

Matthew 12:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

Analysis

'Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.' The Pharisees' response to Jesus's merciful sabbath healing is murderous plot. The verse exposes the depth of their spiritual darkness: confronted with compassionate miracle demonstrating Christ's divine authority, they don't worship but conspire to kill. The phrase 'held a council' (συμβούλιον ἐλάβον/symboulion elabon) indicates formal deliberation—premeditated murder, not passionate outburst. Their motive: Jesus threatened their religious system, authority, and interpretation of Torah. Reformed theology recognizes this as demonstrating total depravity's frightening depths: even religious experts, steeped in Scripture, can become Christ's enemies when self-righteousness hardens hearts. The irony is tragic: they're about to violate 'Thou shalt not kill' while claiming zeal for God's law. This also marks an escalation: opposition moves from criticism to assassination plot. Jesus continues ministering (v.15) despite knowing their intent—model of faithfulness regardless of danger.

Historical Context

This is the first explicit plot to kill Jesus recorded in Matthew, though John mentions earlier attempts (John 5:18). The Pharisees partnered with Herodians (Mark 3:6)—normally opposed groups united against Jesus. Herodians were Jews supporting Herod's dynasty and Roman collaboration; Pharisees opposed Roman rule and Herodian corruption. Yet both felt threatened by Jesus—He undermined both religious and political establishments. The 'council' (συμβούλιον/symboulion)

was informal plotting, distinct from formal Sanhedrin trial (though Pharisees had Sanhedrin representation). Jewish law prohibited capital punishment without Roman approval (John 18:31), so they'd need either Roman cooperation or mob violence to kill Jesus. This plot wouldn't succeed immediately—Jesus's ministry continued over a year—but their determination never wavered, culminating in crucifixion. Church history shows similar patterns: religious authorities often persecute genuine reformers and prophets threatening their power. Jesus warned His followers to expect the same treatment (Matthew 10:17-25).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How can religious people so committed to God's law become murderous toward God's Son—what spiritual dynamics produce this?
2. What does the Pharisees' plot reveal about dangers of prioritizing religious system over encountering God Himself?
3. How should Christians respond when faithful ministry provokes hostile opposition from religious authorities?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	Φαρισαῖοι	συμβούλιον	ἔλαβον	κατ'	αὐτὸν
G3588	Then	the Pharisees	a council	and held	against	him
	G1161	G5330	G4824	G2983	G2596	G846
ἐξελθόντες	ὥπως	αὐτὸν	ἀπολέσωσιν			
went out	how	him	they might destroy			
G1831	G3704	G846	G622			

Additional Cross-References

John 11:53 (Parallel theme): Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

Mark 3:6 (Resurrection): And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

John 10:39 (Parallel theme): Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand,

John 5:18 (Parallel theme): Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

Luke 6:11 (Parallel theme): And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.