Research: David plays the harp for Saul

I Sam 16:14-19, 23

14¶ But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

“*The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul —*Which came upon him when he was first made king, and continued with him till this time, but which God now took away, depriving him of that prudence, courage, and alacrity, and other gifts wherewith he had qualified him for his public employment. . . *Troubled him —*Stirred up in him unruly passions, such as envy, rage, fear, or despair. Hence, he grew fretful, peevish, and discontented, timorous and suspicious, frequently starting and trembling, as the Hebrew word here used seems to import. He therefore became very unfit for business, being sometimes melancholy, or furious and distracted, and always full of anxiety and solicitude of mind.” (Benson Commentary).

**Troubled** is *bawath* in Hebrew which means “overtook with a sudden terror; fell upon; overwhelmed.”

15And Saul’s servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee.

“The form in which the evil spirit manifested itself in Saul was apparently an incurable melancholy, which at times blazed forth in fits of uncontrollable jealous anger. When Saul’s attendants, his officers, and those about his person, perceived the mental malady

under which their king was evidently suffering, they counselled that he should try whether the evil influence which troubled him could not be charmed away by music” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

16Let our lord now command thy servants, *which are* before thee, to seek out a man, *who is* a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.

“*a cunning player*] “Cunning,” *cunnan*, to know, *ken*, is generally used in the E. V. in its original sense of *knowing, skilful*, without any idea of underhand dealing.  
  
*‘thou shalt be well*] The power of music to restore the harmony of a troubled mind is well known” (Cambridge Bible).

“A cunning player on an harp. Literally, one skillful in striking the chords on the harp. In Saul's case music would have a soothing influence, and turn the current of his thoughts. His officers suggest, therefore, that search should be made for an expert musician, and Saul consents; whereupon one of the servants recommended the son of Jesse. The word used here is not the same as that found in vers. 15, 16, 17. There we have Saul's **officers**; here it is **na'arim**, "young men." Thus, it was a youth of David's own age, who had probably been with him at Naioth in Ramah, that described him to Saul. The description is full and interesting, but it has its difficulties. David is not only skillful in music, of which art he would have had ample scope to manifest his powers in the service of the sanctuary at Ramah, but he is also a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, or, rather, **intelligent in speech** (see margin), as well as handsome and successful” (Pulpit Commentatary).

17And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring *him* to me.

“The effects of music on the mind and body, especially as appeasing anger, and soothing and pacifying a troubled spirit, are well known. It is deeply interesting to have the youthful David thus brought before us, as using music for its highest purpose, that of turning the soul to the harmony of peace and love’ (Barnes’ Notes).

18Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth–lehemite, *that is* cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord *is* with him.

“*one of the servants*] The word here used for “servants” literally means “young men” and probably refers to military attendants: that used in [*1 Samuel 16:15-17*](https://biblehub.com/context/1_samuel/16-15.htm)literally means “slaves” and includes the servants in general.  
  
*“a mighty valiant man*] David had proved his courage while still tending his sheep. See [1 Samuel 17:32-36](https://biblehub.com/context/1_samuel/17-32.htm). “A man of war” describes his capacity and promise rather than actual warlike experience.  
  
*“prudent in matters*] Rather, “skilled in word,” **eloquent.** Possibly he had already composed psalms, but of those which have come down to us only Psalms 8 can be referred to this period, and even that is probably somewhat later. Psalms 19, 23, 29, describing the phenomena of nature, doubtless contain recollections of his shepherd life” (Cambridge Commentary).

“A mighty valiant man ... - David's reputation for courage, skill, discretion, and manly beauty, was already great. Since "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him," his natural qualities and powers had been greatly enhanced. His feat of killing the lion and the bear had been performed, like Samson's feats of strength [Judges 14:6](https://biblehub.com/judges/14-6.htm), [Judges 14:19](https://biblehub.com/judges/14-19.htm); [Judges 15:14](https://biblehub.com/judges/15-14.htm), under the same supernatural influence, and was probably more or less known” (Barnes’ Notes).

19¶ Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which *is* with the sheep.

“Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David—In the East the command of a king is imperative; and Jesse, however reluctant and alarmed, had no alternative but to comply” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

23And it came to pass, when the *evil* spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

“David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well—The ancients believed that music had a mysterious influence in healing mental disorders (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

“that David took an harp, and played with his hands; upon it; and, at the same time sung hymns and psalms; made use both of vocal and instrumental music:

“so, Saul was refreshed, and was well; became cheerful, his grief was removed, his black and gloomy apprehensions of things were dispersed, and he was cured of his melancholy disorder for the present:

“and the evil spirit departed from him: at least for a while” (Gill’s Exposition of the Bible).