

## COMMENTARY – I SAMUEL 16: 23 – Henry, Matthew

### 23. David took a 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.

The Spirit of the LORD was no longer with Saul. In fact, he now had an evil spirit from the LORD that tormented him every now and then. His attendants thought music would help Saul, and they innocently recommended the harp music of David, son of Jesse. Saul liked David so much - his music, his bravery, his fighting skills, his speaking abilities, his appearance, his disposition - that Saul even got Jesse's permission to make David one of his armour-bearers when needed.

Saul is made a terror to himself. The Spirit of the Lord departed from him. If God and his grace do not rule us, sin and Satan will have possession of us. The devil, by the Divine permission, troubled and terrified Saul, by the corrupt humours of his body, and passions of his mind. He grew fretful, peevish, and discontented, and at times a madman.

*The Spirit of the Lord departed from him.* He having forsaken God and his duty, God, in a way of righteous judgment, withdrew from him those assistances of the good Spirit with which he was directed, animated, and encouraged in his government and wars. He lost all his good qualities. This was the effect of his rejecting God, and an evidence of his being rejected by him. Now God took his mercy from Saul (as it is expressed, 2 Sa. 7:15); for, when the Spirit of the Lord departs from us, all good goes. When men grieve and quench the Spirit, by wilful sin, he departs, and will not always strive. The consequence of this was that *an evil spirit from God troubled him*. Those that drive the good Spirit away from the do of course become prey to the evil spirit. If God and his grace do not rule us, sin and Satan will have possession of us. as so The devil, by the divine permission, troubled and terrified Saul, by means of the corrupt humours of his body and passions of his mind. He grew fretful, and peevish, and discontented, timorous and suspicious, ever and anon starting and trembling; he wmetimes, says Josephus, as if he had been choked or strangled, and a perfect demoniac by fits. This made him unfit for business, precipitate in his counsels, the contempt of his enemies, and a burden to all about him.II. Here is David made a physician to Saul, and by this means brought to court, a physician that helped him against the worst of diseases, when none else could. David was newly appointed privately to the kingdom. It would be of use to him to go to court and see the world; and here his doing so is brought about for him without any contrivance of his own or his friends. Note, Those whom God designs for any service his providence shall concur with his grace to prepare and qualify for it. Saul is distempered; his servants have the honesty and courage to tell him what his distemper is (v. 15), *an evil spirit*, not by chance but *from God* and his providence, *troubleth thee*. Now, 1. The means they all advised him to for his relief was music (v. 16): "Let us have a *cunning player on the harp* to attend thee." How much better friends had they been to him if they had advised him, since the evil spirit was from the Lord, to give all diligence to make his peace with God by true repentance, to send for Samuel to pray with him and to intercede with God for him! then might he not only have had some present relief, but the good Spirit would have returned to him. But their project is to make him merry, and so cure him. Many whose consciences are convinced and startled are for ever ruined by such methods as these, which drown all care of the soul in the delights of sense. Yet Saul's servants did not amiss to send for music as a help to cheer up the spirits, if they had but withal sent for a prophet to give him good counsel. And (as bishop Hall observes) it was well they did not send for a witch or diviner, by his enchantments to cast out the evil spirit, which has been the abominably wicked practice of some that have worn the Christian name, who consult the devil in their distresses and make

hell their refuge. It will be no less than a miracle of divine grace if those who thus agree with Satan ever break off from him again. 2. One of his servants recommended David to him, as a fit person to be employed in the use of these means, little imagining that he was the man whom Samuel meant when he told Saul of a neighbour of his, better than he, who should have the kingdom, [ch. 15:28](#) . It is a very high character which the servant of Saul's here gives of David ([v. 18](#)), that he was not only fit for his purpose as a comely person and skilful in playing, but a man of courage and conduct, a mighty valiant man, and prudent in all matters, fit to be further preferred, and (which crowned his character) *the Lord is with him*. By this it appears that though David, after he was anointed, returned to his country business, and there remained on his head no marks of the oil, so careful was he to keep that secret, yet the workings of the Spirit signified by the oil could not be hid, but made him shine in obscurity, so that all his neighbours observed with wonder the great improvements of his mind on a sudden. David, even in his shepherd's garb, has become an oracle, a champion, and every thing that is great. His fame reached the court soon, for Saul was inquisitive after such young men, [ch. 14:52](#) . When the Spirit of God comes upon a man he will make his face to shine. 3. David is hereupon sent for to court. And it seems, (1.) His father was very willing to part with him, sent him very readily, and a present with him to Saul, [v. 20](#). The present was, according to the usage of those times, bread and wine (compare, [ch. 10:3](#), [ch. 10:4](#) ), therefore acceptable because expressive of the homage and allegiance of him that sent it. Probably Jesse, who knew what his son David was designed for, was aware that Providence was herein fitting him for it, and therefore he would not force Providence by sending him to court uncalled, yet he followed Providence very cheerfully when he saw it plainly putting him into the way of preferment. Some suggest that when Jesse received that message, *Send me David thy son*, he began to be afraid that Saul had got some intimation of his being anointed, and sent for him to do him a mischief, and therefore Jesse sent a present to pacify him; but it is probable that the person, whoever he was, that brought the message, gave him an account on what design he was sent for. (2.) Saul became very kind to him ([v. 21](#)), *loved him greatly*, and designed to *make him his armour-bearer*, and (contrary to the manner of the king, [ch. 8:11](#) ) asked his father's leave to keep him in his service ([v. 22](#)): *Let David, I pray thee, stand before me*. And good reason he had to respect him, for he did him a great deal of service with his music, [v. 23](#). Only his instrumental music with his harp is mentioned, but it should seem, by the account Josephus gives, that he added vocal music to it, and sung hymns, probably divine hymns, songs of praise, to his harp. David's music was Saul's physic. [1.] Music has a natural tendency to compose and exhilarate the mind, when it is disturbed and saddened. Elisha used it for the calming of his spirits, 2 Ki. 3:15 . On some it has a greater influence and effect than on others, and, probably, Saul was one of those. Not that it charmed the evil spirit, but it made his spirit sedate, and allayed those tumults of the animal spirits by which the devil had advantage against him. The beams of the sun (it is the learned Bochart's comparison) cannot be cut with a sword, quenched with water, or blown out with wind, but, by closing the window-shutters, they may be kept out of the chamber. Music cannot work upon the devil, but it may shut up the passages by which he has access to the mind. [2.] David's music was extraordinary, and in mercy to him, that he might gain a reputation at court, as one that had the Lord with him. God made his performances in music more successful, in this case, than those of others would have been. Saul found, even after he had conceived an enmity to David, that no one else could do him the same service [ch. 19:9](#), [ch. 19:10](#) ), which was a great aggravation of his outrage against him. It is a pity that music, which may be so serviceable to the good temper of the mind, should ever be abused by any to the support of vanity and luxury, and made an occasion of drawing the heart away from God and serious things: if this be to any the effect of it, it drives away the good Spirit, not the evil spirit.

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David served Saul as a skilled musician. David played his \*harp when the evil spirit came to Saul. As David played, the evil spirit left. It may have left because of the music or because of the Spirit of the \*Lord on David. Saul loved David and depended on him. Later David carried Saul's \*armour to the battles. That showed how much Saul trusted David (Helen Pocock)