

Bite Size Bible Study

David Spares Saul's Life #201

By Pastor Lee

Most of us have read this passage before, but do we really understand all the implications of David's actions?

David Spares Saul's Life

24 After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the **Desert of En Gedi**." ² So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Craggs of the Wild Goats.

³ He came to the **sheep pens** along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to **relieve himself**. David and his men were far back in the cave. ⁴ The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and **cut off a corner of Saul's robe**.

⁵ Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶ He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." ⁷ With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸ Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹ He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" ¹⁰ This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the **LORD's anointed**.' ¹¹ See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹² May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. ¹³ As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

¹⁴ "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?" ¹⁵ May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

{Read Saul's response in verses 16-22}

1 Samuel 24:1-15 NIV

Desert of En Gedi

Where do we find David and his men? Answer: In the desert of En Gedi, which lies about midway down the Dead Sea on the western shore. Qumran is north and Masada to the south. Jerusalem is about 35 miles northwest from here.

sheep pens

This area has high cliffs on the western edge and is riddled with caves where sheep pens and the caves provide shelter for the flocks. A spring provides ample year-round water for the animals and plenty of grazing area. The sheep are protected at night and during the hot time of the day by the caves.

relieve himself

The Hebrew reads "to cover his feet" which is an idiom for relieving his bowels.

cut off a corner of Saul's robe

This phrase has so many connotations. I'll try to cover a couple of them.

The Hebrew word, used here, is *me'il*, which can mean mantle, cloak, or robe. The word used for corner is *kanaph*, which has multiple related meanings. Literally it means "wing", but that can be the wing of a bird, a garment, a building, or a flap of earth. The meaning that seems to fit best here is "wing or edge" of a garment.

Now what was the edge of Saul's garment?

Like the elaborately decorated hem on the high priest's garments (Ex 28:33-34), Saul's robe would also have had a distinctive fringe or design marking him as the king. It symbolized his power and authority.

Another possibility is that the corners of his garment had a tassel or *tzitzit*. In antiquity, the *tzitzit* became an insignia of authority, high breeding, and nobility. By adding the blue woolen cord to the *tzitzit*, the Torah combined nobility with priesthood.

Adonai said to Moshe: "Speak to the people of Isra'el, instructing them to make, through all their generations, tzitziyot on the corners of their garments, and to put with the tzitzit on each corner a blue thread.
Num 15:36-38 CJB

The primary purpose of this command is to remind the daily practitioner to bring God's love into action by practicing all the 613 commands. This command from Numbers is included in daily prayer as the final paragraph of the *Shema*.

By cutting the corner of Saul's robe, David was symbolically assaulting the king's authority to reign.

One way to view this is that David damaged the king's outer garment thus showing contempt for Saul being in the office of the king.

Another way to see it is that David was prophetically removing Saul as the king of Israel.

And if it was the tzitzit that David removed, he was showing that Saul was not following the 613 commands and acting like the king he was anointed to be.

Finally, maybe since Saul was trying to kill David it was just a way to show Saul that he, David, was able to kill Saul if and when he wanted to.

David knew that he had been anointed to be the next king. It is difficult to know exactly what was going through his head at that moment. This may have been a test to see what David would do to become king. Would he wait for God or take it for himself? Would he succumb

to the same temptation that Adam and Eve faced with the Tree of Good and Evil, or would he trust God.

What we do see, is that David succumbed to the temptation but was quickly pricked by his conscience and regretted his actions.

He recognized that Saul had been anointed by God as the king and that his, David's, actions were against God's will. David was to become king but only in God's timing. David's action was usurping God and that was a wrong attitude and wrong actions.

How often do we see something that we feel God wants for us but fail to see that God's timing is more important than getting it now?

God's timing is impeccable. It allows events to happen in an orderly manner. The side effect is that it teaches us patience and a reverence for God's plan.

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