

Acts 23:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

Analysis

The nephew warns **there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men**, describing an anathema (ἀνάθεμα) oath: **bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him**. This self-cursing vow invoked divine judgment if unfulfilled—a practice rooted in Numbers 30 and Deuteronomy 23. The conspirators' fanaticism mirrors later sicarii (dagger-men) terrorism. Their murderous intent violated the Sixth Commandment while claiming religious devotion, exposing how tradition can corrupt conscience (Mark 7:13).

Historical Context

First-century Palestine saw numerous zealot groups willing to assassinate perceived enemies of Israel. These 'forty men' likely included temple police or zealots. Their plot failed, but such fanaticism eventually contributed to the Jewish War (AD 66-70).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How can religious conviction become divorced from moral truth, leading to violence?
2. What safeguards protect against confusing human tradition with God's will?

Interlinear Text

σὺ	οὖν	μὴ	πεισθῆς	αὐτόν	ἐνεδρεύουσιν	γὰρ	αὐτόν	
thou	But	not	do	him	there lie in wait for	for	him	
G4771	G3767	G3361	G3982	G846	G1748	G1063	G846	
ἐξ	αὐτόν	ἄνδρες	πλείους	τεσσαράκοντα	οἵτινες			
of	him	men	more than	forty	which			
G1537	G846	G435	G4119	G5062	G3748			
ἀνεθεμάτισαν	ἐαυτοὺς	μήτε	φαγεῖν	μήτε	πιεῖν	ἕως	οὗ	
have bound	themselves	neither	eat	neither	drink	till		G3739
G332	G1438	G3383	G5315	G3383	G4095	G2193		
ἀνέλωσιν	αὐτόν	καὶ	νῦν	ἔτοιμοι	εἰσιν	προσδεχόμενοι		
they have killed	him	and	now	ready	are they	looking for		
G337	G846	G2532	G3568	G2092	G1526	G4327		
τὴν	ἀπὸ	σοῦ	ἐπαγγελίαν					
from	thee	a promise						
G3588	G575	G4675	G1860					

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 23:2 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment:
