

WEEK 4: SATURDAY

We stood in the autumn light beside the huge waterfall, mesmerized by the sheer volume of water pouring over and crashing down on the rocks beneath, unable to hear ourselves speak because of the rush and roar of the turbulent river. Then, as we walked back up the path to where we'd parked the car, we thought of all the tiny streams we'd seen earlier in the day, tinkling along gently high in the hills, and how each one had contributed to the massive flood we had just witnessed. Down they come into the valley, each making its way and lending its weight to the wide, powerful river.

Something of that same sense, of thousands of different streams each contributing to an eventual waterfall, is contained here, as Jesus concludes his solemn denunciation of both the official and the self-appointed guardians of Israel's ancestral traditions. Jesus looked back, up into the far hills of Israel's history, and saw a long line of prophets and righteous people who had been rejected by the leaders and opinion-formers of their day. Again and again it had happened. Little by little the streams have grown into a flood; and now Jesus sees the present leaders, his own contemporaries, flowing along in the same tradition. Right back as far as Abel, the first murdered man, right on to the more recent prophet Zechariah son of Barachiah, Israel's leaders have rejected and killed those who were sent to them; and now they are doing the same one more time.

What Jesus can see as well, though, is that there is a great waterfall just ahead. All this weight of water will not simply stop when it comes to the cliff: it will crash over it, thundering down to the depths. A mighty disaster is on the way. Many others had warned of similar things; Jesus, like the prophet he was, can see it only too clearly. And when it happens it won't be arbitrary. It won't be an accident. It will be the direct result of all these small streams of rebellion coming together into the greatest rebellion of them all.

But that isn't the end of the story. In the middle of the warning, Jesus speaks of his own longing to do something about it. God has indeed abandoned the Temple to its fate (verse 38). But, like a mother hen gathering the chickens under her wing to protect them against a fire, or a fox, Jesus has longed to gather Jerusalem and its people to himself so that he could take upon himself the full force of the coming disaster. Somehow, as we go through the next four chapters of Matthew's gospel, we need to remember that we are watching two different scenes: God's judgment on his rebellious people, and Jesus standing in the way, offering to take that judgment upon himself.

TODAY

Lord Jesus, Messiah and King, help us to stand in awe at your solemn words, and in gratitude at your offer of rescue.