

**Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People**  
First Sunday of Advent – Year C

**RCL Readings** – Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

**ACNA Readings** – Zechariah 14:1-9; Psalm 50; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

**Introduction.** Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical church calendar. It is the four-week season that heralds the celebration of the birth of the Messiah and gets us thinking about the coming of the Lord. It is very hard not to like Christmas with the centre of attention being a baby, presents, food, and family. Advent reminds us that the first coming of the Lord was as the Lamb, while the second time will be as the Lion. The first week of Advent focuses on the judgment that is involved with the second coming of Jesus.

**Common Theme.** Preaching about the Day of the Lord can be difficult in that some people are quite obsessed with the apocalypse. Books have been written, movies made, as well as flow charts listing all the prophecies of the Bible, so often plucked out of context and blended together to tell us when the Messiah will come. Unfortunately, we have a long history of false predictions about the return of Jesus that can lead people to have a jaded view of the End Times. Our readings this week encourage us to live a lifestyle of expectation, both of judgment and the soon return of Jesus.

**Jeremiah 33:14-16.** The context of Jeremiah's promise of restoration is the New Covenant proclaimed to the people of Israel and Judah in chapter 31. All of these prophecies and promises are enveloped around the messianic redeemer figure described here as the righteous Branch of David. The term 'branch' is used by the prophets as a descriptive title of the future messianic offspring of David. The great promises of goodness, blessing, and restoration through the coming redeemer – the branch of righteousness – would be through a descendent of King David. Jeremiah does not reveal as much about the coming Messiah as perhaps Isaiah does. The coming redeemer will bring about the establishment of the rule and reign of God over the whole world; however, in this short passage the focus is quite local. Jeremiah foretells the time when the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem will know peace and safety under the Messiah. Jerusalem has had a long history of idolatry, bad kings, destruction and shame, but the Lord will restore the city with a new name that will be found in the righteousness of the Lord. Too many commentaries attempt to over-spiritualize the people and land of Israel. Literal Jerusalem becomes no more than an allegory for something else. Allegory is one of many legitimate exegetical devices to apply to Scripture; Paul himself uses allegory. However, it is also inappropriate to remove the promises the Lord has for Israel and superimpose them on someone else. God has not forgotten Jerusalem nor has it been cast aside for some other city as though God was utilitarian. In the words of the Lord to Solomon, 'My eyes and my heart are always here' (1 Kgs 9:3). The Lord has made a promise, and he will see it done.

**Psalm 25:1-9.** Psalm 25 is a personal lament of David before the Lord. It is a lament that perhaps some of us will be able to identify with. It is composed during a time of trouble in which David pleads for assistance, instruction, salvation, and forgiveness. David asks for help while 'waiting on the Lord'. The 'waiting' is not a passive sitting and waiting for God to do something. Rather it is an active service of waiting, like a waiter who attends tables and watches carefully for his moment to care for the patron. David asks for instruction when he asks God to 'show me your ways'. During

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times of trouble, some of the best advice comes from the Word of God. God's Word has good advice to help us overcome and get through a time of trial, and we would do well not to ignore it. David reminds himself that the Lord in whom he waits is the God of his salvation. David has received salvation from the Lord already, and this reinforces his faith and trust that God will deliver him again. This is true for us as well, as we let this prayer remind us of our salvation and the imminent deliverance from this present age. God is coming to judge, and he is bringing his salvation with him. We should not be afraid.

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-13.** Paul wanted to see the community of Thessaloniki face to face, but he declared that he had been prevented by Satan from doing so (1 Thess 2:18). In the Second Temple Period, Satan was considered a very real power in league with the demons and fallen angels and who was active in trying to undermine the rule of God. The Jewish people believed very much that there was a war between the forces of good and evil in the spiritual realms. Paul does not elaborate on how the Enemy stopped his planned visit. Paul says his intention to see the community was to 'restore whatever was lacking in their faithfulness'. In Paul's mind, somehow his personal presence was going to help. It was important for him to be there, and so he prays, 'may our God and Father ... clear the way for us to come' (v 11). Paul also prays for the Thessalonians to increase in love. It is not that the community had a lack of love, but there is always room to grow and improve. Paul also admonished the community to maintain holiness, particularly in their hearts. Paul reminds them of the return of Jesus because that expectation should motivate them, and all of us today, to increase our attitude and actions of love, as well as encourage us to more holiness.

**Luke 21:25-36.** After prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus turns his teaching to the coming of the Son of Man, at which time the powers of earth and heaven are shaken. Some commentators link these events back into the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. However, based on a literal reading of Jesus, we have no historical record that adequately describes the astronomical and geological incidents he mentions here. Jesus describes cataclysmic events that affect whole nations. It sounds terrifying, and understandably, people begin to panic. Talking about the end of the world can be quite unsettling. Yet Jesus encourages us to have a posture of hope and confidence and not a spirit of fear or timidity. Jesus says we should 'straighten up and raise our heads' (v 28). We are not meant to view the return of Jesus and the events surrounding that with foreboding. Instead, our response is to be vigilant and on our guard against the temptations of life. Jesus warns his disciples against being overburdened by the worries and concerns of life. There is also a temptation that the imminent return of Jesus can lead to a life of passivity. Jesus does not instruct us to go sit under a tree and wait for the rapture. The analogy of the fig tree is used simply to indicate that the return of the Messiah is close, not as a tool for calculations and date setting. Jesus teaches us to instead be alert and active in prayer. We will all have to stand before the Son of Man who will judge the world. How, then, should we behave? As we move toward the Christmas season, we should be encouraged to put away deeds of darkness, contemplate the coming judgment, and repent. Jesus, in some of his final words in Revelation, calls us to repent for he is coming quickly.

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**Zechariah 14:1-9.** The Hebrew Bible contains many dramatic visions of the events to take place at the end of time, and many of them centre around Jerusalem. The city will be besieged by a coalition of many nations brought together by God himself. The Lord has a guiding hand on the events leading up to the end of time. Initially, the battle against Jerusalem is successful, and then at the height of the distress of the people, the Lord appears as a warrior to defend his city, his people, and his name. The earth reacts to the Lord's presence by shaking the natural material order and splitting the Mount of Olives in two and creating new geological features. The normal movement of the sun and moon change also so that the natural light of the world is diminished, and God establishes his own light. The conclusion of the Day of the Lord affects more than the environs of Jerusalem, as Zechariah declares that God will be king over all the earth. Salvation in the Bible is not limited to Israel but is universal in scope, and God will not only rule and reign in Jerusalem but also to the ends of the earth.

**Psalms 50.** In the order of the psalter, this is the first psalm that is attributed to Asaph and is traditionally part of the *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles) liturgy. Asaph was a composer for both King David and Solomon, with 2 Chronicles 29:30 making the note that Asaph had a prophetic gift, calling him a seer. The opening lines remind us that God indeed speaks. He is not silent; instead, his word goes out to all the world. Accompanying his voice is light as God shines forth in perfection. The light is paired with the all-consuming fire as we are reminded also that God is a judge, and he will bring justice to the earth. Asaph notes that God's judgment of the earth begins with his own people. In Asaph's context, he refers to the Jewish people with whom God has an everlasting covenant. However, through the Messiah, believers from the nations have joined the household of faith through the New Covenant, and we too will experience the judgment of the Lord. Everything starts with the household of faith, both redemption and judgment, and we would do well to let that moderate our behaviour in and to the world.

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is a deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and a teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.