

Cutting of a Different Cloth (1 Sam. 24)

1. The Surprise Visitation (v.1-3)

- After departing from En Gedi (23:26-29) to defeat the Philistines, Saul returns to the same region with 3,000 of his “chosen” soldiers (Judg. 20:16, 34). He not only has elite soldiers, but also outnumbers David’s men 5:1.
- David remains hidden in the wilderness of En Gedi, which is on the western shores of the Dead Sea. In this area there are an oasis of fresh springs, rich pasture, rocky cliffs, and caves. In one of these caves, close to the Wildgoats’ Rocks, David and his men are taking refuge, unbeknownst to Saul.
- In this location there is a sheepfold that surrounds the mouth of the cave; caves offered natural protection for both sheep and shepherd in the wilderness.
- Saul and his men set up camp somewhere around this entrance, and Saul enters the cave to “relieve himself.”
- This Hebrew word is a euphemism for defecation (Judg. 3:15-26). Additionally, the Torah prohibited people from “exposing” themselves within the confines of the camp (Deut. 23:12-13).
- While Saul is “taking care of business,” David and his men are in the inner recesses of the cave, hiding. Out of all the caves at En Gedi, Saul chooses to relieve himself in the same cave where David and his men are. Saul is unaware of David’s presence.

2. The Suggested Action (v.4)

- David and his men are somehow aware that Saul has entered the cave and is alone. Considering this providential arrangement, David’s men encourage him to kill Saul.
- The Hebrew can either mean “today, the LORD is telling you that He has given your enemy into your hand” or “the LORD has told you that you can do whatever you want when He delivers your enemy into your hand.” In the former rendering, they are reminding and informing David of God’s providence given the situation: it is obvious that the LORD wants David to kill Saul. In the latter rendering, they put a twist on the LORD’s words to David at Keilah (23:4), thus equating both the Philistines and Saul as David’s enemies. While David has never called Saul his enemy, Saul was the enemy of David’s men.
- David’s men use technical language of “giving him over” (v.4) which is a common connotation in the Old Testament that refers to the abandonment of one party to the power of another (Ex. 23:31; Numb. 21:34; Deut. 7:2; Josh. 1:2-4; 2:24; 10:19; 11:8; 21:44; 24:11). They are convinced that this unique situation is ordained by God, and as a result, David must seize the opportunity. His men, however, may have ulterior motives since they are distressed, discouraged and in debt; when Saul is eliminated, so is any record of their offenses.
- How could David have cut Saul’s royal robe without Saul seeing him, hearing the tearing, or feeling the tension? Either Saul was “in the zone,” or, he took off his robe prior to taking care of his business.

3. The Sacred Anointed (v.5-7)

- Instead of killing Saul, as his men suggested, David cut off a piece of Saul’s robe without being noticed.
- David was convicted and “cut to the heart” after cutting Saul’s robe because he perceived his actions as violent and self-promoting. David has a special reverence

for the LORD's anointed. In David's eyes, this "symbolic move" of cutting the robe was an act of violence to the king. He was prematurely usurping the throne and exhibiting a failure to trust in the LORD.

- Saul, as the anointed king, is still king and God's property; David had no right to insert himself. David knows that he nearly succumbed to selfish ambition and motives, along with peer pressure from his men. If the LORD anointed two kings, the LORD must work out the details.
- David restrained himself because: Saul is still the LORD's anointed king (10:1), he would have violated the sixth commandment "you shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13) and also broken the injunction of cursing his rulers (Ex. 22:28). He may have been familiar with the LORD's punishments for those who rebelled against constituted authorities (Num. 12:2-15; 16:1-35).
- When David returned with the piece of Saul's robe, his men wanted to kill Saul. While David may have been somewhat pressured by his men who had given up everything to follow him, David "tore into his men" (v.7) by threatening them. David protected Saul from imminent death.

4. The Spirit of Reconciliation (v.8-22)

David's Reverence (v.8-15):

- As Saul departs from the cave, David follows, and calls out to Saul. He bows his head to the ground and addresses him as his "lord and king." David has given up every element of surprise and is at the mercy of Saul:
 - Providence (v.10a): "The LORD has given you into my hands."
 - Opportunism (v.10b): "My men told me to kill you."
 - Restraint (10c): "I spared you."
- Proof of David's loyalty to the king and reverence for the LORD is Saul's torn robe. This cutting of the robe symbolizes a torn kingdom (1 Sam. 15:27-28) while the placing of a garment before a newly anointed king could signify one's submission to him (1 Sam. 18:4; 2 Kgs. 9:13). This piece of royal robe signified a transfer of power from the house of Saul to the house of David (15:27-28; 18:4; 19:24). Additionally, David refashioned Saul's robe into a state of non-compliance with the Torah requirements (Num. 15:38; Deut. 22:12).
- David calls Saul his "father." While he is the son-in-law, the narrator informs us that he has replaced Jonathan as the heir to the throne.
- David has successfully proven that he is no threat to Saul, despite those feeding him false information about David.

Saul's Realization (v.16-22):

- Saul does immediately recognize David, either because of the distance between them, or because David's head is on the ground (v.8). Instead of referring to David as "son of Jesse" (20:27, 31; 22:13), Saul calls him "David, my son."
- Once Saul realizes that it was David, he wept (v.16). This weeping is not one of brokenness over sin, but instead because of his failed kingdom. This is evident through his acknowledgment and request, and lack of genuine repentance (26:1-2).
- While Saul verbally acknowledges that David will be the next king (v.20), he will not concede immediately. Instead, he requests that David protect his lineage. Jonathan and David have already entered this covenant (20:42).