
1SAMUEL 24: 1 When Saul was returned from following the Philistines, it was told him, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of En Gedi."

Saul is informed that David is at En-gedi, and goes to seek him with three thousand men, 1Sam 24:1, 1Sam 24:2. He goes into a cave to repose, where David and his men lay hid; who, observing this, exhort David to take away his life: David refuses, and contents himself with privily cutting off Saul's skirt, 1Sam 24:3-7. When Saul departed, not knowing what was done, David called after him; showed him that his life had been in his power; expostulates strongly with him; and appeals to God, the Judge of his innocence, 1Sam 24:8-15. Saul confesses David's uprightness, acknowledges his obligation to him for sparing his life; and causes him to swear that, when he should come to the kingdom, he would not destroy his seed, 1Sam 24:17-21. Saul returns home, and David and his men stay in the hold, 1Sam 24:22.

Verse 1

Saul was returned - It is very probable that it was only a small marauding party that had made an excursion in the Israelitish borders, and this invasion was soon suppressed.

1SAMUEL 24: 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the rocks of the wild goats.

Verse 2

Rocks of the wild goats - The original (צורי היעלים) *tsurey haiyeelim* is variously understood. The Vulgate makes a paraphrase: *Super abruptissimas petras quae solis ibicibus perviae sunt*; "On the most precipitous rocks over which the ibexes alone can travel." The Targum: the caverns of the rocks. The Septuagint make the original a proper name; for out of צרוי היעלים *tsurey haiyeelim*, they make Σαδδαιεμ *Saddaiem*, and in some copies Αειαιμειν *Aeiamein*, which are evidently corruptions of the Hebrew.

1SAMUEL 24: 3 He came to the sheep pens by the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were abiding in the innermost parts of the cave.

Verse 3

The sheep-cotes - Caves in the rocks, in which it is common, even to the present time, for shepherds and their flocks to lodge. According to Strabo there are caverns in Syria, one of which is capable of containing four thousand men: Ων ἐν και τετρακισχλι ο υ ς ανθρωπους δεξασθαι δυναμενον; lib. xvi. p. 1096. Edit. 1707.

Saul went in to cover his feet - Perhaps this phrase signifies exactly what the Vulgate has rendered it, *ut purparet ventrem*. The Septuagint, the Targum, and the Arabic understand it in the same way. It is likely that, when he had performed this act of necessity, he lay down to repose himself, and it

was while he was asleep that David cut off the skirt of his robe. It is strange that Saul was not aware that there might be men lying in wait in such a place; and the rabbins have invented a most curious conceit to account for Saul's security: "God, foreseeing that Saul would come to this cave, caused a spider to weave her web over the mouth of it, which, when Saul perceived, he took for granted that no person had lately been there, and consequently he entered it without suspicion." This may be literally true; and we know that even a spider in the hand of God may be the instrument of a great salvation. This is a Jewish tradition, and one of the most elegant and instructive in their whole collection.

David and his men remained in the sides of the cave - This is no hyperbole; we have not only the authority of Strabo as above mentioned, but we have the authority of the most accurate travelers, to attest the fact of the vast capacity of caves in the East.

Dr. Pococke observes: "Beyond the valley (of Tekoa) there is a very large grotto, which the Arabs call El Maamah, a hiding place; the high rocks on each side of the valley are almost perpendicular, and the way to the grotto is by a terrace formed in the rock, which is very narrow. There are two entrances into it; we went by the farthest, which leads by a narrow passage into a large grotto, the rock being supported by great natural pillars; the top of it rises in several parts like domes; the grotto is perfectly dry. There is a tradition that the people of the country, to the number of thirty thousand, retired into this grotto to avoid a bad air. This place is so strong that one would imagine it to be one of the strong holds of En-gedi, to which David and his men fled from Saul; and possibly it may be that very cave in which he cut off Saul's skirt, for David and his men might with great ease lie hid there and not be seen by him." - Pococke's Travels, vol. ii., part 1, p. 41.

1SAMUEL 24: 4 The men of David said to him, "Behold, the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe secretly.

Verse 4

And the men of David said - We know not to what promise of God the men of David refer; they perhaps meant no more than to say, "Behold, the Lord hath delivered thine enemy into thy land, now do to him as he wishes to do to thee."

Then David arose - Though I have a high opinion of the character of David, yet the circumstances of the case seem to indicate that he arose to take away the life of Saul, and that it was in reference to this that his heart smote him. It appears that he rose up immediately at the desire of his men to slay his inveterate enemy, and one whom he knew the Lord had rejected; but when about to do it he was prevented by the remonstrance of God in his conscience, and instead of cutting off his head, as he might have done, an act which the laws and usages of war would have justified, he contented himself with cutting off the skirt of his robe; and he did this only to show Saul how much he had been in his power.

1SAMUEL 24: 5 Afterward, David's heart struck him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

1SAMUEL 24: 6 He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed."

 Verse 6

The Lord's anointed - However unworthily Saul was now acting, he had been appointed to his high office by God himself, and he could only be removed by the authority which placed him on the throne. Even David, who knew he was appointed to reign in his stead, and whose life Saul had often sought to destroy, did not conceive that he had any right to take away his life; and he grounds the reasons of his forbearance on this - He is my master, I am his subject. He is the Lord's anointed, and therefore sacred as to his person in the Lord's sight. It is an awful thing to kill a king, even the most untoward, when he has once been constitutionally appointed to the throne. No experiment of this kind has ever succeeded; the Lord abhors king killing. Had David taken away the life of Saul at this time, he would, in the sight of God, have been a murderer.

1SAMUEL 24: 7 So David checked his men with these words, and didn't allow them to rise against Saul. Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.

Verse 7

Suffered them not to rise against Saul - As he could restrain them, it was his duty to do so; had he connived at their killing him, David would have been the murderer. In praying for the king we call God the only Ruler of princes, for this simple reason, that their authority is the highest among men, and next to that of God himself; hence he alone is above them. We find this sentiment well expressed by an elegant poet: -

Regum timendorum in proprios greges,

Reges in ipsos imperium est Jovis.

Horace, Odar. lib. iii., Od. i., ver. 5.

Kings are supreme over their own subjects;

Jove is supreme over kings themselves.

1SAMUEL 24: 8 David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!"

When Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth, and showed respect.

1SAMUEL 24: 9 David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to men's words, saying, 'Behold, David seeks your hurt?'"

1SAMUEL 24: 10 Behold, this day your eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered you today into my hand in the cave. Some urged me to kill you; but I spared you; and I said, I will not stretch out my hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed.

1SAMUEL 24: 11 Moreover, my father, behold, yes, see the skirt of your robe in my hand; for in that I cut off the skirt of your robe, and didn't kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor disobedience in my hand, and I have not sinned against you, though you hunt for my life to take it.

1SAMUEL 24: 12 May the LORD judge between me and you, and may the LORD avenge me of you; but my hand shall not be on you.

Verse 12

The Lord judge between me and thee - Appeals of this kind to God are the common refuge of the poor and oppressed people. So also among the Hindoos: God will judge between us. Mother Kalee will judge. Sometimes this springs from a consciousness of innocence, and sometimes from a desire of revenge.

1SAMUEL 24: 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness;' but my hand shall not be on you.

Verse 13

Wickedness proceeded from the wicked - This proverb may be thus understood: He that does a wicked act, gives proof thereby that he is a wicked man. From him who is wicked, wickedness will proceed; he who is wicked will add one iniquity to another. Had I conspired to dethrone thee, I should have taken thy life when it was in my power, and thus added wickedness to wickedness.

1SAMUEL 24: 14 Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?

Verse 14

After a dead dog - A term used among the Hebrews to signify the most sovereign contempt; see 2Sam 16:9. One utterly incapable of making the least resistance against Saul, and the troops of Israel. The same idea is expressed in the term flea. The Targum properly expresses both thus: one who is weak, one who is contemptible.

1SAMUEL 24: 15 May the LORD therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of your hand."

Verse 15

The Lord therefore be judge - Let God determine who is guilty.

1SAMUEL 24: 16 It came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Saul lifted up his voice, and wept.

Verse 16

My son David? - David had called Saul his master, lord, and king. Saul accosts him here as his son, to show that he felt perfectly reconciled to him, and wished to receive him as formerly into his family.

1SAMUEL 24: 17 He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have done good to me, whereas I have done evil to you.

1SAMUEL 24: 18 You have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, because when the LORD had delivered me up into your hand, you didn't kill me.

1SAMUEL 24: 19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away unharmed? Therefore may the LORD reward you good for that which you have done to me this day.

Verse 19

If a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? - Or rather, Will he send him in a good way? But Houbigant translates the whole clause thus: *Si quis, inimicum suum reperiens, dimittit eum in viam bonam, redditur ei adomino sua merces;* "If a man, finding his enemy, send him by a good way, the Lord will give him his reward." The words which are here put in italic, are not in the Hebrew text, but they are found, at least in the sense, in the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic, and seem necessary to complete the sense; therefore, adds Saul, the Lord will reward thee good for what thou hast done unto me.

1SAMUEL 24: 20 Now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.

Verse 20

I know well that thou shalt surely be king - Hebrew, Reigning, thou shalt reign. He knew this before; and yet he continued to pursue him with the most deadly hatred.

1SAMUEL 24: 21 Swear now therefore to me by the LORD, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house."

Verse 21

Swear now - Saul knew that an oath would bind David, though it was insufficient to bind himself; see 1Sam 19:6. He had sworn to his son Jonathan that David should not be slain; and yet sought by all means in his power to destroy him!

1SAMUEL 24: 22 David swore to Saul. Saul went home; but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Verse 22

Saul went home - Confounded at a sense of his own baseness, and overwhelmed with a sense of David's generosity.

David and his men gat them up unto the hold - Went up to Mizpeh, according to the Syriac and Arabic. David could not trust Saul with his life; the utmost he could expect from him was that he should cease from persecuting him; but even this was too much to expect from a man of such a character as Saul. He was no longer under the Divine guidance; an evil spirit had full dominion over his soul. What God fills not, the devil will occupy.