

# PATIENT INEVITABILITY

There are many reasons why reading the Old Testament is especially tricky for us. Not the least is the fact that our fundamental understanding of the world, and the universe, is drastically different. At least on the surface. The truth is, the essential nature of our humanity has not changed much since the days of Adam and Eve. We are still, created in God's image for joyful participation in relationship with him and responsibility for one another and the earth. We are also still, prone to the allure of being like God rather than his beloved creatures, more accurately, his children. Like our parents of antiquity, we are encouraged by other inhabitants of this world to dismiss the voice of our Father God and embrace the desires within. Most of us would have no issue with the aforementioned statements, perhaps until I was to describe the "other inhabitants" of this world as—not only—other humans, institutions, governances, and cultures; but other *beings* or "[spiritual beings](#)." It is at this point that the transcendental understanding of daily life in "Bible times," conflicts with what one author calls our "immanent frame," an understanding of everyday life that excludes much, if not all, of what we *cannot* see.

We—for the most part—are conditioned to have to fight for belief in the transcendent and fight against the notion that the transcendent has to "break in" to our world. Put more simply, you and I have grown up in a culture in which we have to choose to believe that God and other beings exist as more than figments of religious imagination or comic book characters. It is an elected reality, not an assumed fact. And, even if we believe that "supernatural" beings do exist, we have been conditioned to think of them as third parties in the affairs of humans, working in a limited capacity in our reality, history, and present. For the person listening to Ezekiel prophecies against Ammon and Philistia ([25](#)), and laments over Tyre ([26-28](#)) and Egypt ([29-32](#)); they would not have assumed like we do, that the prophet was only addressing human beings and governmental hierarchies. Unlike you and I who have to fight for a view of the world more extensive than what humans can think, see or act upon; the original hearers saw their world "imbued with the supernatural," and in a non-superstitious way.

Specifically for the Israelite finding herself marched off to Babylon, with family and friends under siege in her homeland and Jerusalem soon to be crushed entirely under enemy oppression, she would have heard the words of Ezekiel with the underlying assumption that,

"The world you experience was created by an all-powerful God; human beings are his created representatives; Eden was his abode; he was accompanied by a supernatural host; one member of that divine entourage was not pleased by God's decision to create humanity and give them dominion. All that leads to how humanity got into the mess it's in,"

Including her current disaster. Her supernatural view of the situation would have allowed her to hear the words and not only feel conviction for her and her ancestors part in the rebellion, but also rising in her heart would be a sense of foundational justice and reason for hope.

It was crucial for Israel, even though they would not listen, to be confronted with [the reason for the judgment that they were experiencing](#), it was also essential that they recognize the place of this judgment in God's plan to redeem a world and its inhabitants in conflict with Him and themselves. Engrained in the stories of Israel's formation was the understanding that they were set apart as God's "allotted heritage" ([Deut. 32:1-12](#)), amongst a rebellious conglomeration of earthly kingdoms and divine beings. Their enslavement and subsequent exodus from Egypt was nothing less than God's faithfulness to keep them free and distinct from the human and divine collaborators vying for control in opposition to the Most High. Having overcome the collaborators ([Ex. 15](#)), Israel is sent into a promised land; a place meant for the reestablishment of the garden through their covenantal affection and submission to the One true God. But the new grounds for the garden was not empty. Already dwelling there were the nations Ezekiel mentions in [chapter 25](#). The Amorites, Edomites, Moabites, Philistines, and others would be the ones who resisted the reclamation process—politically, economically, morally, religiously, and the like. Israel was meant to remove the remnants of the rebellious entities. Instead, they cohabitated with them.

God founded the people of Israel to be his people, a people who would know him intimately and follow his ways with adoration and affection. The point was not merely to be distinct, but to be a blessing to all the nations of the world ([Gen. 12:3](#)), to be a royal priesthood, the ones who would show the way to restoration with God, one another and the earth they all call home.

Israel was judged because they chose the way of the nations around them. Even worse, they made the God of gods seem like nothing more than one among many. Their forgetting the distinction of God and their relational purpose had led them to be willing participants not in establishing a good world but in the cycle of oppression and destruction. This is why Ezekiel devotes the majority of his condemnation for his own people. Yet, the Israelites failure would not mean that God had failed. He would be faithful to finish what he started through Abraham after the tower of Babel. Though Israel had failed to overcome the nations around them, God would. The rebellion would not be allowed to continue. Neither the divine rebels nor their human collaborators would be allowed to determine what is good and evil for the world. All such allegiances and subjugations would ultimately and forever find their end, and God's righteousness would fill the earth.

Why does that matter? Especially for you and me millennia removed from Ezekiel. First, while rebellion is the atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being; any particular resistance proves unable to establish an unwavering new order. All the uprisings and rebellions of old came to an end. Ironically, by another rebellious force that was unwittingly being used by God for his purposes, but would have their day of judgment too. Who or whatever rules the moment does not, it seems, rule in perpetuity; though it may feel that they do for those of us living among such "rulers...authorities...cosmic powers over this present darkness...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," as the apostle Paul [refers](#) to them.

Eventually, and always, the rebellion is put asunder, their twisted vision of the world and practical distortions become apparent and prove unsuitable to survive in God's holy and good ever (re)creating order. God's judgment of what is truly good and evil comes to bear on all his children—human and divine, Israel and her neighbors, American and her allies and enemies—but it arises so with great patience and after appeals to return to him and lamenting over the choices made. It is the patience that throws many of us off, keeping us from taking the appeals of the prophets seriously to choose another way, "the way, and the truth, and the life." Peter—that disciple who is most like you and me in his faith and doubts, faithfulness and blunders—understood our propensity to misinterpret our times and the nature of God's (re)creating activities and timelines. So he wrote to his friends and fellow followers of Jesus with an encouragement apropos for our time and place in His-story. Read, reflect, and then answer Peter's question embolden below:

*"This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' For they deliberately overlook the fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

***Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people out you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:1-13)***