

Matthias Flees

Their bodies ached and their legs throbbed as they strode along the dry and dusty path. Every step became more of a burden until the small children, their feet sore from the stones, could not carry on.

So, from a vantage point on the path, Matthias and his wife stopped. They embraced, and looked back.

"I should never have doubted you, Matthias", she sighed, looking up into his eyes.

For over 30 years, Matthias had said this was going to happen. Even so, the reality still came a shock.

Exhausted by the ordeal, Matthias leant back against a rocky wall and thought about what they were witnessing. He knew that he and his family had been fortunate to know what to expect and how to recognise the deceivers.

"It started all those years ago", he said, "when my friends and I showed with such pride, the unbelievable glory of the Temple to our leader, Jesus of Nazareth. The Temple sparkled like a glorious white jewel, reflecting the beauty of the sun".

"Even now, as we look back at the city that was our home, I can remember Jesus' words so clearly. When we pointed out the Temple to him, he told us: 'Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' " [Matt 24:2, NIV]

"We were shocked but excited to hear more. At the time", said Matthias, "we believed the Temple would stand until the very end of the Age, just when the Messiah was to come. So we asked him: 'Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' " [v 3]

"We were so fortunate", Matthias told them, "that the very first thing Jesus told us was to beware of deceivers. It was a message he kept repeating to us: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Christ" and will deceive many' ". [verses 4, 5]

"And how true his message was! How many messengers have we seen during the past 30 or so years? And how many, many dear believing souls had been deceived!".

"These deceivers told the people that they were the Messiah ('I am the Christ') or they were calling out messages said to come from him. How confusing it could have been for us, if we had not known".

Matthias asked his children and grandchildren as they sat around his feet, "Do you remember what sort of messages these deceivers were giving?" They nodded.

"Well", he continued, "just as Jesus had warned us close disciples, these deceivers have been pointing to calamities:"

"He said: 'For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ', and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come'. " [verses 5, 6]

"And did we hear about wars!", Matthias exclaimed. "How many dear people have we seen become alarmed because stories of wars were being used to point to the coming of Messiah and to the end of the age? As our Jesus truly said, 'such things must happen', but we knew these were not the sign that men should look for".

“True to Jesus’ words, nations and kingdoms have fought one another,” Matthias explained. “Just as Jesus had said, deceivers used these events as signs. Jesus did not talk about the size of a conflict, its length of combat or the number of casualties. Simply that conflicts would continue to exist. These deceivers, Jesus told us, would also use reports of famines and earthquakes as a sign of the coming of Messiah”.

“So, while talking about deceivers, Jesus had said: ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places’ “. [v 7]

“Then, to reinforce his warning about these deceivers, Jesus told us that instead of being any kind of sign of an end, these events were taking place, while he was speaking with us, even before the birth: ‘All these are the beginning of birth pains’ “. [v 8]

How fortunate Matthias and his family were. He held them close to him, his eyes fixed on the pall of smoke and at the destruction taking place in the Jews’ city of peace, Jerusalem.

For over 30 years, Matthias had warned the citizens of Jerusalem not to listen to those who used war and calamity, signs of death and destruction, as being omens of peace and tranquillity.

“So many of us were persecuted and put to death, so much so that many turned away from their faith in God, even to the point of betraying family and former friends. It was so difficult to stand firm. But we have done it, preaching the good news about the kingdom of God, that he is king, ruling over all mankind”.

“Jesus has told us that ‘this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come’ “. The gospel has certainly reached the whole world [Acts 24:5]. Then we saw, as Jesus said we would, ‘standing in the holy place “the abomination that causes desolation,”’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel’. “ [verses 14 - 17]

Matthias he looked around his family, his beloved city being burned by the invading Roman army. “We are here, alive”, said Matthias, “because we followed Jesus’ instructions: ‘then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house.’ “. [verses 15 - 17].

“So many”, Matthias continued, “walked the streets of Jerusalem, drawing crowds into the desert, claiming that the Messiah had come. These people used great signs and wonders in order to deceive the people”.

“We were saved from deception because Jesus had told us that ‘false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect -- if that were possible’ “. [v 24]

“How comforting it has been for us to know that people are not to travel into the desert in order to see the returning Messiah. How much security it has given us to know that the Messiah will not return to some secret location. This will be an event that is visible to all. As Jesus himself told us:

“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”. [verses 26, 27]

Matthias continued: “When the Messiah does come, there will be a sign, but it will be given too late for anyone to benefit from it. The coming itself would be the sign”.

“We know this,” Matthias continued, “because Jesus himself told us: ‘At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will

mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other' “. [verses 30, 31]

“These happenings, we now know, will happen at the very instant of his coming: ‘When you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door’. “ [v 33]

Looking into his wife’s eyes, Matthias said, “We have indeed been indeed privileged to know that the Messiah will come at a time when he is not expected, without any warning. He will be like a thief, and we know that he gives no warning of the exact time he will be coming. We know that only our heavenly Father knows the exact time: ‘No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’. “ [v 36]

“And at the moment that the Messiah comes, the people will be going about their daily lives and will know nothing about his coming until it is too late. We have been told by Jesus that this is what happened when the Flood came, that the people kept on living their normal everyday lives unaware of the coming catastrophe, until it was too late: ‘As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man’. “ [verses 37-39]

“This means”, explained Matthias, “that we must always be ready, ever faithful, not relying on signs in the physical world, just as Jesus has told us: ‘So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him’ “. [v 44]

Matthias was saddened because of what he had seen, but he was delighted that he had been warned by his Jesus about deceivers. He gathered his family and embraced them. He then picked up his staff, his faith firmer than ever, and continued his trek.

He was now a little wiser, too. When he sat at Jesus’ feet all those years ago, he thought that the Temple would remain standing until the Messiah came. Matthias now realised that Jesus did not rebuke their ignorance and had answered both questions. Jesus had told them about the destruction of the Temple and about the deceivers who would walk the streets of Jerusalem, and then he told them about the sign which would accompany his coming.

Now Matthias understood. There was still a message he had to proclaim, indeed it was more important than the message he had given for the past 30 years or so. Mankind had to be ready at all times, he thought, whether the Messiah was coming or not. The timing of that event, he knew, is in the hands of the Father, not mankind.

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