

### **I Sam 16: 14-23**

**Saul** seems to be the subject of this episode, with his needs for relief from an “evil spirit” occupying central attention. A young musician named David is brought in to aid him. But the reader, because of the anointing story in vv. 1-13, knows that David is more than just a musician in this story. Saul has brought the future king in to his own court. The key word that sets the theme for this episode is “spirit.” V. 14 reports that “the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul” (v. 14a) and “an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him” (v. 14b). Both Saul and David may have been anointed, but it seems that only one of them may possess the Lord’s Spirit at a time and this be the legitimate anointed one in the eyes of God and on the throne of Israel. The evil spirit that plagues Saul seems to be some sort of affliction that comes and goes, since David’s play can make it depart (v. 23).<sup>1</sup>

The evil spirit here is more than just some ancient code for what we might call sickness or mental illness. Saul is troubled man, and as he people’s king he reflects a troubled Israel. Both Saul and Israel are alienated from God. David is God’s solution for both. The episode in 16:14-23 brings David immediately into the household of Saul, and with healing results. In the longer term, the episode introduces David into the household of Israel with hope for its future well-being. Although the immediate context is Saul’s malady, God’s ultimate plan for Israel in David is recognized and given voice through Saul’s servant, “the Lord is with him” (v. 18).<sup>2</sup>

**16: 14-19** – We have noted that the Lord’s Spirit departs from Saul and that an evil spirit arrives to plague him (v. 1). Possession of God’s Spirit was a sign of Saul’s status as God’s anointed one, and it is now David who possesses God’s Spirit (16:13). By contrast, the evil spirit can come and go repeatedly. We know that Saul, at later points in the story, evidences brooding and melancholy sate fits of anger and rage that issue in violence, and irrational actions that divert him from the needs of his kingdom and finally lead to his own suicide. **That this evil spirit is attributed to God indicates that Saul’s condition has a spiritual dimension.**<sup>3</sup> **He is alienated from God and from the power of God’s Spirit for well-being. All things come from God, but Saul’s actions have cut him off from the well-being that would be available to him in relationship to God.**<sup>4</sup>

**Music is often associated, in both ancient and modern literature, with healing powers. Saul’s servants are certain that music will help to soothe his troubled state, and they suggest a search for a musician skilled on the lyre. Saul accepts the suggestion and commands that his servants “provide for me someone who can play well” (v. 17). Here is the first testimony in the biblical tradition to David as a musician. David’s skills as a musician, singer, and composer of songs become a standard part of the tradition about him. He is called the “beloved singer of Israel” in 2 Sam 23:1 (NIV; The NRSV abandons this reading; see Commentary on 2 Sam 23:1-7). He is**

<sup>1</sup> Leadner. E.Keck, ed. The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. II, I Samuel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1101.

<sup>2</sup> Leadner. E.Keck, ed. The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. II, I Samuel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1102.

<sup>3</sup> Leadner. E.Keck, ed. The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. II, I Samuel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1102.

<sup>4</sup> Leadner. E.Keck, ed. The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. II, I Samuel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1102.

cited as a composer of psalms and patron of music in 2 Sam 6: 5; 1 Chr 6:31; and 16:7-42 and in the superscriptions of more than eighty psalms. Klein cites a reference in the Qumran materials that David wrote 3,600 psalms and 450 songs.<sup>5</sup>

**16: 20-23:** David makes his appearance and enters Saul's service. His role is still largely passive. He is the subject of only two verbs here, "David took the lyre and played it" (v. 23). V. 23 returns to the theme of Saul's illness/evil spirit. When it plagues him then it is indeed David who can lift this oppressive spirit. David is the source of well-being, the possessor of the Lord's Spirit who can drive back evil spirits. The word translated as "relieved" is a verbal form from the same root as "spirit." David not only removes the troubling spirit but also is the source of life and well-being through the Spirit. David provides momentary relief to Saul; he is the longer-term hope for Israel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Leadner. E.Keck, ed. The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. II, I Samuel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1102.

<sup>6</sup> Leadner. E.Keck, ed. The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. II, I Samuel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1103.