There are two main points of discussion in relation to these verses, viz. the meaning of wayešassac in v. 8, and the arrangement of vv. 5-8. This short article will discuss both questions.

The section describes how David and Saul came unexpectedly close in a cave near En-gedi where David and his men had been hiding. Spurred on by his companions David rose, as if convinced by their argument for killing Saul on the spot, but instead of dealing the king a deadly blow he merely cut off the skirt of his robe. Even this comparatively trivial act, however, brought him pangs of conscience for having put forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed. The editorial comment is that, in reminding his men of Saul’s sacrosanct status, David “‘cleft his men with words and did not permit them to rise up against Saul’ (v. 8). “David cleft his men with words’ is a literal rendering of the MT wayešassac dâwdîr ðet-ðanâšâyw baddebirim, but because of this singular use in Biblical Hebrew of šiisac the expression has had its share of indifferent treatment at the hands of translators and commentators, some of whom have concluded with BDB (p. 1042) that the MT ‘gives too violent a meaning’.

The ancient versions were obviously in difficulties, with translations ranging from “‘persuaded’” (LXX, Targum) to “‘deceived’” (Theodotion). Only Aquila and Jerome (Vulg. confregit) venture
anything like a literal rendering. Several emendations have been tried in the modern period but none of the forms proposed is sufficiently close to the MT to be persuasive. Nor has G. R. Driver's attempted homonymic explanation met with much enthusiasm. In a short article entitled, "Two Forgotten Words in the Hebrew Language", *JTS* 28 (1927), pp. 285-6, he argued for a second Hebrew verb šāsać, cognate with the Akkadian šasû, "to call". But "David called (or "summoned") his men with words" is not a satisfactory reward for augmenting the stock of Hebrew verbs by one. Even if *baddebarim* were regarded as a gloss the sense yielded is still poor.

J. Wellhausen wisely eschewed emendation on the ground that the presence of *baddebarim* showed that šāsać is here used figuratively. Presumably this is the view reflected in most modern English Bible translations, though there is sometimes room for doubt: "persuaded" (*Revised Standard Version*), "gave strict instructions" (*Jerusalem Bible*), "restrained" (*New American Bible*), "reproved severely" (*New English Bible*), "rebuked" (*New International Version*). In any case, whatever the previous uncertainties, there are good reasons for seeing in *wayešassac* the ordinary Hebrew verb šāsać, used with a figurative sense.

(i) There is a kind of parallel to this use of šāsać in Hos. vi 5:

> Therefore I have hewn (חָשַׁבְתִּי) them by the prophets,
> I have slain them (חרֵגְתִּים) by the words of my mouth.

Despite the fact that Hosea has proved too colourful for some modern interpreters, there is no reason to query the text, and 1 Sam. xxiv 8 might even be cited in support of it. Hosea's bicolon presents a figurative use of "hew" and "slay" similar to the occurrence of "cleave" in the Samuel reference.

(ii) This figurative use of šāsać may correspond to the occurrences of the Greek δισχοτομεῖν in the Q parallels at Matt. xxiv 51 and Luke xii 46. The passages in question describe the fate of the wicked servant who, in his master's absence, takes to beating his fellow-servants: his master will come unexpectedly and, having "dichotomized" him, will appoint his place with the hypocrites.

---

4 *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis untersucht* (Göttingen, 1871), p. 130.