy circumstance to be brushed aside as meaningless, and does it not enjoin the deepest reflection by all lettered men of integrity?

This is all the more apparent when we recall that scripture states Methuselah's father, Enoch, was a prophet (Jude 14-15). Although these verses also refer to our Lord's second coming, their primary reference was to the judgment of the Flood. By naming his son "When he dies, it will be sent", Enoch caused Methuselah to be a living, walking prophesy and warning to the people of his day. The scriptural setting and the context are most clear. Indeed, Amos 3:7 confirms that the Creator would reveal and so warn before bringing judgment on the world: "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."

Moreover, *context* is the decisive factor for determining the final connotation of any word or phrase, even above etymology. Etymology, though often helpful, is not an exact science. It should be used for confirmation, not as the deciding factor. In this instance, as we have clearly shown, – both context and etymology are found to be in perfect accord.

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[10] As the original Hebrew is said to have had no vowels, all possible vowel combinations of tm must be considered. Vowel points to aid in pronunciation were supposedly added c.600 AD by a group of Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes. The earliest extant Masoretic Text is dated c.900 AD.

[11] Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, as cited in *The in-depth Journal of Creation*, Vol. 17 (3) 2003, p. 17.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Floyd Nolen Jones, *A Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics*, 15th ed., (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004), see chart 6; also, James Ussher, *Annals of the World,* revised by Larry & Marion Pierce, (Green Forest, AK: Master Books, 2003), p. 19(1658 ed., p. 3).