

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Jeremiah 33:14-16

NRSV

Jeremiah ministered around the time when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. In bad times, he told of God's love for his people. The restoration of the city is mentioned in vv. 6-9: "... this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory ..." Our passage was edited or written centuries later.

Now we hear that it is a certainty that a time will come when God will complete his obligations ("fulfill the promise I made", v. 14) under his covenant with the Israelites. Vv. 15-16 are Jeremiah's prophecy in 23:5-6 with a difference: there it is Judah and Israel; here it is "Judah" (v. 16) and "Jerusalem". The "righteous Branch" (v. 15) is a king (or messiah) of David's line; both kings and the messiah were expected to be just and righteous (godly). Judah will be restored to prosperity ("saved", v. 16); Jerusalem will be protected. Per the NRSV, it is the city or the "Branch" that will be called "The Lord is our righteousness", but this may be the name of a king: thus the Revised English Bible. Vv. 17-18 foretell the permanence of the Davidic monarchy, and of priests offering sacrifice. God's covenant with his people is forever, or at least until the end of the age, i.e. to the start of the messianic era. God will never break the pact (even if the people deviate from it).

Psalms 25:1-10

NRSV

The psalmist seeks deliverance from personal enemies. He trusts in God (vv. 1-4); may God never allow the ungodly (the "treacherous", v. 3) to claim victory over him. Key to maintaining the upper hand is knowing God's ways, being taught by God (v. 4), accepting God's leadership (v. 5), coming to know ultimate "truth" (v. 5): this is the way to being saved from the scheming of his (and God's) adversaries. The psalmist nudges God into remembering his "mercy" (v. 6, compassion) and "love", qualities of God since time immemorial. In youthful *flings*, we deviate from God's ways, but please, Lord, remember my times of fidelity (v. 7). God does teach his ways to those who have strayed and who approach him in awe ("humble", v. 9). "Love and faithfulness" (v. 10) are characteristic of God's covenant relationship with his people.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

NRSV

Paul predicted, when he was in Thessalonika, that some Christians there would be persecuted. This has now happened; he has sent Timothy to "strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, so no one would be shaken by these persecutions" (vv. 2-3). Timothy has now returned to Paul in Athens, and has conveyed to him "the good news of your faith and love" (v. 6). Indeed, their faith has encouraged Paul in facing persecution himself.

Now he considers their prayer for him to be a debt to be repaid ("in return", v. 9).

Even though he lives continually in gratitude to, and dependence on, God ("before our God"; "Night and day", v. 10), "all the joy" (v. 9) their faith brings to him is hard to repay, but he does give thanks. He also prays that he may visit them ("see you face to face", v. 10) to "restore" (or *make good*) lacks in their knowledge of the faith, to give them further instruction in specific areas (likely what will happen when Jesus comes again: see v. 13). In vv. 11-13, he prays, intercedes with God, on their behalf: (1) that he may visit them again ("direct ...", v. 11); (2) that they may have a superabundance of love for their fellow Christians and for others ("all", v. 12), as Paul, Timothy and Silvanus ("we") have for them; and (3) that their very beings ("hearts", v. 13) may become so God-like ("holiness") that they may be totally free of sin ("blameless") when Christ comes again with all those who belong to God ("his saints") at the end of time. At that time, says 4:13-17, Christ will bring the faithful dead with him; they will rise to be with God first; then those who are still alive will join them in heaven forever.

Luke 21:25-36

NRSV

Jesus has foretold the destruction of the Temple (v. 6). Some have asked him when this will occur and what will indicate that it is about to happen (v. 7). Given that "all the people were spellbound by what they heard" (19:48) and that the religious authorities "kept looking for a way to kill him" (19:47), the destruction must have spiritual meaning. Jesus tells of events commonly expected at the end of the era, and adds some which are specifically Christian. First, Christians will be persecuted by religious and civil authorities (v. 12). Then there will be "wars and insurrections" (v. 9), but "the end will not follow immediately" (as people expected). Disastrous natural phenomena, cause for great distress, will occur (v. 11), and when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies (v. 20), the city will soon fall: either physically or spiritually. Again the end will be delayed: the killing and deportation of citizens will continue "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (v. 24), i.e. until non-Jews have had the opportunity to come to Christ.

Now Jesus foretells unnatural events ("signs ...", v. 25) and the resulting confusion among nations and people, not knowing what will happen next. But the "Son of Man" (v. 27), the ideal human, Christ, will come from heaven ("in a cloud", a symbol of divine presence, as at the Transfiguration) with power to control events. Then "redemption" (v. 28), God's acts of freeing his chosen people, will be near. Just as the leafing of trees shows that "summer is ... near" (v. 30), so the occurrence of all these events will show that "the kingdom of God is near" (v. 31): this time will be evident to the faithful. The signs will be as striking as is seen in fig trees: in winter, they look dead but in spring they sprout. In spite of the delay, the era will end before all those alive now have died (v. 32). Jesus' "words" (v. 33) are even more eternal than creation ("heaven and earth"). Finally, he advises vigilance: do not be so "weighed down" (v. 34) with day-to-day earthy matters that you are unprepared for the final call ("that day"). It will be for all those who survive all disasters (v. 35). Pray that God may give you the strength to resist all evils, so that you may "stand before" (v. 36) Christ, be deemed worthy by him.