

The Scenes Depicted in the David Plates

The following descriptions of the scenes depicted in the David Plates are presented in the order of the biblical story. The biblical passages provided below the descriptions are also found on the back of the corresponding activity cards in this packet.



The Summoning of David

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 5 1/2 in. (14 cm); Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, J454

The lunette above with the sun, moon, and stars represents the heavens. A messenger has come to summon David to meet Samuel. David, well known for his lyre playing, is seated below the sun, indicating that he is God's chosen one. Halos encircle the messenger and David's heads, emphasizing the sacredness of the event. The presence of the sheep is a reminder that David is a shepherd.

1 Samuel 16:11–12

Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."



David Anointed by Samuel

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 10 1/2 in. (26.7 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.398)

Holding a raised horn full of oil, Samuel is about to pour it over David's head to anoint him. David's father, Jesse, has his hand raised in a gesture of benediction, while David's brothers look on. One of the brothers, Eliab, is on the far right.

Under God's plan, the prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem, supposedly to offer a sacrifice (1 Samuel 16:1–3). This is why an altar, a heifer, and a sacrificial knife are at the bottom of the plate below Samuel and David. But Samuel's true mission was to anoint one of Jesse's sons as God's chosen king of Israel, since God had rejected Saul as king. With God's help, Samuel rejected Jesse's first seven sons and finally sent for the youngest, David, who was watching the family's sheep—the reason for the ram and shepherd's staff (shown horizontally) below Jesse.

1 Samuel 16:13

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.



David's Confrontation with His Brother Eliab

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 5 1/2 in. (14 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.395)

The hand gestures in this scene suggest a heated discussion between David and his brother Eliab. Eliab accuses David of neglecting his duty as a shepherd to watch the battle with the Philistines. Eliab's armor and his shield below identify him as a soldier. David, shown with a halo and the sun over his head, has heard Goliath's challenge to fight one Israelite in order to determine the battle between the Philistines and the Israelites. He has also heard from King Saul's soldiers about the reward the king has offered for slaying Goliath.

1 Samuel 17:28–29

His eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men [Saul's soldiers]; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David. [Eliab scolded him for leaving his flock.] He said, "Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle." David said, "What have I done now? . . ."



The Presentation of David to Saul

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 10 1/2 in. (26.7 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.397)

The artist has chosen the moment when Saul bestows his blessing on David after David has convinced him that he should fight Goliath the giant Philistine. Though depicting biblical characters who lived long before the time of Byzantium, the artists show them as Byzantine. Saul sits upon a throne dressed in a long-sleeved tunic with a Byzantine imperial *chlamys*, or cloak, over it. On the front of the *chlamys* is a *tablion*, a woven or embroidered patch of cloth that indicates the rank of the wearer in the Byzantine court. Beneath Saul's throne is the reward for defeating Goliath, the bags and basket containing the Roman *sparsio*, the money distributed to the Roman people by high officials at games they sponsored. In their dress and longer hair, the two Byzantine imperial bodyguards show that they originally came from German tribes in the West.

1 Samuel 17:32–37

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this . . . Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!"



David Slaying the Bear

David Slaying the Lion

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 5 1/2 in. (14cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917, (17.190.194)

The following passages are provided on the back of both of the activity cards illustrating these plates.

1 Samuel 17:33–35

Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it.”

1 Samuel 17:37

David said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you!”

The Arming of David

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 10 1/2 in. (26.7 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.399)

Their halos and central positions identify Saul and David. David wears Roman armor: over his tunic, a metal breastplate covers his chest and stomach. Protective strips or scales (either of metal or leather) hang from his sleeves and short skirt. Saul wears a jeweled or embroidered *chlamys*, or cloak, over a short-sleeved tunic, which in turn lies on top of a long-sleeved undergarment with embroidered cuffs. These removable cuffs, stitched with gold thread, were worn by the elite, including the Byzantine emperor. An attendant places a bronze helmet on David’s head. Two soldiers frame the balanced scene. Below are a bow and a shield for David’s use.

1 Samuel 17:38–39

Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul’s sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these, for I am not used to them.” So David removed them.



The Battle of David and Goliath

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 19 1/2 in. (49.5 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.396)

TOP REGISTER

The towers indicate the two towns near which the Israelites and the Philistines are about to clash. David, who has shed Saul's heavy armor, confronts Goliath. Borrowed from classical antiquity, the seated figure between them personifies a stream, as suggested by the marsh grass he holds and the water that pours from the jug at his side. (It is from this stream that David gathers the stones he uses to fight Goliath.) David appears composed, sure of God's protection, symbolized by the hand of God pointing to him from the heavens. His shepherd's staff has been transformed into an imperial scepter with an orb at the top.

1 Samuel 17:42–47

When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

CENTER REGISTER

David raises his left arm to ward off Goliath's armed advance while readying his slingshot in his right hand. The Israelite and Philistine soldiers stand behind their leaders.

1 Samuel 17:48–49

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

BOTTOM REGISTER

David decapitates Goliath with a large sword. His slingshot and stones visually counter-balance Goliath's powerful shield and arms.

1 Samuel 17:50–51

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

In all three scenes, David wears a halo, an attribute of his holiness.

NOTES:



David's Marriage to Michal

Byzantine, 629–30; one of a set of nine silver plates, diam. 10 1/2 in. (26.7 cm); Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, J452

Here David receives his reward for slaying Goliath. On the ground lies the monetary reward, shown as the bags and basket containing the Roman *sparsio*, the money distributed to the Roman populace by high officials at games they sponsored. Above, David and Michal, Saul's second daughter, join their right hands in the *dextrarum junctio* ("joining of the right hands") during a Roman marriage ceremony presided over by Saul, who in imperial dress stands upon a platform. Two figures, one on either side of the central group, play celebratory flute music.

1 Samuel 17:24–25

All the Israelites, when they saw the man [Goliath], fled from him and were very much afraid. The Israelites said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel."

1 Samuel 18:27

Saul gave him [David] his daughter Michal as a wife.