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MOTIFS OF HEALING
Interpretation of 1 Samuel 16:14-23 as Music Therapy

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Abstract

This article delves into the unique role of music as a therapeutic tool in ancient Israel, with a focus on the biblical account of music therapy healing Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23). This study attempts to explore and question the relationship between music, healing, and religion. This study aims to: first, to interpret the text of 1 Samuel 16:14-23 which introduces the significance of music in the ancient Israelite tradition. Second, to emphasizes the function of music as healing therapy, where David uses the lyre to heal Saul. This text subtly demonstrates the prevalence of the healing practice of music in the biblical world. Third, it investigates narrative interpretive methods that discuss the extent to which Israel, through David, defines himself and how the superiority of music helps shape Israel's self-perception as a musical community. Data was collected through literature studies/scientific literature related to the title of this study. The results of the data collection will then be processed and presented in the form of a description.

Keywords: David, biblical interpretation, lyre, music, therapy, Old Testament, healing

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MOTIF-MOTIF PENYEMBUHAN
Interpretasi 1 Samuel 16:14-23 sebagai Terapi Musik

Abstrak

Artikel ini meneliti peran unik musik sebagai alat terapeutik di Israel kuno, dengan berfokus kepada kisah Alkitab terkait terapi musik untuk menyembuhkan Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23). Studi ini berupaya mengeksplorasi dan mendiskusikan hubungan antara musik, penyembuhan, dan agama. Penelitian ini memiliki beberapa tujuan: pertama, menafsirkan teks 1 Samuel 16:14-23 yang memperkenalkan makna musik dalam tradisi Israel kuno. Kedua, teks ini menekankan fungsi musik sebagai terapi penyembuhan, di mana Daud menggunakan kecapi untuk menyembuhkan Saul. Teks ini secara khusus menunjukkan prevalensi praktik penyembuhan musik dalam dunia alkitabiah. Ketiga, studi ini menginvestigasi metode interpretasi naratif yang membahas sejauh mana Israel melalui Daud mendefinisikan dirinya dan bagaimana keunggulan musik membantu membentuk persepsi diri Israel sebagai sebuah komunitas musikal. Pengumpulan data ini dilakukan melalui studi kepustakaan/literatur ilmiah yang berkaitan dengan judul penelitian. Hasil pengumpulan data selanjutnya akan diolah dan disajikan dalam bentuk deskripsi.

Kata-kata Kunci: Daud, interpretasi biblikal, kecapi, musik, terapi, Perjanjian Lama, penyembuhan

Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to interpret the idea of music as a healing therapy in 1 Samuel 16:14-23 and its relevance in the modern context. This article interprets 1 Samuel 16:14-23 with attention to musical elements as a form of therapy in ancient Israel and, in particular, music-based healing for Saul. By exploring the relationship among music, healing, and religion in the text, this article presents a point of departure from prior research to off a different emphasis. For instance, Madah highlights and explores the concept of the Evil Spirit from God in the same passage,¹ while from the same verses Arthur Sitompul and colleagues consider the condition of people with mental disorders.²

¹ Madah, "Roh Jahat Yang Dari Pada Tuhan: Suatu Penelusuran Terhadap 1 Samuel 16:14-23," *Sophia: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristeni*, Vol. 1 (2020): 29.

² Arthur Sitompul, Stimson Hutagalung, and Bartholomeus D. Nainggolan. "Menjangkau Orang Gangguan Jiwa Dengan Konsep Daud Dalam 1 Samuel 16:23." *Jurnal Gamaliel: Teologi Praktika*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2021): 86.

I am interested in interpreting the text of 1 Samuel 16:14-23 from a musical perspective for several reasons. First, this text is unique in biblical literature in that it demonstrates the significance of music in ancient Israel, which comes to define its national identity through the kingship of an excellent musician, David. Second, this text demonstrates that it was the musical skills that gave David to Saul's court, not the ability to shepherd in the field. The meeting of David and Saul in the palace was a musical encounter that culminated in the momentum of David's musical healing for Saul. Third, this text accentuates the function of music as healing therapy, noting how David served Saul through his lyre. This text overtly demonstrates the prevalence of music as a healing practice in the biblical world.³

Several theologians discuss the polyphony of ideas on music in the Hebrew Bible, including Robert Ignatius Letellier,⁴ Yelena Kolyada,⁵ Jonathan L. Friedmann,⁶ Nissim Amzallag,⁷ and Ioan Chiciudean.⁸ All of these theologians provide rationalizations with different accents on the role and function of music for shaping the spirituality of Hebrew society in ancient times. A couple examples of such scholarship cover a wide scope of Israel's history. Letellier wrote on the development of liturgy and worship from ancient Israel to later Jewish communal practice, which influenced a Christian Church enriched by ancient scriptural songs to set hymns to music.⁹ Kolyada, whose work on music performance practices in antiquity is captured in *A Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible*, presents historical facts alongside a comparative linguistic analysis to leverage a more accurate study of music in biblical times.¹⁰

Other scholars explore music's significance in specific segments of the Hebrew Bible, such as 1 Samuel (Friedmann), Psalms (Amzallag) and Genesis (Chiciudean). Friedmann's thesis centers music as a driving force for the shaping of ancient Israel's self-understanding as a collective identification through musical

³ Jonathan L. Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life: The Roles of Song in Ancient Israel* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 5.

⁴ Robert Ignatius Letellier, *The Bible in Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), xxvii.

⁵ Yelena Kolyada, *Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

⁶ Jonathan L. Friedmann, *Musical People: The Role of Music in Biblical Life* (Potchefstroom: North West University, 2011), 1.

⁷ Nissim Amzallag, "The Musical Mode of Writing of the Psalms and Its Significance," *OTE Journal*, Vol. 27 (2014), 17.

⁸ Ioan Chiciudean, "Sacred Music in the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the Transilvania of Brasov, Series VIII: Performing Arts*, Vol. 9, No. 58 (2016), 1.

⁹ Letellier, *The Bible in Music*, xxvii.

¹⁰ Kolyada, *Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible*, 1.

expression.¹¹ The work of Holly Delcamp showcases biblical activities involving instrumental music and vocal music, both separately and in tandem.¹² Likewise, Amzallag explores musical modes in the Psalter, showing how the setting of musical poetry informs a distinctly Israelite liturgy of worship.¹³ Chiciudean, who examines the relationship in Genesis between music and sacred creation, posits that humans have since the beginning been blessed by God with one of the most beautiful gifts—melos—which can be expressed both vocally and through musical instruments. Sacred music was considered by the ancients to be an eternal aspect of spiritual life.¹⁴

This study employs narrative criticism to interpret 1 Samuel 16:14-23. It focuses on how the biblical text works as *literature*, in such ways that the “what” of the text (its content) as well as the “how” (its rhetoric and structure) are analyzed as a complete tapestry or an organic whole.¹⁵ The arc of narrative criticism, which analyzes formal characteristics like point of view, plot, characters, setting, style, standards of evaluation, and rhetoric presents 1 Samuel 16:14-23 as a tight, complete narrative. An additional element to consider is that of *narrative desire*. The two-sided lens of narrative desire—how stories play upon our desires, and how our desires shape our reading of (biblical) narratives—offers insight into the intersubjective relationship between the Bible and its interpreters. Narrative desire illuminates the myriad forms of persuasion, inducement, yearning, pleasure, dissatisfaction, frustration, and heartbreak we experience as readers.¹⁶ As narrative critics have observed, writers pattern our desires, through strategies of exposition, transition, diversion, and closure, attempting to transform within us ideal kinds of desires.¹⁷ Based on above descriptions, this study questions how the interpretation of the concept of music as healing therapy in 1 Samuel 16:14-23 and its relevance in the modern context?

Regarding this, I will discuss four main topics, namely: first, identifying the spiritual crisis that Saul experienced. Second, I will explore the healing music therapy that David applied to Saul. Third,

¹¹ Friedmann, *Musical People*, i.

¹² Holly Delcamp, *An Investigation of Ancient Hebrew Music During the Time of the Old Testament Especially the Role of Music in the Lives of Israel's First Two Kings, Saul and David* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2013), 1.

¹³ Nissim Amzallag, “The Musical Mode of Writing of the Psalms and Its Significance,” 17.

¹⁴ Chiciudean, “Sacred Music in the Old Testament,” 25-26.

¹⁵ James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 19-20.

¹⁶ Stephanie Day Powell, *Narrative Desire and The Book of Ruth* (London: T & T Clark International, 2019), 7.

¹⁷ Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 35.

I will investigate David's profile as a musician and the importance of the way music shaped and facilitated his rise as king. Fourth, I will present the implementation of music healing therapy in ancient and recent times. In essence, this interpretation discusses how Israel through David defines itself and the superiority of music in shaping Israel's self-perception as a musical people.

Relationship among Music, Healing, and Religious Practices in 1 Samuel 16:14-23

Background: Saul's Spirituality Crisis

The passage begins with a stark description of Saul's spiritual condition in verse 14 ("Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul"). Verse 14 correlates with verse 13 in the following two ways: first, the transition scene of leadership succession from Saul to David, and, second, the transition of the Spirit, power, and blessing of God from Saul to David. Verse 13 narrates David's anointing as king by Samuel, as the Spirit of the Lord comes powerfully upon David. The narrative plot moves in verse 14 about Saul's spirituality crisis, because the Spirit of the Lord departed from him. It is observed that Saul's pneumatic experience becomes episodic.

The first half of the verse spells out the implication of v.13a. Yahweh's spirit is now with David and will remain on David. The spirit has therefore turned away from Saul. Verse 14b is interpreted as an attempt at theological precision which states that Saul will continue to be influenced by the evil spirit of the Lord and be tormented. The image of diplomatic and not-so diplomatic relations is helpful here. Yahweh now recognizes David and not Saul as the legitimate king of Israel.¹⁸

Saul's pneumatic experience continues, "The Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul" and "an evil spirit of the Lord tormented him." The syntax of 16:14 can be construed as the Hebrew equivalent of the verb pluperfect. Thus, one gets a sense that *at the same time* the divine spirit comes upon David as it also departs from Saul. The verb "torment" (תַּעֲזֹב *bā'atb*) has never been used so far in the Bible, suggesting a new and terrifying experience. Statistically, the highest concentration of these verbs (תַּעֲזֹב *bā'atb*) is in the Book of Job, thus we gain the impression of this highly unpleasant situation. Samuel may have retired, but for Saul there is a new source of torment. This text refers to the deepest expression of despair or depression in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁹ The saddest torment is that of Saul being "abandoned" and experiencing the

¹⁸ Graeme Auld, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 187.

¹⁹ Keith Bodness, *I Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 172.

trauma of alienation from the Spirit of the Lord. Saul experienced mental and moral breakdown. God had withdrawn from him all those special aids attendant with his anointing to the royal office. Extremely, God revoked all the special gifts that had been bestowed upon him. It describes an irritable mood, psychomotor agitation or retardation, insomnia or hypersomnia, diminished ability to think or concentrate, sadness, and low concentration.²⁰

As expressed in ch.16, Saul is on the right end of a spiritual affliction that transcends a bad mood. No doubt he is upset about it, but the torment here originates from an external source. This episode presents that “evil spirits” are also under God’s sovereignty. The last time an “evil spirit” surfaced in Deuteronomistic History was in Judges 9, when God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem. In both cases, the evil spirit eventually induces hostility between two parties. The terminology is mentioned in 1 Samuel 6 to describe the relationship between David and Saul as compared to hostility between Abimelech and the Shechemites in Judges 9.²¹

After Samuel’s rebuke at Gilgal, Saul appears to have become more abandoned than ever. Saul’s suffering reaches a climax; he becomes moody, irritable, vindictive, and gloomy. His moral balance is weak and unstable, his life is almost destroyed, and even his intellect becomes clouded. Saul shows symptoms similar to mental aberration. Even his suffering becomes a cause of anxiety, inducing terror for everyone around him. The cause and nature of the disease are narrated in two phrases: “The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul,” and “An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.” There is thus both a privative and a positive preposition. The statement is “The Spirit of the Lord has departed from Saul.” In any case, regardless of King Saul’s symptoms, music as therapy brought about the significant improvement of his disturbed soul. The wonderful sounds of musical instrumentation calmed him to the point he felt well.²²

Healing Music

The encounter between David and Saul in 1 Samuel 16:14-23 is frequently cited as a biblical example of music therapy. Saul’s spirituality crisis was so severe that his attendants were concerned and urged him to invite a skilled musician to the bedside. Through his lyre-playing skills, David provided therapeutic healing for Saul. According to Michael A. Bakare, music therapy has positive functions, including: aiding bodily movement, correcting speech order, enhancing character formation, and promoting teamwork; it

²⁰ Liubov Ben-Nun, *Music Therapy in the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Ben-Sheva: Ben Nun Publications House, 2013), 131.

²¹ Bodness, *I Samuel*, 172.

²² Ben-Nun, *Music Therapy in the Bible*, 131.

is through songs that the ills and vices in a given society are unveiled.²³ These functions have the potential for “endowing the soul with good qualities” and leading one on the path to the divine. In the context of David and Saul, music therapy served a third function—catharsis. In their case, the function of music therapy was to cleanse or exorcise evil spirits with the lyre. Music functioned as a traditional remedy for demonic possession “common to all ancient demon-possessed societies.” By playing his lyre, David succeeded in calming the tormented king.²⁴

The “lyre” is an important musical instrument in the Old Testament. In the early translation used by the King James Version (KJV), the instrument that David uses is כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*), denoting a portable lyre held horizontally during playing, different from the common harp. In 1 Samuel 16:23 it is mentioned that David played the כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*) with his hands, like a harp. The Hebrew כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*) is a West Semitic term possibly referring to a thin instrument that probably originated in Syria around 2500 BCE. In Ugarit mythology, the *kinnârum* bow is said to be a “beloved companion” of Kothar-wa-Hasis, the god of skill who was patron of the crafts of prophecy and music. This shows that from the beginning the relationship between music and liturgy has two functions, namely, invoking divine presence and providing entertainment.

The use of כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*) in a prophetic context is attested throughout the Hebrew Bible, along with other musical instruments. The biblical text mentions the use of כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*) as musical accompaniment to stimulate or convey prophecy (1 Chronicles 25:3). Evidently, 1 Chronicles 25:3 mentions David’s appointment of the sons of Jeduthun who prophesied with lyre, כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*), to give thanks and praise the Lord.²⁵ Apart in military encounters, the כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*) accompanied singers who were inspired to reflect musically the shift in power from one side to the other, as seem in 2 Kings 3:13-20 and 2 Chronicles 20:14-23. In Exodus 15:20-21, Miriam and her all-girl slave band use hand drums or tambourines to accompany the victory song ending with the prophetic reference to a future “holy abode.” In Deuteronomy 31:19-22, Moses composes a didactic song to guide Israel and interpret the future of divine interaction. In this case, כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*) has “teaching” functions, as music is used to improve memory and rational thinking.²⁶

²³ Michael A. Bakare, “An Exploration of Music Therapy in the Bible,” *Anchor University of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences*, Vol. 1 (2020): 61.

²⁴ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 59.

²⁵ Carole R. Fontaine, “The Sharper Harper (1 Samuel 16:14-23): Iconographic Reflections on David’s Rise to Power,” in *The Fate of King David - The Past & Present of A Biblical Icon* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

In the Ketuvim books, the use of כִּנּוֹר (*kinnôr*) is also implied in 1 Samuel 19:20-24 and Ezekiel 40:44-46; in 1 Samuel 10:5-6, Samuel says that Saul will find a group of prophets making music. Samuel promotes function of lyre as the power of personal transformation, where the lyre was used as an exorcism tool for Saul. The Bible passages above affirm a sort of “science” of musical prophecy. The principle is that the value and performance of music can have transformative power when combined with the consultation of the divine will, as demonstrated by the music therapy that David provided for Saul.²⁷

Saul was haunted by an evil spirit, indicating a condition some commentators have associated with some form of spiritual illness. Bible scholars identify his illness as melancholy, paranoid schizophrenia, or bipolar syndrome.²⁸ The two aspects of Saul’s instability, the evil spirit bringing terror upon him and his raving like one of the prophets at Gibeah, now comprise a major breakdown in his life, which was triggered by his degraded status.²⁹ Because the king was abandoned and alienated by the spirit of God. David’s musicianship functions like the equivalent of a modern-day music therapist whereby gentle playing refreshed and uplifted the bedridden king. Saul’s depression is alleviated through the musical conjuring of a contrary emotion (joy), and the shift in his mental state is consistent with the musical instrument’s joyous qualities. More generally, the episode describes the vivid and often all-consuming impact of music on the listener, whether sick or well. Whatever thoughts or feelings may be affecting one’s disposition can be altered or swept away by musical tones.³⁰ However, the text asserts that this healing occurred not only by musical intervention but also divine intervention. Saul experienced God’s healing through David’s lyre who recovered his mental disorders (1 Samuel 16:23). The textual author(s) diagnosed Saul’s illness as a spiritual problem, described in theological rather than psychological terms.³¹ As such, only divine therapies could cure him. D. Thiessen said, “it was as if God himself was present and brought joy to Saul.

²⁷ John Curtis Franklin, “The Wisdom of the Lyre: Soundings in Ancient Greece, Cyprus, and the Near East,” *Journal of Ind-European*, Vol. 30 (2006): 2.

²⁸ Jonathan Kirsch, *King David: The Real Life of The Man Who Ruled Israel* (New York: Ballantine, 2000), 48.

²⁹ Philip F. Esler, “The Madness of Saul: A Cultural Reading of 1 Samuel 8-31,” in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 222.

³⁰ R. Lack, *Twenty-Four Frames Under: A Buried History of Film Music* (London: Quartet, 1997), 2.

³¹ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 73-74.

Through music, God plays His power, and His power is in music.”³²

The text says that whenever an evil spirit tormented Saul, David would take a lyre and play the strings with his hands. It was comforting to Saul, and good for him, and the evil spirit would turn from him. David’s skill as a musician was able to provide (temporary) relief to the tormented king. The Hebrew text of the first part of 16:23 does not include the word “evil,” but based on the last part of the verse it clearly mentions the word “evil spirit.” David’s music calmed the king and made him “feel better.” In this text, the Hebrew verb “soothe” (רָוַח – *rāvah*) forms a pun with “spirit” (רוּחַ – *rūah*). Therefore, David’s musical talents were appreciated by Saul and documented in Israel’s historical literature. Music unites David and Saul in the short term, but in the long run it divides them. It is evident in chapter 18, by the singing of the women, that Saul’s hatred was heightened as he threw a spear while David was playing the lyre.

According to the narrative, David’s music had three distinct effects on Saul (v.23). First this music helps him “find relief.” This demonstrates the ability of music to impact one’s state of mind. Second, his music was able to make Saul “feel better” (“soothe” (רָוַח – *rāvah*) exhibiting the healing power of music. Third, music was able to cause evil spirits to “leave him,” indicating that music is imbued with perceived supernatural force. For his musical skills, David is made a member of Saul’s court, available to play for the king whenever he feels diminished. This brief episode appears to be an isolated incident, but it stands out as the Bible’s sole instance of what can be called a music therapy session.

Nowhere else do we find the controlled use of musical tones revitalizing someone in a troubled state? The story presents the healing practice of music in the biblical world. The Book of Psalms provides several examples of music’s cohesive effect. Much of the psalms were scribed in corporate language—that is, first personal plural. For example, a number of communal complaints were composed in response to war, pestilence, exile, famine and other calamities (e.g., Ps. 44; 74; 79; 80; 83; 89). These laments typically follow a five-step progression: plea to God, complaint about the community’s condition, confession of sin, appeal for divine help, and a conclusion of praise, vows or acknowledgement of God’s help.³³ In I Samuel 16:24-32, the attendants recommend musical treatment for Saul. Music is the only method of healing and the instrument serves as a therapeutic tool. It is proven in verse 16; the special servants are looking for “someone” skilled in playing

³² D. Thiessen, *Selab: A Guide to Music in the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Cornerstone Press, 2002), 21.

³³ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 72.

lyre.” This function is commonly used by music therapists today by using the harp and harp for the treatment of a number of ailments.³⁴

David as Musician

The musical encounter between Saul and David became a central episode in the story of David’s rise to royal power, the telling of which extends from 1 Samuel 14 into 2 Samuel. Like other biblical narratives, the Books of Samuel reads like a historical novel rather than a chronicles. These texts showcase the various qualities and characteristics of David, illustrating him as one of the most multifaceted characters throughout the Bible. David has a complex character and is very human.³⁵ At times, he is an outlaw, a deserter, and a Philistine mercenary. Yet at other times, he is a pure soul (1 Sam. 16:12), loyal friend (1 Sam. 18:1), and faithful servant of God (2 Sam. 25-28).³⁶ He is an “innocent man of destiny” and a “cunning schemer,” both a pious king and “tough practitioner of *Realpolitik*.”³⁷ Of interest is how David’s ascendant kingdom relate to his musical skills.³⁸

David is first introduced when God sent the prophet Samuel to find a replacement for King Saul, who has lost divine favor. God tells Samuel, “Fill your horn with oil and be you on your way set out; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have decided on one of his sons to be king” (1 Sam. 16:1c, 1d). Samuel meets seven of Jesse’s sons at a sacrificial feast, none of whom is God’s choice. Samuel asks if any sons are absent, and Jesse replies that there is one more who is “tending the flock” (v.11). This missing son is David, the youngest and least esteemed of the eight brothers. After David arrived at the feast, Samuel was commanded to “[r]ise and anoint him, for he is the one” (v.12). This unlikely selection continues the biblical motif of the younger being preferred to the elder: Abel to Cain (Gen. 4:2-5), Isaac to Ishmael (Gen. 21:9-13), Jacob to Esau (Gen.27:28-40) and Joseph to Reuben (Gen. 37:3–11). Suitability, not seniority, is the decisive factor.³⁹

Though David receives divine blessings, it is his skill as a musician that enabled his spectacular rise from lowly shepherd to exalted king.⁴⁰ David’s music soothed the suffering king, and he was made an armor-bearer who would play music whenever the

³⁴ Bodness, *I Samuel*, 174.

³⁵ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 62.

³⁶ J.J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 3.

³⁷ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 62.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

evil spirit returned. David eases the madness that consumes Saul at odd moments. He provides “musical medicine” that is much needed, though temporary.⁴¹ At this point, Saul is not yet aware that David has been appointed to replace him, and his introduction to the young man is purely a musical matter. David poses no initial threat to Saul’s power, and the relations between the two are most promising. David is Saul’s royal servant and musical rescuer. Though their rivalry is inevitable, for the moment David is the recipient of Saul’s warm affection. It is significant that this intimate relationship is initiated through music. David’s musical adeptness is the sole and immediate cause for his invitation to the court, and the sound of his lyre forges an instant bond between the two men who differ vastly in age and social status.⁴²

At first, David’s music has a therapeutic effect, but it eventually exacerbates the complexity of the contention between David and Saul. Saul may have become increasingly paranoid about the persuasive power of David’s lyre as a medium for subversive manipulation, thereby increasing Saul’s hostility to David (see 1 Sam. 18:10–11 and 19:9-10). When Saul was possessed by an evil spirit, he threw a spear at David who tried to calm the king with his lyre.⁴³ Thiessen said, “the function of music as a healing therapy tool initially to provide relief has now turned into an irritant and a catalyst for evil actions.”⁴⁴ The centrality of David’s music had elevated him to the aristocracy. That, music became a determinant to shape the spirit and leadership of David as king in the history, and religion of Israel. David achieved the highest level of appreciation for his musical skills.

The scene described in 1 Samuel 16:14-23 is the second of three separate accounts of David’s election. The first account is of David’s anointing by Samuel after evaluating all of Jesse’s sons and electing David to divine appointments (1 Sam. 16:1-13). The third account centers on David’s victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:1-18:5).⁴⁵ The focus of this story is found in several analytical ideas, namely: First, these accounts seem to come from different socio historical because they compare the confrontation of David and Goliath with the “battle” between Saul’s madness and David’s lyre. Second, the three accounts only focus on introducing David as a shepherd and mighty hero, but not exclusively on his musical skills. Third, these accounts with different accents actually become a unifying element and provide access to David’s journey to become kings. These accounts portray David as a warrior who has dual

⁴¹ Thiessen, *Selab*, 22.

⁴² Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 63.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64

⁴⁴ Thiessen, *Selab*, 21.

⁴⁵ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 65.

weapons, one being music and the other being a slingshot.⁴⁶ Although David is described as having extraordinary skills in music and military arts, his natural abilities are not enough to defeat Goliath and Saul's evil spirit. The text attributes Saul's temporary healing and Goliath's mortal defeat to the divine power present in and working through David (1 Sam. 16:18 and 17:45).⁴⁷ The other two accounts are important, but the musical encounter between Saul and David provides the most thorough characterization of David as the future king. David was recommended to Saul because he was "skilled in music" (1 Sam. 16:18). In the same verse added another advantage of David, namely: he is faithful, sensible in speech, handsome, godly, and skilled in warfare. This means that these two accounts accentuate the four qualities of David, namely: good looks, piety, articulateness, and battle expertise.⁴⁸

Most text of the Bible exposes strongly the five of David's qualifications.⁴⁹ Faithful breeds trust and respect, powerful words inspire crowds, good looks enhance charisma, piety brings divine supports and military skill ensures stability and power. Less obvious is the role of music in leadership. The text affirms the significance of the artistic role of a national leader. Generally, artistic sides are considered as secondary roles or complementary to a leader's talent as a communicator and warrior.⁵⁰ In fact, a leader equipped with extraordinary musicianship qualities has the exclusive advantage of exuding a certain magnetism that draws people in and wins them over.⁵¹ This certainly aids David in gaining access to Saul's court. The most important thing is that the role of music contributes to David's access to other fields such as oration, warfare, and religious devotion. David is not only merely a gifted communicator, but "the sweet singer of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1). His talent on the lyre is matched by his vocal abilities.⁵² Musical talent enabled David to enter the palace, become king and develop a number of other skills.

David offered beautiful songs in various circumstances throughout his life. For example, 2 Samuel 1:19-27 contains David's heartfelt song of the death of Saul, his crazed nemesis, and Saul's son Jonathan, David's dearest friend. This song of lament is not only an exquisite example of biblical poetry but is also an expression of David's faithful, one of the virtues mentioned in 1

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ A. G. Johnson, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User's Guide to Sociological Language* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 3.

⁴⁸ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 66.

⁴⁹ L. O. Richards, *Bible Reader's Companion* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2002), 3.

⁵⁰ Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 66.

⁵¹ Thiessen, *Selab*, 21.

⁵² Friedman, *Music in Biblical Life*, 66.

Sam. 16:18. David also was accompanied in battle by song. In 2 Samuel 22:2-51, he sings an extended song of praise “after the Lord has saved him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul” (v.1). When meditating and thinking about God, David sings about the following themes: divine praise (vs.2-4); his existential plight (vs.4-7); God’s appearance (vs. 8-16); God’s revenge (vs.17-20); reward for righteousness (vs.21-25); God’s requital (vs. 26-28); God’s help in battle (vs.29-37); victory (vs.38-43); David’s rule over the nations (vs. 44-46); and concluding praise (vs.47-55). The same song, with slight modifications, is found in Psalm 18. Through this victory song, David established himself not only as a devoted servant of God, intrepid warrior, brilliant strategist, empire builder and the dynasty founder, but also as a super musician and king *par excellence*.”

Through David, devotional music became a regular part of the national religion: “David ordered the officers of the Levites to install their kinsmen, the singers, with musical instruments, harps, lyres, cymbals, joyfully making the voices heard” (1 Chronicles 15:16). Among the reportedly 38,000 Levites under David’s charge, 4,000 are appointed as musicians (1 Chr. 23:5).⁵³ This special class is crucial for the development and preservation of David’s musical heritage, fixed scales tunes, instrumental techniques as well as for the transmission of history, core beliefs, moral standards and other key aspects of the nation’s religion and society.⁵⁴ David used music to articulate his religious concepts, an emotional expression of God’s presence. David carefully orchestrated the union of singer and players to perform psalms that espouse Israel’s feelings, doctrines, ethics, and religious character. Many other Bible passages discuss David’s musical skills including singing, playing the lyre and sacred dancing. One of the reasons for this is that his musical skills have been used as an instrument for healing therapy. When the Holy Ark is transferred to Jerusalem, David and the people of Israel dance before God to the music of all sorts of instruments (2 Sam. 6:5). David is portrayed as an expert in the three forms of musical art known in Israel: instrument playing, singing, and dancing. He is also identified as the inventor of musical instruments (Neh. 12:36; 1 Chr. 23:5; 2 Chr. 29:26) and as an archetypal musician (Amos 6:5).⁵⁵ Another source states, “All praises which are stated in the Book of Psalms, David uttered each one of them.”⁵⁶ His connection to psalmody is even more pronounced in the large psalm scroll from Qumran, which claims that he wrote 3,600 psalms and an additional 450 songs. David is extolled as a model of musical perfection in Jewish, Christian, and

⁵³ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Muslim sources and is touted as a symbol of divinely inspired music making.⁵⁷ As a psalmist, poet, singer, or artist, King David deserves the title of “father of Hebrew music.” David is a gifted poet and composer, but he is also a good organizer. David is a rare talented idealistic leader. He is the first to promote music as an art. He ordered the Levites to no longer be carriers, but only to be singers and musicians.⁵⁸

Implementation of Music Therapy

Interpretations of 1 Samuel 16:14-32 highlight the significance of music’s role as a therapeutic tool in ancient Israel. This text presents the prevalence of musical healing practices in the biblical world. Urgency of therapy music is also indicated in the contemporary context. Music therapy is an important part of complementary medicine in the twenty-first century. This creative art therapy contributes to all areas of healthcare and may be employed in treatments for most psychologic and physiologic illnesses.⁵⁹ Anthony E. Mereni regards music therapy as empirical research in systematic musicology, drawing on relevant ancillary disciplines, particularly social and health sciences aimed at practical healthcare needs.⁶⁰ Throughout human history people have created music. Music is an expression of the identity of humans and of the cultural norms of each society. The interaction between music and the human mind is important and contributes to the well-being of humans.⁶¹ Music has the capacity to affect the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual domains.

Lesli Bunt said most cultures use music to stimulate positive change in people with physical or mental health problems.⁶² For example, Greek mythology includes the legends of Orpheus and Apollo who healed diseases with song.⁶³ According to Emperor Canon, Chinese classical five-element music can cure disease.⁶⁴ The five elements include Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi and Yu. Each element links with specific organ: Gong to the spleen, Shang to the lung, Jue to the liver, Zhi to the heart, and Yu to the kidney. In TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) psychology, five-element

⁵⁷ B. Bayer and A. Shiloah, “David,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 5 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 457.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 457.

⁵⁹ Ben-Nun, *Music Therapy in the Bible*, 8.

⁶⁰ Anthony E. Mereni, *Music Therapy: Concept, Scope and Competence*, (Lagos: Apex books Limited, 2006), 5.

⁶¹ Ben-Nun, *Music Therapy in the Bible*, 9.

⁶² Lesly Bunt, *Music Therapy an Art Beyond Words* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

⁶³ J. Gioia, *Healing Songs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 69-88.

⁶⁴ Ma QF, Wong JJ, “Traditional Music Therapy in China,” *Xin Li Ke Xue*, Vol. 6, No. 29 (2006): 1470-1473.

music can regulate mood and improve health.⁶⁵ The Indian *ragas* have long been used to positively influence mental and physical health.⁶⁶ The list of examples above shows many ancient healing traditions from which the modern practice of music therapy developed.

Historically, Western clinical music therapy started during the Second World War.⁶⁷ Since then, the clinical practice of musical healing has proven effective in combating a remarkable array of conditions. Research supports both the physiological and psychological benefits of employing musical therapies.⁶⁸ Music aids movements, corrects speech disorder, enhances teamwork, and through songs the ills and vices the society are unveiled.⁶⁹ Although music therapy may not be an explicit part of contemporary Jewish and Christian theology, signs of the connection between music and healing are found in many services.

A more recent study by Dale A. Matthews and Connie Clark emphasizes the health benefits of congregational singing in the Western faith tradition.⁷⁰ Dale A. Matthews, is associate professor of medicine at Georgetown University School of Medicine. He is the author of a four-volume annotated bibliography of clinical research on spiritual subjects, and more than sixty peer-reviewed scientific articles, book chapters, audiovisuals, and other publications. Meanwhile, Connie Clark is a writer, teacher, and retreat leader whose focus is contemplative Christian spirituality.⁷¹ Their book, *The Faith Factor: Proof of The Healing Power of Prayer*, presents an elaboration of medical and spiritual aspects in healing. "The faith factor" is recognized as having a natural impact on patient healing. This research was built from personal experience as a doctor with several other doctors who have treated thousands of patients with various diseases. Participating in congregational singing is a medium for healing.⁷²

⁶⁵ Xifang Liu, Xin Niu, Qianjin Feng & Yaming Liu, "Effects of Five-element Music Therapy on Elderly People with Season-all Affective Disorder in A Chinese Nursing Home," *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, Vol. 2, No. 34 (2014): 159-161

⁶⁶ R. Sankaran, "Homeopathic Healing Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology*, ed., D. Koen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 393-409.

⁶⁷ Gioia, *Healing Songs*, 133-134.

⁶⁸ Heather B. MacIntosh, "Sounds of Healing: Music in Group Work with Survivors of Sexual Abuse," *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, Vol. 30 (2003): 22.

⁶⁹ C. O. Aluede & D. B. Ekewen, "Healing Through Music and Dance in the Bible: Its Scope, Competence and Implications for the Nigerian Music Healers," *Ethno-Med*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2009): 163.

⁷⁰ D. A. Matthews and C. Clark, *The Faith Factor: Proof of the Healing Power of Prayer* (New York: Viking, 1998), 45-46.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

Singing requires deeper breathing than any other form of exercise, opens the airways and sinuses, and increases aerobic capacity. This results in a greater intake of oxygen which can help the heart and circulation reduce muscle tension, lower heart rate, and lower blood pressure and reduce stress.⁷³ In a congregational setting, the positive effects of singing with mind, body and spirit stimulate an additional sense of attachment with transcendent powers. Matthew and Clark conclude that “sacred music, seems to soak into our very bones, carrying the message of God’s glory and God’s love deep into our being.”⁷⁴

Some of the most interesting statements about the religious nature of music therapy come from the views of the medieval Jewish philosopher and physician Moses Maimonides (1135–1204). F. Rosner explains Maimonides’ idea with the following quote:

Maimonides opposed listening to vocal and instrumental music as a sign of mourning over the destruction of the Second Temple or as the potential for secular music to lead to frivolity and debauchery. He allows “dignified” music at festive occasions of religious nature, such as weddings, and permits songs of praise to God (without instrumental accompaniment). Though he warns against the potentially tarnishing impact of music, Maimonides, being a pragmatist, promotes the use of musical tones for therapeutic aims. He asserted that fitness of mind and body are both necessary to obtaining wisdom and striving for knowledge of God. He asserts that fitness of mind and listening to beautiful music, such as “a bride with her accompanying musical instrument.”⁷⁵

Coenie J. Calits affirms this idea in an article entitled “Healing Liturgy: The Role of Music and Singing.” According to Calits, music and singing have a pastoral therapy function. With normal Sunday-to-Sunday liturgy, singing and music aims at promoting and restoring spiritual well-being. A careful selection of songs from the unique repertoire of songs in a congregation can contribute to healing. Not only congregational singing (music as therapy) but also active or passive listening to music (music in therapy) could be of great value in the process of healing.⁷⁶

⁷³ S.M. Clift and G. Hancox, “The Perceived Benefits of Singing,” *Perspectives in Public Health*, Vol. 12, No. 14 (2001): 248-256.

⁷⁴ Clark, *The Faith Factor*.

⁷⁵ F. Rosner, “Moses Maimonides on Music Therapy and His Respondum on Music,” in *Essays of Jewish Music and Prayer* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2005), 147.

⁷⁶ Connie J. Calits, “Healing Liturgy: The Role of Music and Singing,” *Verbum et Ecclesia*, Vol. 1, No. 38 (2017): 1-9.

Conclusion

As result of this close reading of 1 Samuel 16:14-17, seven assertions can be made. First, healing is one of the first and most widespread uses of music. Almost all people in all walks of life use musical tones for therapeutic purposes. Second, music is a traditional remedy in cultures such as ancient Israel, where mental and physical illness is associated with divine punishment and demonic possession. Third, the courtiers did not hesitate to recommend musical treatments for the king, implying that music is conventional and trusted medicine. Fourth, the men are specifically looking for someone who could play *כִּנּוֹר* (*kinnôr*), suggesting that the instrument was recognized as a healing device. Fifth, because the musical encounter between David and Saul is an effective and credible way of telling the story of David's revival, healing music is well known and widely accepted in biblical life. Sixth, this text states, the function of music therapy must be connected with God's intervention. God presents His power through music for healing. Basically, musical instruments are neutral and not independent; the utility value of music is intervened by the power of God. Seventh, the text shows the high status given to music in ancient Israel. Through music, David developed an intimate relationship with Saul. Through his skillful playing of music and poetry, David is able to win people's hearts and minds.

David is recognized as the greatest and most musical of Israel's kings. Music accompanied him in battle, voiced his deepest sentiments, attracted and captivated the population and became an official part of Israel's religious life in his reign. Music is a constant presence throughout David's career. David uses music as a musical tone to enrich and benefit him and many people. David's lyre playing not only presents the healing efficacy of music, but also encourages and lends credibility to the widespread use of music therapy in society. The playing of David's lyre demonstrates the powerful potential influence of the sound of music on the inner spiritual realm.

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