

Matthew 24:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

Analysis

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not (τότε ἐάν τις ὑμῖν εἴπῃ, Ἰδοὺ ὧδε ὁ Χριστός, ἢ, ὧδε, μὴ πιστεύσητε)—The adverb τότε ("then") connects to the tribulation period. The interjection ἰδοὺ (idou, "behold, lo") suggests urgency and attention-getting. False messiahs will claim location: "here" (ὧδε). The imperative μὴ πιστεύσητε ("believe not") commands skeptical resistance.

When suffering intensifies, desperate people grasp for deliverance—making them vulnerable to deception. During Jerusalem's siege, multiple zealot leaders promised divine intervention and military victory, leading thousands to stay in the city and perish. Jesus's warning anticipated this psychological vulnerability. The command "believe it not" doesn't mean general skepticism but specific discernment: the true Christ's return will be unmistakable (v. 27, "as lightning"), not localized rumors requiring investigation.

Historical Context

Between Jesus's prophecy and AD 70, Josephus catalogs numerous messianic pretenders who attracted followers with promises of deliverance: an Egyptian false prophet (mentioned in Acts 21:38), Theudas, and various zealot leaders during the revolt (AD 66-70). After AD 70, the pattern continued: Bar Kokhba (AD 132-135), acclaimed messiah by Rabbi Akiva. Throughout church history—Sabbatai Zevi, David Koresh, Sun Myung Moon—the pattern Jesus warned against has repeated.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Why are people especially vulnerable to false messiahs during times of crisis and suffering?
2. How can believers maintain discernment when longing for Christ's return without falling into cynicism or date-setting?
3. What specific characteristics should make any "messiah" claim immediately suspicious?

Interlinear Text

τότε	ἐάν	τις	ὑμῖν	εἴπη	Ἰδού,	ἴδε,	ὁ	Χριστός,
Then	if	any man	unto you	shall say	Lo	here	<small>G3588</small>	is Christ
<small>G5119</small>	<small>G1437</small>	<small>G5100</small>	<small>G5213</small>	<small>G2036</small>	<small>G2400</small>	<small>G5602</small>		<small>G5547</small>
ἢ,	ἴδε,	μὴ	πιστεύσητε·					
or	here	it not	believe					
<small>G2228</small>	<small>G5602</small>	<small>G3361</small>	<small>G4100</small>					

Additional Cross-References

Luke 21:8 (References Christ): And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.

Mark 13:21 (Faith): And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: