

Matthew 24:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

Analysis

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day (προσεύχεσθε δὲ ἵνα μὴ γένηται ἡ φυγὴ ὑμῶν χειμῶνος μηδὲ σαββάτω)—The imperative προσεύχομαι (proseuchomai, "pray") commands petition regarding circumstances of escape. Winter (χειμών, cheimōn) brings cold, rain, and swollen rivers, making mountain travel treacherous. The sabbath (σάββατον) presented different challenges: Jews limited travel to a "sabbath day's journey" (~2,000 cubits, about 3/5 mile), and city gates were closed.

This reveals:

1. Prayer influences providential timing—God cares about practical details.
2. Jesus assumes Jewish Christians would still observe sabbath restrictions decades later, showing continuity with Mosaic law's ethical dimensions.
3. Even in sovereignty, God invites prayer that affects outcomes.

The early church's escape during Cestius Gallus's unexpected withdrawal (not winter, not sabbath) may well have been answer to this very prayer.

Historical Context

Judean winters (December-February) brought temperatures near freezing in mountains, with heavy rain making roads muddy and rivers dangerous. The siege of Jerusalem occurred April-September AD 70 (not winter). The brief escape window under Cestius (AD 66) also wasn't winter. Regarding sabbath: Jewish

authorities enforced strict sabbath regulations. Fleeing on sabbath would have attracted hostile attention and been physically difficult with closed gates.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does this command to pray about logistical details teach about God's concern for physical as well as spiritual needs?
2. How can believers balance preparation/planning with trust in God's providence?
3. Does Jesus's assumption of continued sabbath observance have implications for how Christians view Old Testament law today?

Interlinear Text

προσεύχεσθε	δὲ	ἴνα	μὴ	γένηται	ἡ	φυγὴ	ὑμῶν
pray ye	But	G2443	G3361	be	G3588	flight	your
G4336	G1161			G1096		G5437	G5216

χειμῶνος	μηδὲ	ἐν	σαββάτῳ
in the winter	neither	on	the sabbath day
G5494	G3366	G1722	G4521

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 16:29 (Parallel theme): See, for that the LORD hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.