

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 ἔαυτοὺς μήτε φαγεῖν μήτε πιεῖν ἔως οὐ
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: