

**Sermon Notes from CMJ**  
25th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

**RCL Readings** – 1 Samuel 1:4-20; 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8

**ACNA Readings** – Daniel 12:1-13; Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:31-39; Mark 13:14-23

**Introduction.** Biblical passages that reference the end times are always fraught with difficulty to exegete. Very often, we take a few verses from this passage and a few from another passage and Velcro them together to create a continuous narrative. If only it was that easy! Prophetic warnings of the future are found in both the Old and New Testaments, and we should embrace their warnings seriously and honestly but with the confidence that God is in control.

**Common Theme.** Enduring through times of trial is one of the themes in the readings this week. Some of the passages refer to people enduring a current difficult period. Others prophesy of a future time of distress. Despite the frustration felt at what seems to be a hopeless situation, our texts will remind us that everything is in the hands of a loving God. He hears prayers; he endures alongside his people. Even the Messiah does not shy away from suffering and persecution.

**1 Samuel 1:4-20.** The books Samuel are named after the prophet whom God used to establish the monarchy in Israel. The ancient Hebrew manuscripts were one book that was divided into two texts during the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. The author is unknown, and while Samuel the prophet may have contributed some of the material, he is not the only author (as he dies in 1 Samuel 25).

The passage begins by describing the family that God is going to use. Elkanah is a Levite living in a Levitical city in the territory of Ephraim. He journeys to Shiloh, also in Ephraim, to worship at the tabernacle with his family. The feasts and festivals of the Lord always involved rejoicing and food, so we see the family eating before the Lord. He has two wives, which causes many of us all kinds of theological problems. Why does a man of God have more than one wife? Polygamy was a fact of life in the ancient world. The Bible does not advocate nor disparage the practice. We should not take present-day morality and superimpose it on the past.

Hannah was childless in a society that saw children as a blessing and fulfilment from God. The text says that it was the Lord who had closed her womb. This adds a spiritual element to Hannah's trial. God is in control and is using this time of distress for some purpose. Her pain is the same as everyone who feels useless and a failure. It is a deep, personal and long-lasting pain. Hannah shows us what we need to do when we are in deep distress; we are to bring everything to the Lord in honest and sincere prayer. Eli, the priest of the tabernacle, initially thought she was drunk. This is understandable in the context of ancient Israel; as we mentioned before, the worship of God included food and drink. As Hannah pours her heart out to the Lord, she makes an incredible vow. She will give the child that she longs for so much to the Lord. As a Levite child, the baby was already dedicated to the service of God. Hannah goes further and adds a Nazarite vow on behalf of her future son. The Nazarite vow appears in Numbers 6

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and includes the visible sign of uncut hair. Both Samuel and Samson are unique in the Scriptures for being Nazarites from birth. The good news is that God hears all our prayers. Hannah's time of trial and frustration is over when the Lord acts to bless her with the son she prayed so earnestly for. She will then take her most prized possession and give him into the hands of God, the safest place to be.

**1 Samuel 2:1-10.** The prayer of Hannah marks the end of the birth narrative of Samuel. Hannah had been through a time of distress. She had opened her soul in heartfelt prayer, and God had brought her through to a time of joy and happiness. Some of the themes of Hannah's prayer, which is more like a psalm of praise, reoccur in the Song of Mary in the Gospel of Luke. Hannah had once felt despair and emptiness; now she feels full of the Lord's joy. Yes, there will be moments of loneliness ahead as she departs Shiloh without the boy Samuel, but she will see him for every feast of the Lord. Hannah also goes on to have other sons and daughters. So even though she gave the Lord one son, God returned the blessing with five more children. This demonstrates how much we really cannot outgive God. The prayer of Hannah contains some messianic and prophetic elements. Hannah concludes by saying that God will judge the ends of the earth and references a king. At the time of the judges, there were no kings and Israel did not seem to want one. Hannah is referring to a future anointed ruler. Previously, the verb 'to anoint' was used only for priests and prophets. This is the first time in the Bible that we encounter the word 'messiah' used in a royal setting.

**Hebrews 10:11-25.** Today's portion from the Epistle to the Hebrews is in two parts. Verses 11-18 describe the results of Jesus offering himself, and the second part, verses 19-25, brings the implications and consequences for us. The Messiah is contrasted once again with the Levitical priesthood, which stood to offer daily sacrifices that could never remove sins permanently. The sacrifice of Jesus, made once for all-time, is sufficient to remove sins, and now Jesus no longer stands but sits at the right hand of God. The author then brings in a verse from Psalm 110:1, which has an eschatological tone. The enemies of God will become the footstool of the Messiah. Salvation in the Hebrew Bible is universal. The prophets of Israel foretold a time when the Gentiles would seek the Lord and come to Jerusalem. The writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah, ascribing inspiration to the Holy Spirit when he says, 'The Holy Spirit also bears witness'. The actual words of Jeremiah 31:33 say the covenant is with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Hebrews changes the wording to 'the covenant I will make with them'. Who is the 'them'? Whom Hebrews is addressing and to whom 'them' is referring is debated in commentaries. I suggest, with the biblical Hebraic background implying salvation is universal and inclusive of Gentiles, that the 'them' are the believers in Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles. The laws are not dismissed and done away with, rather they take their rightful place on our hearts, which is where they were always meant to be. Moses said in Deuteronomy for the people to fix the words of God on their hearts (Deut 10:16). Hebrews calls those who follow the Lord 'brothers'. The household of faith shares a kinship that moves beyond race and colour. This should speak powerfully to our world today that seems to see distinctions of colour and ethnicity more and more. Hebrews then exhorts us to 'hold fast' to our confession, to 'provoke' one another to love and good deeds and to continue to seek the company of the

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faithful. The passage ends with another eschatological note. The Day is approaching, presumably referring to the Last Day or the Day of Judgment. The end times should not scare us into inaction but instead provoke us to more and greater acts of love and kindness, proclaiming the Gospel ever louder and with greater clarity. Part of our meeting together is to encourage each other that Jesus is indeed coming soon.

**Mark 13:1-8.** The disciples seemed suitably impressed with the grandeur of Herod's Temple. It was said in antiquity that there were three wonders of Israel; a sea in which all things float, a day of the week in which no work is done, and a magnificent temple without a single statue. Josephus the Jewish historian records that the outside of the temple was covered with gold leaf so that when the sun shone it was dazzling to behold. The disciples remarked, 'See what manner of stones and buildings are here'. Jesus casts a sober prediction of the fate of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Quite rightly, the disciples inquire of the Lord when this might occur in the future. Most of us do not like things to change, much less change catastrophically. Jerusalem was the city of God and included Mount Zion and the house of God. Jesus had even called the temple his Father's house. If such an important building was doomed for ruination, then it might be important to know when, how, and why?

Sitting on the Mount of Olives, opposite the Kidron Valley with an excellent view of the temple and its precincts, Jesus discusses the coming destruction of Jerusalem. The disciples ask two questions: when and what will be the signs. The Gospel of Mark records Jesus answering the 'what'. He begins by warning the disciples of false messiahs and false teachers that bring deception. The power of the Enemy, the Devil, is in lies and deceit. We must remember, though, that as powerful as his lies are, they are not enough to stop the Gospel from going out to all the world. It can be comforting to remind ourselves that Satan has not been able to stop the message of Jesus. Instead of stopping the Gospel, he tries to twist the message and distort the truths of the good news. This is something we do have to be on guard against. Jesus also reminds us that the world will experience troubles; although we pray for peace, there will be war. There will be geological troubles as well as political ones, famines and earthquakes and perhaps the dreaded effects of a changing climate. Interestingly, Jesus says 'such things must happen'. Why they must happen and to what end is not explained. Perhaps they are global signs to wake us up from our self-absorption and motivate us to live the Gospel loudly and clearly. Jesus will continue in Mark to warn us to prepare for persecutions. Persecution is also not the end, but it is something we should prepare for. Much of the Church – through history up until this very day – has had to endure severe persecution, often unto death. All these things will continue until the good news has been made available to the whole world. The presence of persecution does not negate the responsibility we have to continue to share the Gospel. History has demonstrated that persecution has accelerated the growth of the Church, not hindered it.

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**ACNA Readings**

**Daniel 12:1-13.** The angel Michael is often associated with spiritual warfare. In Revelation 12, we see that he fights, defeats, and casts the Devil out of heaven. In Jude, he clashes with Satan over the body of Moses. Satan has sometimes been heralded as the opposite of Jesus, but he is not. Satan is a fallen angel, and his true opposite is the angel Michael. In the vision of Daniel, we see that Michael has another role, that of protector of the people of Israel. Daniel was a captive in Babylon; the temple had been destroyed and the people were cast into exile. It was a very distressing time. What could be worse? Daniel's vision prophesied an even worse 'time of distress' that perhaps becomes the backdrop of the tribulation that is mentioned in Revelation 7. The Jewish people have known many times of trouble throughout their history, yet Daniel writes of a greater trouble to come. Amidst this heavy thought of prophetic doom, there is hope. Despite the impending tribulation, deliverance is assured for all those found written in the book. Daniel does not give the book a name, but we can confidently assume this refers to the Book of Life. Daniel 12:2 is a clear expression of personal resurrection in the Hebrew Bible. The wording in verse 2 does not say 'all' will rise; it says 'many' will rise. Some commentators argue that the word '*rabim*' in Hebrew can mean 'all', though I have never seen the word used in Hebrew to ever signify 'all'. At the Passover of Jesus, our Lord took the cup and said his blood was shed for 'many'. These words still echo in our liturgies today. The question is, then, who are the non-many? Further into the vision, Daniel sees several angelic divine figures, one of whom stands above the waters of a river. I once attended a rabbinic discussion in which a rabbi pointed out this verse that reveals a divine figure in the context of the end of days standing on water and concluded that the Messiah will walk on water.

**Psalms 16.** Psalm 16 is titled a 'Miktam of David', which is also the title of Psalms 56-60. Unfortunately, the meaning of the word has been lost to history. The Septuagint translates the word to mean 'an inscription on stone', which still is not all that helpful. It could be that the psalm was written on stone as that was the only material available to David. Perhaps David wrote the psalm during one of his times of trouble, as it begins with a call for preservation. However, it is also a beautiful prayer in which David declares loyalty to God by simply stating, 'You are my God, apart from you I have no good thing'. Loyalty means that you know that God is not simply God, but that he is 'your God'. Loyalty and obedience are personal qualities. David knew the Lord as 'my Lord', and the psalm reflects some of the good things that come from having a relationship with the Lord, including good counsel and instruction. During troubled times David acknowledges that the Lord is close and not distant. God does not abandon those in trouble. Rather he journeys with them, providing strength, endurance and sometimes deliverance.

**Hebrews 10:31-39.** The followers of Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles, have known times of persecution and distress throughout history. The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers to endure, keeping their eyes on the prize, a future reward that is a lasting possession in the world to come. The quote from Habakkuk encourages the faithful to persevere because the wait for the Lord will be short; 'A little while

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and the coming one will come'. Who is this coming one? Hebrews says it is the 'righteous one'. Habakkuk 2:4 says, 'The just (or righteous) shall live by his faith (faithfulness)'. This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament. The question is in the personal preposition; who is the 'he' implied in 'his faithfulness'? There are several options here. The 'his' could refer to God. God is faithful, and because God is faithful, the righteous ones of the Lord will live and endure. Romans 1:17 quotes this verse in reference to God faithfully having salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. The 'his' could also refer to the righteous or just person themselves. Paul uses the quote this way in Galatians 3:11 where the person's faith justifies them rather than the works of the Law. Hebrews 10:38 uses the 'his' to refer to the Messiah, who is the righteous one of the Lord. Messiah was faithful. He did not shrink back from the path set before him to endure the cross. Through his faithfulness, we will live a life everlasting. This is the hope that we have and that we proclaim to a fallen world so desperately in need of some hope.

**Mark 13:14-23.** Sometimes we forget that Jesus gave us a stark warning of the future. What exactly is the abomination of desolation has been discussed in Christian circles, without agreement, since the ascension of Jesus to heaven. Regardless of whether we read the text literally or figuratively, the point of the warning is to be on guard. Jesus says that something is coming, something so dangerous and terrible that for the sake of the believers those days are shortened. Jesus directed his warning to the Jewish people, for the people of Judea are told to flee to the mountains. The warning initially was, therefore, quite local. However, after the abomination of desolation there comes another dark time described as a tribulation, which seems to have global implications. Jesus describes it as the most horrific time in human history. Jesus gave us a warning to be on guard, however, some Christians throughout history have tried to set dates, write books, and make movies saying when the end will come. This has resulted in some cynicism from failed date setting and is very unhelpful when communicating the Gospel of salvation through the Messiah. When contemplating the Day of the Messiah, the Last Judgment, the rabbis ask a question: which day is better, a day of rain or the day of the Messiah (Tannit 7a:2)? They answer that it is a day of rain for the rain falls on the just and the unjust. It is a blessing to everyone. The day of the Messiah is only a blessing for the righteous. For the ungodly, it will be a dark day of judgment indeed.

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and 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.