

it that the disciples will desecrate it? It’s either one or the other, or both. But because they leave this thing hanging out there in a gray area, without stating clearly what they’re saying, we’ll have to answer them on both **(1) & (2)**. And because **#1** will be answered all throughout the tract, we’ll begin with **#2**—Don’t run on the Sabbath because you’ll desecrate that “sacred” day.

This is the gist of the thought of their paragraph—that the disciples would desecrate the Sabbath if they were forced to flee on that day. Listen to what they’re saying: “So concerned was Christ for the sacredness of the Sabbath...” Where do they place his concern? “that even then Christians would be bound to a strict observance of the Sabbath.” This is exactly what they’re setting before their readers—In AD70, 40 years after Christ’s ascension, his disciples would be “strictly observing” the Sabbath, thus, because Christ is “so concerned” about the “sacredness” of that day, he counsels them to “pray” that their flight might not be on that day. Why? They’ve already told us: because Christ is “so concerned” for the “sacredness” of that day. In other words, if the disciples are forced to flee on the Sabbath, that “sacred” day will be desecrated by their actions.

They’re very craftily making **SDA** readers see this in such a way, that they, the **SDA** leaders, don’t even believe, and more so, in such a way that the **SDA** readers themselves don’t believe. But their wording is styled in such a manner that the **SDA** reader would never pick up on it. What is it that Adventists do not believe? They don’t believe it would be a violation of the Sabbath to flee on that day *in case of necessity*, or that the disciples would be desecrating the Sabbath were they forced to flee on that day *in order to save their lives*. In other words, there would be nothing “wrong” with the disciples fleeing on that day. Nothing at all. They would not be committing sin in any way, nor doing anything displeasing to God. Adventists believe this. So it cannot be “the sacredness of the Sabbath” that Christ has in view here, or is “so concerned” about. He’s concerned about something, yes, but it’s not the sacredness of the Sabbath. It’s something much more dear to him than a Jewish law.

Christ emphasized again and again that works of necessity and mercy were not only acceptable to be performed on the Sabbath, but God was pleased with them—whether saving the life of a sheep, or relieving a person’s suffering, or escaping bodily injury or even loss of life to one’s self—the disciples had the example of Christ in this to follow as well as his very word. None of this performed on the Sabbath would have desecrated that day at all. It would have all been most proper. This is exactly what Adventists believe. Listen to them on page 297: “When criticized for his work of alleviating suffering, Jesus replied, ‘It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath’ (*Matt 12:12*). His healing activities neither broke the Sabbath nor abolished it.” The disciples fleeing from the wrath of the Roman army on the Sabbath certainly fits in here; for they would be “avoiding” and thus “alleviating” their own “suffering,” which Jesus says is both “lawful” and “good” in the sight of God!

So, for **SDA** leaders to picture for their readers the reason that Christ counsels his disciples to pray that they wouldn’t

have to flee on the Sabbath is because he’s “so concerned” for the “sacredness” of that day, when he himself has taught that such necessary fleeing would not only not desecrate that day, but was proper and pleasing to God—this kind of **SDA** teaching, *I say*, is most *improper* and *not pleasing* to God! It’s a cunning way of deceiving the reader. And I say to all **SDA** readers—Take a serious look at *how* your leaders are presenting things to you. This is a prime example of just how easy they can pull the wool right over your eyes and pervert the teachings of Christ.

A “JEWISH” SACRED DAY

Adventists use this text to show that the Sabbath continued to be a “sacred” day *after the resurrection*. And they’re right! Why wouldn’t it have been? The Sabbath was at the very heart of Judaism, and Judaism did not cease when Christ died. The Sabbath was kept just as strictly after he died as it had been before he died. The cross did not change “*the Jews’ religion*.” The Lamb of God had come and sacrificed himself, but Judaism kept on killing sheep after his death. The Temple veil was torn in two when Christ died, but the Temple services did not cease to function until AD70. Jews continued the types and shadows after Christ finished his redemptive work. The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in AD70 by the Romans was the definitive termination of the old covenant economy. The Sabbath continued right along with these other “Jewish” institutions. But if Adventists want to use this to argue that because Jesus says the Sabbath would still be observed in AD70 that this proves it was “binding” upon “Christians” at that time, and thus, still binding upon us today—this same line of reasoning would also have to apply to everything else “the Jews” were still doing up until AD70: sacrificing animals, circumcision, keeping passover, pentecost, etc. Their argument simply does not hold up.

JESUS HAS ONE THING IN MIND

The manner in which Adventists highlight “the Sabbath” in this passage keeps you from seeing “the forest” because they’ve got you focused on “**one tree**.” In order to see clearly what Jesus is doing here, and where his concern is, verse 20 must not be isolated from the surrounding verses. Here’s the same passage in Luke: (*21:20-23*)

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.

What is Jesus doing by telling his disciples this? What is he concerned about? Listen to him again: When you see those armies: **(1)** Know that it’s all over **(2)** Flee to the mountains **(3)** Get out of the midst of Judaea **(4)** Don’t anybody enter into Judaea **(5)** Woe to women with child **(6)** Woe to mothers with nursing babes **(7)** These be the days of vengeance and wrath. You see what he’s concerned about now, don’t you?

One thing—the **safety of his disciples**. It’s clear now. The **SDA** leaders had us focused on that tree over there in Matthew; but Luke’s not even interested in that tree. Luke is interested in the same thing Mark is interested in, which is the same thing Matthew is interested in. And it’s not that **SDA** tree. It’s something else. Did I mention Mark? He’s not interested in that tree, either. But he adds some things to the list that follow perfectly with the thought of the passage:

And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house: And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment...And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. (*Mark 13:15,16,18*)

Every one of these things listed is designed **for the disciples’ safety**. It all boils down to this: “When you see those armies, Get out as quick as you can!” Everything Christ mentions has to do with this—“Don’t linger!” The “woe” to mothers is spoken compassionately—a flight so prompt and hasty would involve real hardship and difficulty for delicate women. Jesus says, If you’re on the housetop, don’t run down to pack. If you’re in the field, don’t run to grab your clothes. Just run! And why does he tell them to pray that their flight be not “**in the winter**”? For their *safety* again—the days will be short with the weather cold, and unfit for long journeys; the way will be dirty with the roads bad, and sometimes impassable, through large snows or floods of water, and therefore traveling most difficult, especially for whole families; and dwelling in desert places, and lodging in mountains, very uncomfortable. Jesus just goes on and on, with one thing after the other, all with one thing in mind—**their safety**! “When you see those armies: Be sure—it’s all over. Get out as fast as you can! And pray that your flight is not in the winter!” It’s their safety all the way.

And Matthew has got one more thing to add to the list, that again, *follows the thought of the passage perfectly*—“**Pray that your flight be not on the Sabbath day**” (*Matt 24:20*). Nothing has changed! Jesus has not shifted gears. His concern is right where it’s always been. Every phrase in this passage, one after the other, has to do with the **safety** of his disciples. That’s where he’s focused. He hasn’t turned his attention elsewhere. Don’t try to turn him. Don’t force something on this passage that’s not there. Keep your thoughts together. Keep your mind on *the same thing* Christ has his mind on.

CHASING BUZZWORDS

That’s how a lot of passages of Scripture get messed up—the Bible student is following right along with the thought of the context, when all of the sudden, he’s veered off in the wrong direction, giving a verse a meaning it was never intended to have. What happened? He heard a “buzzword!” And he allowed this buzzword to throw him off track. That happens to a lot of people. They hear words like “law,” “commandments” and “Sabbath”—and to them these are buzzwords. Flags go up. And they begin thinking about things that are **nowhere** in the text. They lose their focus, and before you know it, they’re following *that word* instead of following the passage.

Reading Luke’s account, all went well right down the line. And Mark’s account, too, no problem. And his additions of “the housetop,” “the field,” and “the winter” gave us no trouble. Every phrase has to do with Jesus’ concern for the safety of his disciples. And Matthew is no different—right down the line. But the **SDA** leaders come along and shift gears with this entire context and *elevate* the word “Sabbath” to a place it was never intended to be. They get your eyes off of Jesus’ concern for the disciples and get your eyes on (*so they say*) Jesus’ concern *for the Sabbath*! How did that happen? I was doing real well there, and all of the sudden I found myself looking in two directions at the same time! Christ was concerned for the disciples, and then, right out of the blue, he became concerned for the Sabbath. His concern went from the keeping of his disciples to the keeping of a day! and right in the middle of a verse! Can you explain that?

When you see those armies: **(1)** Know that it’s all over **(2)** Flee to the mountains **(3)** Get out of the midst of Judaea **(4)** Don’t anybody enter into Judaea **(5)** Woe to women with child **(6)** Woe to mothers with nursing babes **(7)** Don’t run in the house to pack **(8)** Don’t run from the field to grab your clothes **(9)** Pray that your flight be not in the winter **(10)** And pray that your flight be not on the Sabbath day.

The only way to say, “So concerned was Jesus for the sacredness of the Sabbath,” is if **#10** is taken out of this list and held up all by itself. Then you can do what you want with it. But that’s not the way to interpret Scripture—lifting verses out of their context. But this is what the **SDA** leaders are doing. They’re making it fit their doctrine by paying no attention at all to the surrounding verses. They ignore **1-9**, and hold your attention on **#10**. And by doing this, they can lead you right where they want you to go—to see Jesus “so concerned” for “the Sabbath day” and its “sacredness.” But is that where Jesus’ concern really is? We all know better now, don’t we? The context has turned the light on. His concern is right where it’s always been—the safety of his disciples. Think about it.

In all of this list **(1-10)** Jesus is referring to the inconvenience and danger of their flight; and this is precisely why he mentions “the Sabbath day.” On that day the gates of the city would be shut, and so hinder them greatly if not detain them entirely. The gates of all the villages through which they must pass would be closed. The Jews would look at them suspiciously, and probably arrest them as traitors. Thus, you can imagine the obstacles they would meet with, and how dangerous it would be, almost impossible for his disciples to flee on that day. It’s their *safety* that Christ has in view. Any candid person can see that this is the true meaning of this text.

“THAT THEY MAY BE ABLE TO KEEP IT”

Here’s a classic quote on this verse from their popular tract, “*The Lord’s Day in the New Testament*” (*Review and Herald Pub., Good News Series, #13*). After quoting Matthew 24:20, the **SDA** leaders give us this: “Far from abolishing the Sabbath, the Lord goes to the extent of commanding his disciples to pray **that they may be able to keep it** forty years after his resurrection.” Remember **#1** earlier: “Don’t run on the Sabbath so you can keep it.” Here it is spelled out plainly! They’ve nailed it down now.

They’ve got it out of the gray area and into black and white. Listen to it: “**that they may be able to keep it.**” Wow! Where would we be without such powerful insight!

This is what I’ve been saying—they take this one phrase out of verse 20, and out of the entire context, and make it say just what they want you to hear. They stand by as Jesus goes down a checklist of **10** things to say to his disciples out of concern for their safety, but low and behold, as he gets to **#10**, they give him a *jolt* and a *twist*, and before you know it, *he’s concerned about the Sabbath!* They’ve got the whole focus of Jesus on the Sabbath now, and hoping that his disciples will be able to keep that day—“**that they may be able to keep it.**” He’s no longer considering the dangers they’ll be facing or the hazards of the way, he has only in his mind their keeping of a day! Can you believe this?—“**that they may be able to keep it.**” The Bible is a “workbook” people! Wake up! Study passages as they’re given, *in their setting*, comparing Scripture with Scripture; and watch closely *how* these “Bible teachers” present things to you.

“IN THE WINTER”

Did you notice how the **SDA** leaders stay away from the phrase “**in the winter**”? It’s in the same verse, right there beside “on the Sabbath.” “*Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.*” Why don’t they ever make the slightest comment about “in the winter”? Because to think about it at all gives the whole thing away. Jesus has two things, not just one, that they are to “pray for” in this one verse.

“Pray ye that your flight be not”

“in the winter”

“on the Sabbath”

Jesus’ purpose in mentioning these is *the same*. Both of them are to be prayed for *to be avoided*. Why? for the very same reason.

“Pray ye that your flight be not”

“in the winter”

“on the Sabbath”

Difficulties of the way

Difficulties of the way

To say that Jesus counsels his disciples to pray that their flight be not “on the Sabbath” so they can *keep the Sabbath day*, is about the same as Jesus counseling them to pray that their flight be not “in the winter” so they can *enjoy Christmas and New Years!* You say, that’s a bit far-fetched! You’re right! But it’s no more far-fetched than teaching that Jesus is saying this because he’s “*so concerned for the sacredness of the Sabbath.*” He’s not concerned here about the Sabbath at all! His concern is for **the safety** of his disciples. **Period!** And the phrase “on the Sabbath day” is spoken for the *same purpose* and carries *the same meaning* as the phrase “in the winter”—**the dangers and hazards of the way**. Why do the **SDA** leaders totally ignore the phrase “in the winter”? The answer to that is all too obvious. What we have here is Jesus as “the Good Shepherd” caring for his own. He’s not caring for a day; he’s caring for his own. If he had no more in view here than *the keeping of the Sabbath day*, he’d be no better than the scribes and Pharisees that he so often rebuked for that very same reason—putting the keeping of a day above man and his needs.

“FOR THEN SHALL BE GREAT TRIBULATION”

We’ve been laboring through this entire tract column after column to make our case, but Jesus does it with just one word—“**For**.” He’s given the **when**, but he hasn’t given the **why** yet, as he’s come down the list. The **when** is “When you see those armies” (*Luke 21:20*). But the **why** doesn’t come in till immediately after “the Sabbath day,” that is, immediately after he’s completed the entire list of **10** things (*vv16-20*). Now he’s gonna tell us **why**, and right in the middle of the sentence: “Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: **FOR then shall be great tribulation.**” He just gave away the answer! This is the first time in the entire list that he’s given the reason, that he’s given the **why**, for them to do all these things: “**FOR then shall be great tribulation.**” Are you gonna flee? Yes! Why? “great tribulation.” Are you gonna pack? No! Why? “great tribulation.” Are you gonna grab your clothes? No! Why? “great tribulation.” The whole list is tied to “great tribulation” by this one word “**For**.”

This word “**For**” is the key that unlocks the whole thing. Do you want to be fleeing in the winter? No! Why? “great tribulation.” Do you want to be fleeing on the Sabbath day? No! Why? “great tribulation.” Everything Jesus mentions going right down the line has to do with a speedy flight out of Judaea without hindrances of any kind. The disciples “keeping” or “desecrating” the Sabbath day has **nothing** whatsoever to do with the entire thought. Let’s prove it. It’s easy. But you’re gonna have to “think” with me. In this tract, three interpretations of this passage have been given; two of these are by the **SDA**. What we’re gonna do is simply take all three of these interpretations and set them down right in the middle of what Jesus is saying to see which one fits with how he’s thinking. It’s that simple. The wrong interpretation will not make sense. The right interpretation will. The first two interpretations listed are those of the **SDA**—(1) & (2).

“Pray ye that your flight be not on the Sabbath day”

(1) in order that you might KEEP THE SABBATH

“**FOR** then shall be **GREAT TRIBULATION**”

“Pray ye that your flight be not on the Sabbath day”

(2) in order that you DO NOT DESECRATE THE SABBATH

“**FOR** then shall be **GREAT TRIBULATION**”

“Pray ye that your flight be not on the Sabbath day”

(3) in order that you HAVE A SPEEDY FLIGHT OUT OF HERE

“**FOR** then shall be **GREAT TRIBULATION**”

In **#1** “great tribulation” is tied to “keeping the Sabbath day” by the word “For” which is used like “because.” But you see the problem—“keeping the Sabbath day” doesn’t have anything to do with “great tribulation.” In other words, this would be the reason why Jesus is encouraging them to “keep the Sabbath day”—**because** of “great tribulation.” But that makes no sense. These two things bear no relation. That would be like encouraging someone to participate in Easter Sunday service—**because** the nation’s economy is collapsing. That doesn’t make sense. These two things are not related at all. They simply don’t go together, any more than “keeping the Sabbath day” goes with “great tribulation.”

In **#2** “great tribulation” is tied to “not desecrating the Sabbath day” by the word “For” or because. But you see the problem again—“not desecrating the Sabbath day” has nothing to do with “great tribulation.” In other words, this would be the reason why Jesus is instructing them “not to desecrate the Sabbath day”—**because** of “great tribulation.” “**FOR then shall be great tribulation.**” But this makes no sense either; it just doesn’t go together. This would be like a pastor instructing his people not to desecrate “the Lord’s Table”—**because** of an approaching hurricane. There’s no connection at all. Don’t you see how none of this is related, and none of this makes any sense? We wouldn’t talk like this; and we can be sure—Jesus didn’t talk like this! He made sense!

In **#3** “great tribulation” is tied to “having a speedy flight out of Judaea,” and again, these are joined by the word “For” or because. In other words, this would be the reason why Jesus is telling them to be sure they get out of Judaea speedily—**because** of “great tribulation.” “**FOR then shall be great tribulation.**” Now, that makes sense! The thought follows right through. Listen to what Jesus is saying—“Pray that your flight be not on the Sabbath day, **because** of all the inconveniences, hindrances, and hazards you are sure to meet with on that day. Every gate of every village will be bolted shut; you’ll be viewed by the Jews with suspicion, and probably arrested as traitors. Pray that your flight be not on that day. You’ll not be able to flee with the speed you’ll need to escape.” This is his whole purpose in calling their attention to “the Sabbath day.” Any one who looks at this passage honestly and objectively will agree that this is the *only* valid interpretation of this passage. It perfectly fits.

In all fairness you can see how easy it is to eliminate **#1** & **#2** by simply “thinking” them through. They just don’t fit with the reason that Jesus gives as to why he’s saying all these things to his disciples. And if they don’t fit, and if they don’t flow with what he’s saying, then they’ve been **forced** upon this passage; and this text then can be used to teach a meaning other than what Jesus intended. Adventists do just that. I believe a quote from **Ellen G. White** to be most appropriate here—some good words of counsel:

If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, **but accept the light given.**

SDA Believe, “To The Readers”

Dan Shanks
767/285-0175

Other tracts you’ll want to read:

- *Questions that Silence “Jewish Sabbath” Keepers*
- *“Jesus said He Didn’t Come to Destroy the Law!”*
- A “House of Cards”—“*The Rise of Sunday Observance*” by **SDA**
- *Seventh-day Adventism—a Church built upon an Assumption*
 - “*The Sabbath was made for Man*”—*Mark 2:27*
 - *Why “Jewish Sabbath” Keepers Run & Hide from the Testimony of the Early Church Fathers!*

Don’t Run on the Sabbath!
Matthew 24:20

“But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation” (*vv20,21*)

In the entire New Testament, the Seventh-day Adventists (**SDA**) have “slim pickins” when it comes to finding passages to support their “Sabbath” teaching. In order to give the Sabbath “New Testament” credibility, which they so desperately want, they know they need all the help they can get—from *the NT*. This is not so simple for them, especially since they cannot find one Scripture from either Christ or the apostles commanding Sabbath observance. They’re pretty much “*left out in the cold*” in their search for **NT** “proof-texts.”

There are two **NT** passages, though, Matthew 24:20 and Mark 2:27, that they do grab ahold of, and hold up high before the entire Christian world. They want everyone to know what they’ve got *in the NT*. And they feel confident that these two texts give them what they want—a rock-solid **NT** argument. But the truth is, they’re grasping at straw; they don’t have anything. Nothing at all. And this is easy to see. All you have to do is just look at these two passages, and carefully read them. That’s it. But Adventists really believe they have an impregnable **NT** fortress in these two texts; and they advertise them with vigor and enthusiasm. Thus, we felt it our duty to do a little advertising of our own. We’ve put together “twin tracts,” this one on Matthew 24:20, and another on Mark 2:27—“*The Sabbath was made for man.*” Read them and acquaint yourself with what the **SDA** leaders have given us—two prime examples of exactly what it is we are **not to do** when interpreting Scripture.

DECEIVING THE READER

Both of these passages are listed as the two main **NT** texts in their **SDA Believe** book (*2006 ed.*), under “*The Sabbath and Christ*” (*p286*). The following quote is the entire paragraph where they discuss Matthew 24:20. Listen to it carefully:

So concerned was Christ for the sacredness of the Sabbath that when he spoke about the persecution to take place after his ascension, he counseled his disciples regarding it. “Pray,” he said, “that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath” (*Matt 24:20*). This clearly implied, as Jonathan Edwards noted, “that even then Christians were bound to a strict observance of the Sabbath.”

The **SDA** leaders are speaking in a *round-a-bout* manner here. They’re putting two thoughts in the reader’s mind; yet they refuse to come right out and state clearly either one, or both. By this, the reader must draw his own conclusion after the paragraph is read. Here are the two thoughts that they’re leaving you with: (1) Don’t run on the Sabbath so you can keep it. (2) Don’t run on the Sabbath because you’ll desecrate that “sacred” day. Read their paragraph again. This is what they leave you with. Is it so the disciples can keep it? or, Is