

1 Samuel 16:14-23

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/1sam/1sam-16/1-samuel-1614-23/>

God solidifies His rejection of Saul as king over Israel by removing His Spirit from him and sending a tormenting spirit upon the king.

After *David* had been anointed by Samuel, *the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.* The Hebrew word for *evil* here is “ra” and does not always speak of moral wickedness. In its basic definition it can mean “bad, ill favored, calamity or trouble.” *God* does this knowing that *Saul* will call for *David* and come to rely upon him and eventually envy him. *David*, besides being a proper name, is a common noun in Hebrew that means “beloved” and is a title given to Jesus, as God’s beloved Son.

No doubt this *terrorizing spirit* made *Saul* and everyone around him miserable. So, *Saul’s servants then said to him, “Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you.* The *servants of Saul* had a correct diagnosis. In addition to having the correct diagnosis of *Saul’s* malady, they also offered a providential solution. They introduced their recommended solution by saying *Let our lord now command your servants who are before you.* Asking *Saul* to *command* them was a clever way to make a recommendation. It might be like leading someone to think a solution is their idea.

The *command Saul’s servants* ask to be given is to *let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well.* The idea is to find a skilled musician to sooth *Saul’s spirit.* *Saul* liked the idea and fell for the “this is now my idea” suggestion. *So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me now a man who can play well and bring him to me.”*

In ancient times musical instruments and those who played them were seen as being endowed with spiritual powers. We know from archaeology that Greeks, Canaanites, and Israelites all made extensive use of playing the lyre. Though like the harp, the lyre has several features that distinguish it from a harp. More than likely *David* played the lyre, which was common in Jewish culture. Below is a seal found in Jerusalem depicting a Middle Eastern lyre.



One of *Saul's servants* speaks up and says that he has *seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician*. This of course is *David*, and we can see *God's hand at work*. The *servant* adds however that *David* is also *a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him*. These attributes with which *Saul's servant* describes *David* are not usually all gifted upon one individual.

The *servant* observed that *David* was a *mighty man of valor* as well as a *warrior*. A *mighty man of valor*, or a *warrior* would not typically have time to become a *skillful musician*. *Warriors* might be expected to be brutish in their *speech*, yet *David* is called *prudent in speech*. Likewise, a great *warrior* might not be expected to be *handsome*, but *David* is said to be a *handsome man*. Many imagine *David* as a young boy at this point in the Bible. However, it is clear from this description that while *David* might be a young man, he is certainly not a young boy. Upon hearing of *David's* qualifications, *Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David who is with the flock."*

It is interesting that *Saul* appears to have accepted the fact that *God* has rejected him as king. *Samuel* told *Saul* this was the case after he disobeyed *God* in the prior chapter, saying "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:23). *Saul* also accepts the word of his *servants*, that *God* had sent this *evil spirit*. He doesn't seem to consider repentance, prayer, or even sacrifice as a means to petition *God* to remove this *evil spirit*, even though he knows it is *from God*. Instead, *Saul* sets his hope on *David* being a *skillful musician* to alleviate his condition.

When *Jesse* received *Saul's* request, he *took a donkey loaded with bread and a jug of wine and a young goat and sent them to Saul by David his son*. *Jesse* is deferential to the king and sends gifts as well as sending his *son*. Perhaps at this point *Jesse* has begun to realize that *David* is something special.

David came to Saul and attended him; and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer. Being given the position of *armor bearer* signifies that *Saul* trusted *David* with his life. It also confirms that *Saul* agreed with the *servant* who recommended *David*, that he also found *David* to be a valiant *warrior*.

Saul, wishing to keep *David* with him long term *sent a message to Jesse saying, "Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight."* *David's* duty before the king was that *whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp (or lyre) and play it with his hand*. *David* would go into the presence of *Saul* and give him a private concert. Since *David* was also an *armor bearer*, it seems likely that *David* was also busy with other tasks on *Saul's* behalf when his musical services were not necessary.

When *David* would *play music*, then *Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him*. Later in the New Testament, *Jesus*, the seed of *David*, would also drive out *evil spirits*. It is somewhat ironic how *God* allows *Saul* to get to know *David*, and to see the *Spirit* of favor, blessing, and protection that *God* has placed on him without being aware that *David* has been anointed king in his place. But *Saul*, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, eventually suspects that *God* has chosen *David* as king, who was from the tribe of Judah.

Saul knew Samuel had pronounced that *God* had rejected him as king. However, he did not know that Samuel had anointed *David* to be king. From the text, we are not certain that *David* knew at this time that the anointing he had received from Samuel was intended to make him king (although *God* and Samuel knew). *David* was anointed later, when he was made king after the death of *Saul* (2 Samuel 1:7). This would indicate that Samuel's anointing made *David* king before *God*, but *David* was later anointed to take possession of the throne. This, again, pictures the two advents of Jesus, first to come as a spiritual leader and servant, then to return again to possess the throne.

Perhaps *Saul* was familiar with the messianic prophecy Jacob proclaimed over his son Judah a few centuries earlier,

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*.”
(Genesis 49:10)

We will see that *Saul* will become envious and begin to persecute *David* and will try to kill him (1 Samuel 18:9). *Saul* also was afraid of *David*, because the Lord's *Spirit* was with *David* but had departed from him (1 Samuel 18:12). This could picture the first advent of Jesus, the *Son* of *David*. Jesus was persecuted during His earthly ministry (Romans 8:17b). Roughly 1000 years after the time of King *Saul*, another Benjamite named *Saul* would persecute Jesus, the son of *David*. Jesus told *Saul* of Tarsus, “Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4). Jesus suffered and died, and as a result of His obedience, even to death, His name was exalted above every name (Philippians 2:5-10). Jesus was anointed king of the entire earth (Matthew 28:18). However, like *David*, there is a time lag between Jesus' anointing and the time when He will take possession of the throne and rule the earth. So far it has been almost two thousand years, and counting.

Biblical Text

14 Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. 15 Saul's servants then said to him, “Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. 16 Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play *the harp* with his hand, and you will be well.” 17 So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me now a man who can play well and bring *him* to me.” 18 Then one of the young men said, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him.” 19 So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, “Send me your son David who is with the flock.” 20 Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread and a jug of wine and a young goat, and sent *them* to Saul by David his son. 21 Then David came to Saul and attended him; and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer. 22 Saul sent to Jesse, saying, “Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight.” 23 So it came about whenever the *evil spirit* from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play *it* with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him.