

17.03 David Plays His Harp for Saul (1 Samuel 16:14–23)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *lyre*: a small U-shaped harp [explain the difference between the sound and spelling of *liar* and *lyre*.]

Scripture: (ESV)

1 Samuel 16:14 Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. 15 And Saul’s servants said to him, “Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. 16 Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well.” 17 So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me.” 18 One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him.” 19 Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, “Send me David your son, who is with the sheep.” 20 And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul. 21 And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. 22 And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, “Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight.” 23 And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.

Introduction/Review:

David, the shepherd diligently cared for his father’s sheep, but he did have time on his hands out in the lonely fields. What could he do while he watched sheep? Well, he could learn to play the lyre, a small U-shaped harp. If a person wants to learn a musical instrument, that person must practice, practice, practice—hours and hours. David’s situation allowed for hours and hours of practice, and he became quite a good musician.

One day, David was unexpectedly anointed by Samuel to become the next king of Israel. Saul, the present king, had disobeyed God time and again; so God was preparing another king, one who would love and obey Him.

Story:

The evil spirit

While the Spirit of God was rushing upon David, the opposite was happening in Saul’s house. The Spirit of God left him, and the Lord sent an evil spirit upon Saul. ✓Perhaps his condition included getting very depressed or cranky and mean.

The solution

Everyone around Saul could see what was happening to him. “Surely,” they thought, “there must be a way for our king to be comforted.” So Saul’s servants came up with a solution and said to him, “Look, an evil spirit from the Lord troubles you. Find a man who plays the harp well to come so that when the evil spirit from God is on you, that man shall play and calm you down and make you well.”

The harpist

One of the servants noted, “I have seen a son of Jesse, who lives in Bethlehem, who (1) plays well, and (2) he is a mighty valiant man, (3) a man of war,¹ (4) wise, and (5) good-looking, and (6) the Lord is with him.”

So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, saying, “Send me David, your son, who is with the sheep.”

✓Jesse apparently thought his son should not appear before the king without a gift, so he loaded a donkey with bread and a bottle of wine and got a baby goat to send with David for Saul.

David’s harp-playing became Saul’s medication for his ✓bad temper. When an evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David would play his harp, and Saul would feel better. The evil spirit would go away.

Saul was well-pleased with David. The Bible states he loved him greatly and that David became his armor bearer.²

¹“The terming of him ‘a mighty valiant man’ intimates that his single-handed victory over the lion and the bear (1 Sam. 17:37) had already been noised abroad” (A.W. Pink at [3. Entering Saul's Service \(biblebelievers.com\)](#)). But why was David known as a “man of war”? Although nothing in the text before 1 Samuel 17 indicates that he was ever in a battle, arguing from silence ✓one could say he had been drafted by Saul (1 Samuel 14:52). It might be more plausible that strict chronology is not followed in this passage, and “this character of him was given after the affair of his fighting with Goliath and killing him, but here put by a prolepsis or anticipation” (John Gill at [1 Samuel 16:18 - Meaning and Commentary on Bible Verse \(biblestudytools.com\)](#)).

² “[Saul] appointed him to this office, though we never read that he exercised it; nor did he go with Saul in this capacity to the battle related in the following chapter: it may be literally rendered: ‘and he was to him a bearer of vessels’, or ‘instruments’; and Abarbinel thinks this is to be understood not of instruments of war, but of instruments of music to play with; which he brought in and bare before him when he went in to the king (John Gill at [1 Samuel 16:21 - Meaning and Commentary on Bible Verse \(biblestudytools.com\)](#)).

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:

“The coming of the Spirit upon [David] was followed by his having to face the great enemy. Thus it was with David’s Son and Lord, the One whom, in so many respects, he foreshadowed. After the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him at His baptism, Christ was tempted of the devil for forty days. So here: the next thing we read of is David’s being sent to calm Saul who was terrified by an evil spirit, and shortly after that he goes forth to meet Goliath—figure of Satan” (A. W. Pink at [3. Entering Saul's Service \(biblebelievers.com\)](#)).

Activities:

- Play dough: harp
- Snack: Jesse gave a grain gift to Saul. Serve a grain cereal with milk for a snack.
- Using the “Description of David” list found below, discuss which characteristic was most valuable. [The Lord is with him.] Which is the second most valuable description? [Is wise.]
- Review questions: (Game: If a small harp or even a ukulele or guitar is available, allow the student who answers a question correctly strum or pick the strings for five seconds.)
 1. What kind of spirit tormented Saul? [A harmful spirit from the Lord.]
 2. What did Saul’s servants think was the solution to his problem? [To have someone play the harp.]
 3. Who did a servant suggest would be a good harpist? [David.]

4. Name one characteristic of David given by the servant. [Plays well; is a mighty valiant man; is a man of war; is wise; is good-looking; the Lord is with him.]
5. Name one of the gifts Jesse sent with David. [Bread, wine, a goat.]
6. How did Saul feel about David's service to him? [Saul felt better after David played; Saul loved David; Saul made David his armor bearer.]

Memory Verse[s]: (KJV)

- Psalm 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Handwork:

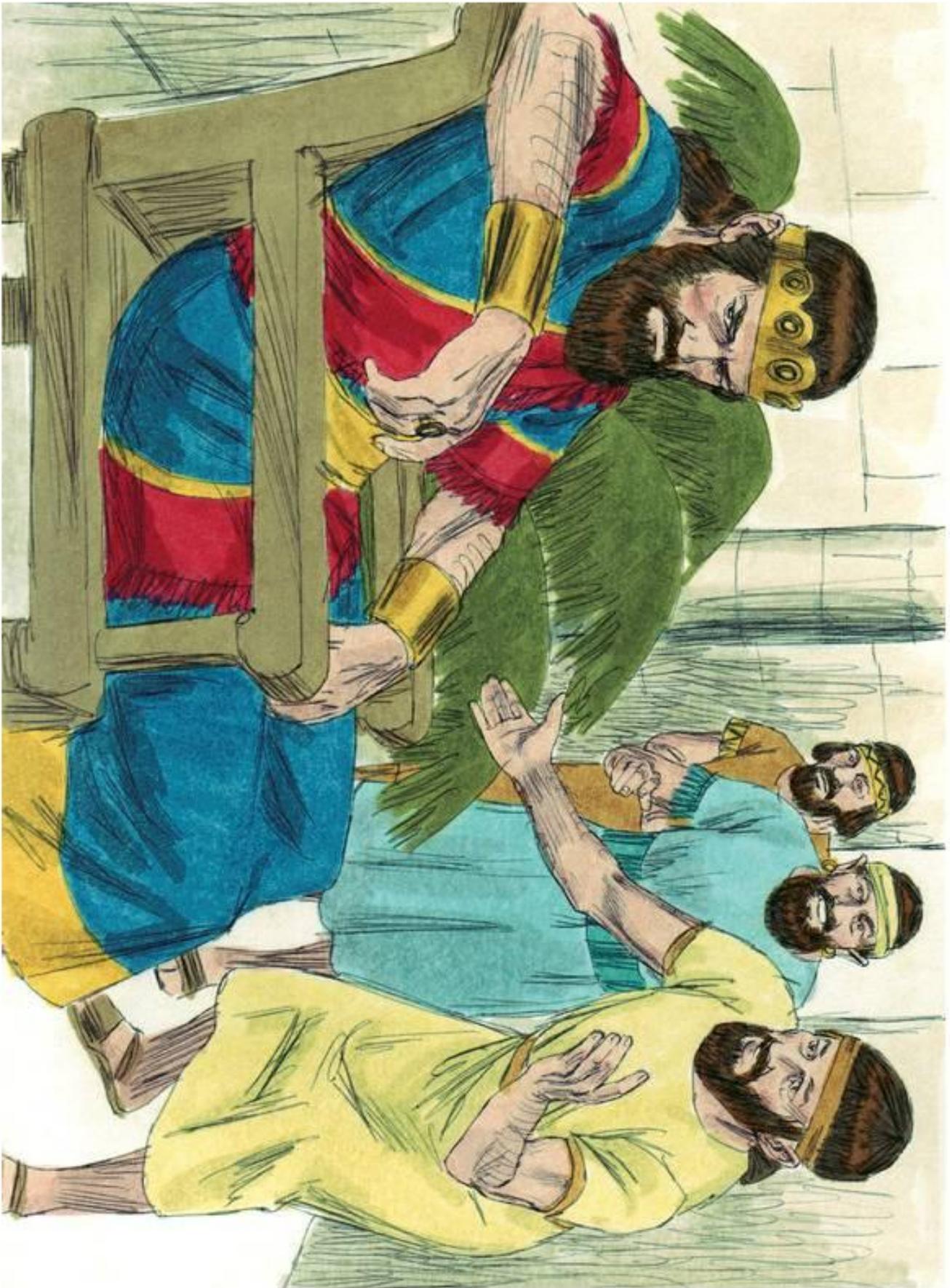
- Make a harp based on the template found at 39ff4634daf662d35044be79462700b5.jpg (2475×1710) (pinimg.com). Instead of following the directions about stringing through the holes shown, stringing from the straight bar down would be more in keeping with the lyre's *U* shape.

lyre

Description of David

- **plays well**
- **is a mighty valiant man**
 - **is a man of war**
 - **is wise**
 - **is good-looking**
- **the Lord is with him**







Saul, Samuel and David

(1 Samuel 15-16)

Gilgal ●

Ramah ●

(Samuel's
hometown)

● Gibeah

(Saul's
hometown)

Jerusalem ●

(Jebusites)
hometown)

Bethlehem

● (David's
hometown)

(David's
hometown)

Dead Sea

Jordan River