

Rejection Realized: Saul, the Evil Spirit and the Loss of Kingship

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Abstract

In conversation with tragic readings of Saul's career, the present article attempts to outline a parallel between the presentation and role of the spirit of YHWH and the evil spirit which afflicts Saul in 1 Samuel. By highlighting the parallel between the two spirits, the following argument suggests that they fulfil similar roles in confirming election and rejection respectively and either empowering or debilitating their recipients. The suggestion is that this analogy offers an appropriate way to understand the wider presentation of the evil spirit which afflicts Saul and has important implications for how we think about Saul's rejection and his presentation more broadly.

Keywords

1 Samuel 16; evil spirit; Saul; rejection; spirit of YHWH; 1 Samuel 9-10; tragedy.

Introduction

One of the most prominent and stimulating approaches to the Saul narrative in previous decades has been that of the tragic.¹ There is a reasonable degree of diversity across the various accounts of Saul's narrative as tragedy. Still, one relatively consistent element is the suggestion that Saul is the victim of God's "dark side."² Saul is buffeted by "dark forces" and driven by a "savage god."³ Indeed, in perhaps the most sophisticated of the studies of tragedy in the Old Testament, J. Cheryl Exum draws on Paul Ricoeur's notion

1. Humphreys (1978: 18-27); Humphreys (1980: 74-80); Gunn (1980); Humphreys (1982: 95-117); Exum and Whedbee (1984: 5-40); Humphreys (1985: 23-66); Exum (1992: 16-44); Jobling (1998: 250-281); Nicholson (2002); Adam (2010: 123-183); cf. comments in Good (1981: 56); Frye (1982: 181-182); Dietrich (2012: 131-139).
2. Gunn (1980: 129).
3. Humphreys (1985: 39-41).

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of the “predestination to evil” to give texture to YHWH’s treatment of Saul in 1 Samuel.⁴ Thus, in a tragic account of Saul’s demise, Saul is the victim of powers of fate which drive him towards his end.

There are few times in 1 Samuel where these fateful powers emerge explicitly and much in the readings of scholars such as Exum and David Gunn rely on subtle inferences related to the narrative arc.⁵ However, there appears to be one clear instance when malevolent powers oppress and subdue Saul: the arrival of an evil spirit, sent by YHWH, in 1 Samuel 16, 18 and 19. Gunn and Exum make much of this feature of Saul’s experience.⁶ Gunn, for instance, notes that the evil spirit represents the explicit manifestation of the “dark powers” to whom Saul is beholden.⁷ For Exum, the evil spirit is the means by which Saul experiences YHWH’s “persecuting presence.”⁸ Exum writes:

The tragic hero is haunted by demonic forces from both within and without. We witness as Saul, driven by petty fears and jealousies, becomes a disintegrated personality, but most disturbing is the realization that the evil spirit which torments him and makes his plight even more desperate is the agent of none other than YHWH. In this acknowledgment of the root of Saul’s distress, we discover why Saul alone of biblical heroes attains a truly tragic stature...⁹

The tormenting of Saul by the evil spirit lies at the heart of the tragic reading of Saul’s presentation.

In what follows, I intend to offer a somewhat different characterization of the evil spirit’s role in Saul’s demise. One element in the evil spirit’s role which, while potentially bolstering the tragic reading, is overlooked in each of the leading tragic accounts, is the parallel between the presentation of the evil spirit and the presentation of the spirit of YHWH. By teasing out the potential significance of this parallel we may see the evil spirit’s role in a somewhat different light to that of the “persecuting presence” advocated by Exum. In this reading, as the spirit of YHWH is the central sign and outworking of Saul’s election to the kingship, so the evil spirit (רוח רעה) becomes the central sign and outworking of Saul’s rejection.¹⁰ Thus, the presence of the רוח רעה goes some way to answering the question of what it means for Saul to be rejected; he is not killed or deposed after 1 Samuel 15, but he is, perhaps, debilitated by the presence of the רוח רעה. Of course, space precludes a detailed engagement with the overarching themes of the tragic accounts of Saul’s narrative. Instead, I use the parallel with the spirit of YHWH as a lens for understanding the function of the רוח רעה and I offer readers this alternative heuristic account to “try on for size” in the hope of a reasonably good fit.¹¹

I begin, then, by highlighting the primary points of contact between the רוח רעה and the spirit of YHWH before laying out some of the ways in which the spirit of YHWH

4. Exum (1992: 41); Exum quotes from Ricoeur (1967: 218).

5. See, for instance, Gunn’s account of 1 Sam. 8; Gunn (1980: 59-61).

6. Cf. also Nicholson’s characterization of divine ambivalence in Nicholson (2002: 77-110).

7. Gunn (1980: 78); Gunn draws here on Welch (1952: 63-79).

8. Exum (1992: 40).

9. Exum (1992: 40).

10. In the remainder of the discussion, I use the untranslated form of רוח רעה to avoid prejudging a complex question of translation.

11. This helpful account of approaching the biblical text comes from Gunn (1980: 17).

functions in the narrative of Saul's anointing. In the second part of the discussion, I offer a reading of 1 Samuel 16.14-23 and related texts which draws on the points of contact identified in Part 1 and invokes the role of the spirit of YHWH as an interpretive lens. The parallel between the spirit of YHWH and the רוח רעה not only sheds light on the function of the רוח רעה, but on the presentation of Saul as a rejected king. Thus, finally, I conclude with some reflections on the significance of this account for Saul's overall presentation.

1. *The spirit of YHWH and its role*

The similarities in the descriptions of the spirit of YHWH and the רוח רעה in 1 Samuel have received relatively scant attention.¹² Esther J. Hamori proves something of an exception and has helpfully outlined some of the core similarities in a brief discussion as part of a set of broader observations.¹³ Hamori attempts to bring together the Old Testament material relating to what she terms "the spirit of falsehood."¹⁴ The spirit of falsehood is most visible in 1 Kings 22, but Hamori traces its presence beyond 1 Kings 22, identifying other instances in which "a divinely sent רוח causes a person or group of people to hear falsehood or otherwise be deceived..."¹⁵

For our purposes it is Hamori's discussion of 1 Samuel which is of interest. Hamori highlights four ways in which the רוח רעה parallels the spirit of YHWH; (a) the arrival of both spirits can be described with the verb *וצלח* רוח-יהוה אל-דוד (16.13); *וצלח* רוח אלהים רעה אל-שאול (18.10); (b) again, both can be introduced with the verb *היה* רעה רוח-אלהים רעה: בהיות עליך רוח-אלהים רעה (16.16); ותהי על-מלאכי שאול רוח אלהים (19.20); (c) the departure of both is described with the verb *סרה* מאם שאול: סרה יהוה סרה מאם שאול (16.14); וסרה מעליו רוח הרעה (16.23); (d) finally, both spirits provoke prophecy: ותהי על-מלאכי שאול רוח אלהים וינבאו (18.10); ותצלח רוח אלהים רעה אל-שאול ויתנבא (19.20).¹⁶ The parallel presentation of the two spirits becomes explicit in 1 Samuel 16.14 where the spirit of YHWH departs from Saul immediately to be replaced by the רוח רעה, also "from YHWH."¹⁷

Hamori has nicely highlighted this parallel. However, in her discussion its significance remains underexplored. Hamori suggests that the רוח רעה can be compared with the spirit

12. Fredrik Lindström draws an analogy between the description of the spirit of YHWH in 1 Sam. 9.1-10.16 and the spirit described in 19.18-24, but otherwise this option is left underdeveloped. See Lindström (1983: 81-82). By contrast, studies often emphasize the similarities between the רוח רעה and other ancient Near Eastern spirits; see, for example, Kitz (2016: 447-464). Karel van der Toorn makes similar moves, although without explicit reference to 1 Samuel; van der Toorn (2003: 61-83); cf. Toy (1890: 17-30).

13. Hamori (2010: 15-30).

14. Hamori (2010: 18).

15. Hamori (2010: 18); Hamori identifies five texts, or groups of texts, which display a close connection with the tradition of a spirit of falsehood: 1 Kgs 22.1-19; 1 Sam. 16.14-23; 18.10-12; 19.9-10; Jdg. 9.23-24; 2 Kgs 19.7; Isa. 19.13-14. See the comments in Schuele (2012: 19-20).

16. Hamori (2010: 20). Hamori uses the example of 19.20 here, but perhaps more appropriate would be the example of Saul's prophetic initiation in 10.6 (cf. 10.10): וצלחה עליך רוח יהוה והתנבית עמם.

17. Hamori (2010: 20).

of falsehood, as described in 1 Kings 22, in its capacity as a spirit that causes delusion in Saul.¹⁸ It is not entirely clear that this is the role of the רוח רעה, but more importantly, Hamori does not explore how the parallel with the spirit of YHWH distinguishes the רוח רעה in 1 Samuel from the other texts she discusses. For instance, perhaps the most obvious parallel to the רוח רעה in 1 Samuel is found in Judges 9.23–24.¹⁹ In Judges 9, the context is also a contest around kingship, and in Judges more broadly, the spirit of YHWH has a prominent role. However, while some commentators contrast Abimelech's experience of the spirit of God with that of his predecessors and successors,²⁰ the role of the רוח רעה in Judges 9 bears no resemblance, to the spirit of YHWH as it appears elsewhere in Judges. In Judges 9.23 we are told, "And God sent (וישלח) an evil spirit (רוח רעה) between (בין) Abimelech and between the leaders of Shechem..."²¹ Nowhere in Judges is the spirit of YHWH sent. Rather, the spirit of YHWH functions largely as an agent in itself; it "clothes" (לבש) Gideon, it simply "is upon" Jephthah (היה), and it "rushes" upon Samson (צלח). What is more, here, the רוח רעה does not afflict one actor or individual. Rather, it comes between two parties and provokes treachery. The treachery is initiated by the Shechemites, but it is by no means clear that they alone are affected by the רוח רעה. Regardless, the point, at least, seems clear that the רוח רעה functions quite differently in Judges 9 to 1 Samuel.²² This is seen most particularly in its failure to function in any way analogous to the spirit of YHWH that plays such a prominent role elsewhere in the book.

All this suggests that there might be some significance in the parallel or analogy with the spirit of YHWH for understanding the role of the רוח רעה in Saul's narrative. To explore the interpretive potential of this parallel, we will do well to begin in 1 Samuel 10, where the spirit of YHWH/God is first introduced into Saul's experience. By coming to terms with the way the spirit of YHWH functions in 1 Samuel, we might then be able to use this portrayal as an interpretive lens for making sense of the role of the רוח רעה.

In 1 Samuel 9.16, YHWH announces Saul's imminent arrival to Samuel and tells of his plan to use Saul to liberate (ייע) his people from the Philistines. Saul is to be anointed as a "leader" (נגיד).²³ Samuel announces Saul's future role in somewhat ambiguous terms (9.20), and it is not until 10.1 that Saul hears anything more concrete.²⁴ Following his

18. Hamori (2010: 20); similarly, E. Noort places Judg. 9; 1 Kgs 22 and 1 Sam. 16 together, conceptually at least; see Noort (1984: 128).

19. The parallel between the two texts is regularly drawn, see, Soggin (1981: 180-181); Boling (1975: 175-176); Klein (1983: 165).

20. Butler (2009: 244).

21. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

22. Cf. Routledge (1998: 4).

23. The significance of the term נגיד is obscure. It may have originally functioned as a term for a king-designate, and some hold almost exclusively to this understanding of the term; cf. McCarter (1980: 178-179). It also seems possible that in later usage the term became a synonym for מלך; see Ishida (1999: 57-67); Halpern (1981: 1-11).

24. The LXX includes an addition in 10.1. Samuel's speech reads: Οὐχὶ κέχρικέν σε κύριος εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐπὶ τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, ἐπὶ Ἰσραηλ; καὶ σὺ ἄρξεις ἐν λαῷ κυρίου, καὶ σὺ σώσεις αὐτὸν ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν αὐτοῦ κυκλόθεν. καὶ τοῦτό σοι τὸ σημεῖον ὅτι ἐχρίσέν σε κύριος ἐπὶ κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἄρχοντα; McCarter puts the MT's omission of this section down to haplography, McCarter (1980: 171); cf. Klein (1983: 83); Auld (2012: 109). Hans Joachim Stoebe sees it as

anointing, Saul receives three signs (10.7) and an odd instruction to go down to Gilgal, which has momentous significance later in the narrative. It is the third of these signs that is of interest here.

This third sign (10.5-6) involves Saul's traveling to Gibeath-elohim and, once he arrives, meeting a group of prophets playing instruments and prophesying. At this point, Samuel promises, the spirit of YHWH will rush upon Saul, he will prophesy with the prophets and, somewhat cryptically, "will be turned into another man" (ונהפכת לאיש אחר). Curiously, this sign is then picked up in reverse order later in the chapter. In v.9, Saul turns to leave Samuel and "God turned another heart for him (ויהפך-לו אלהים לב אחר);²⁵ and all these signs came that day." We then read in v.10 that while on their way to Gibeah,²⁶ they (presumably Saul and his companions) meet a group of prophets and "the spirit of God rushed upon him (ותצלה עליו רוח אלהים) and he prophesied in their midst."

The primary observation that may be helpful at this point relates to how the spirit of God functions as a sign. In 10.7 Samuel summarizes the content of vv.2-6 as constituting a series of signs. In this sense, the addition found in the LXX in 10.1, that what follows in Samuel's speech is "the sign (τὸ σημεῖον) for you that the Lord has anointed you as a ruler over his over his inheritance (ἐπὶ κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἄρχοντα)," seems to clarify the basic sense of MT.²⁷ The encounters that Saul experiences following his anointing serve to confirm this anointing.²⁸ The third and climactic sign is that of Saul's endowment with the spirit of YHWH.²⁹ In this sense, the arrival of the spirit upon Saul has a confirmatory function. It endorses him as the anointed, designated by Samuel, but ultimately chosen by YHWH.³⁰ The theme of prophecy is obviously taken up elsewhere in 1 Samuel (19.18-24). Its exact significance here seems to be lost to us. Still, in the wider

an attempt at harmonization dependent on a different recension; Stoebe (1973: 197). Stoebe may well be correct that this addition is a harmonizing expansion. The LXX's expansion in 10.1 seems perfectly congruous with YHWH's statement to Samuel 9.16 and Samuel's comment in 10.7; cf. Pisano (1984: 166-169). Still, accounting for the textual history of the books of Samuel is notoriously difficult, and the possibility of different editions of the Samuel text seems increasingly likely. See Hugo (2010: 1-19).

25. My translation here is clumsy but highlights the parallel between 10.6 and 10.9; the NRSV's translation ("As he turned away to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart...") captures the sense.
26. Gibeah poses a number of problems throughout the Saul narrative, see Arnold (1990).
27. Contra Heller (2006: 104). Heller sees the fulfillment of the signs as "an ambiguous event." Serge Frolov's claim that "it is by no means clear what, if anything, [the signs] are supposed to signify" strikes me as peculiar; the context surely points toward their role as signs confirming Saul's anointing. Whether readers find them convincing as such is presumably another question. See Frolov (2007: 436-437).
28. Auld (2012: 113); Chapman (2016: 105); cf. the more skeptical reading of Samuel's "signs" in Polzin (1989: 105-108).
29. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg characterizes this third sign, rightly I think, as the "most important"; Hertzberg (1964: 85); cf. "the most impressive sign was the third," Gordon (1986: 117); even if vv.5-7 derive from a separate tradition to the earlier part of the chapter it seems that Hertzberg's and Gordon's points still stand; cf. Birch (1971: 65-66).
30. So, Blischke (2019: 16).

account of chapter 10, the act of prophecy seems to be subordinate to the confirmatory function that the spirit serves.

This instinct seems to be strengthened by the fact that the spirit of YHWH also has another function in 1 Samuel 10. As we have seen, the spirit of YHWH has an effect on Saul in the sense that it turns him into another man. The changing of Saul's heart by the spirit in 10.9 seems to cause some confusion, as it disrupts the expected order.³¹ Still, for our purposes at least, it seems clear that a second function of the spirit is to change Saul in some sense.³² The chapter does not spell out exactly what this change effects in Saul. Shimon Bar-Efrat's suggestion appears as good as any. Bar-Efrat argues, "One of the objectives of the narrative is to demonstrate Saul's transformation from a simple young man to a man with leadership ability."³³

The suggestion that Saul's transformation functions to equip him for his new leadership role is bolstered by the spirit's function in 1 Samuel 11. In 1 Samuel 11, the Ammonites threaten the people of Jabesh-gilead who consequently send out messengers to Saul seeking aid. We read in 11.6: "And the spirit of God rushed (והצלח) upon Saul when he heard [the report from Jabesh-gilead] and he became exceedingly angry." Even if v.6 does not make the point explicitly, the pattern of chapter 11 more broadly seems to follow the pattern familiar from the book of Judges where the spirit empowers a heroic figure for a military exploit.³⁴ Saul's astonishing victory (11.11) seems to be a consequence of his empowerment by the spirit. So while the connection between Saul's victory and the arrival of the spirit is not made explicit, the spirit's arrival still seems to function as a prerequisite for empowered success.

We have been looking, then, for suitable parallels within the text of 1 Samuel itself to furnish a careful reading of the function of the רוח רעה in 1 Samuel 16 and elsewhere. Hamori has helpfully highlighted the comparable ways in which the spirit of YHWH and the רוח רעה act in 1 Samuel, and I have attempted to work out part of the significance of this comparison by thinking through some of the ways in which the spirit of YHWH functions in the narratives of Saul's election in 1 Samuel 9–11. From what has been a fairly rudimentary survey, it seems as though the spirit of YHWH carries two primary functions. First, it serves to confirm Saul's anointing as the culmination of the three signs that Samuel promises Saul. Second, its arrival signals that the figure bestowed with the spirit will experience success in shaping events. Saul is empowered by the spirit for his role as king. This is partially seen, perhaps, in the change wrought in him in 1 Samuel 10 and more explicitly seen in the spirit's role in Saul's victory over the Ammonites in

31. McCarter (1980: 183).

32. Gordon (1986: 117).

33. "Eines der Ziele der Erzählung ist, die Wandlung Sauls von einem einfachen Jungen zum Mann mit Führungsfähigkeiten aufzuzeigen." Bar-Efrat (2007: 164-165); cf. Walter Brueggemann's assertion that Saul will become "a new creature empowered for God's special purpose." Brueggemann (1990: 75).

34. A. Graeme Auld points out that Judges 14.19 is the one other biblical text that links "the onset of the divine spirit and the anger of its recipient." Auld (2012: 122); cf. David Jobling's assessment, "Saul's military activity is very much that of a judge." Jobling (1998: 66). However, this is not to say that Saul's leadership is modeled on that of a judge, simply that the spirit here seems to be functioning in a way recognizable from Judges; see Beyerlin (1961: 189-190).

1 Samuel 11. With these observations in mind, we may now turn to 1 Samuel 16 and related passages to see whether they can shed any light on the role of the רוח רעה.

2. *The רוח רעה in 1 Samuel*

The scene is set for the enigmatic account in 1 Samuel 16.14–23 in 1 Samuel 15.28 when Samuel declares to Saul, “YHWH has torn (קרע) the kingdom of Israel from you today and given it to your neighbour, one better than you.” This statement sets up the broad trajectory for the remaining narrative in 1 Samuel.³⁵ Yet it also establishes the central tension of that narrative. For while Saul has had the kingdom torn (קרע) from him, he remains, ostensibly at least, king of Israel.³⁶ In other words, 1 Samuel 15 ends without any real clarity regarding what it means for Saul to be rejected. This problem is expressed most acutely at the beginning of 1 Samuel 16 when YHWH commands Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of the sons of Jesse as king over Israel. Samuel objects in 16.2: “How can I go? Saul will hear and kill me.” Saul’s rejection has just been announced, and yet, his presence as king remains a very real one. Nevertheless, Samuel’s reluctance is duly dealt with (16.3), and David is anointed king. The spirit of YHWH “rushes” (צלח; 16.13) upon David, and he takes up his position as YHWH’s chosen king.³⁷

At 16.14 we return to Saul. Saul’s last appearance in the narrative was in 15.34, when he exited the scene following his rejection and returned to Gibeah. Saul departs in 15.34 with Samuel’s words from 15.28–29 ringing in his ears. Were we in any doubt, the narrator’s comment in 15.35 (“YHWH repented that he had made Saul king over Israel”) closes the chapter with an emphatic note highlighting the change in Saul’s fortunes. Part of Samuel’s pronouncement in 15.28–29 has been fulfilled in the first half of chapter 16. We assume that David constitutes the better neighbor whom Samuel mentions, and his anointing serves to confirm Saul’s rejected status. However, the force of 15.28–29 is felt most fully in 16.14 when the spirit of YHWH departs from Saul and is replaced by the רוח רעה. As we have seen, that the spirit of YHWH is replaced so directly by the רוח רעה highlights the analogy between the two outlined above.³⁸

The two parts of chapter 16 are laced together and in combination serve to confirm the rejection of Saul in 1 Samuel 15.³⁹ Here I read through 16.14–23 and observe some

35. It is not clear what grounds there are for John Van Seters’s claim that the context for 16.14–23 is Saul’s “protracted conflict” with the Philistines and why the presence of 16.1–13 negates the possibility that 1 Sam. 15 provides the proper immediate context for 16.14–23; see Van Seters (2009: 121–122).

36. Thus, Barbara Green characterizes the narrative from this point on as “a dance of two dynasties” rather than merely the history of David’s rise; Green (2003: 262).

37. The spirit’s function in 16.13 mirrors our observations regarding its function in Saul’s appointment: it confirms his anointing and, perhaps, empowers him. That is to say its arrival stands at the head of David’s success in shaping the subsequent narrative (cf. the use of צלח in 16.13 and 11.6); see van Wijk-Bos (2011: 90–93).

38. Ashley Rose points to further ways in which 1 Samuel 15 and 16 may be linked; Rose (1974: 44–45).

39. The tensions between David’s introduction in 1 Sam. 16.14–23 and his arrival in 1 Samuel 17 are well known; it is widely taken that 1 Sam. 16.1–13 and 16.14–23 are parallel narratives that have subsequently been brought together, although to my mind, describing them as a

of its distinctive characteristics before turning to consider its significance in the wider context traced in Part 1.

The departure of the spirit in 16.14 is the perfect counterpoint to the end of 16.13 with its note on David's endowment with the spirit.⁴⁰ Samuel returns at the end of v.13 to Ramah with his departure here mirroring that at the end of 1 Samuel 15.⁴¹ The suggestion at the beginning of v.14 appears to be that the departure of the spirit from Saul and its arrival on David are simultaneous events with Samuel's departure for Ramah suggesting a completion of the events announced in 15.28–29.

Still, v.14 not only mirrors v.13 in the shift of YHWH's spirit from Saul to David, but Saul is also visited by a new spirit: "and a bad spirit from YHWH assailed him (ובעתתו יהוה רוח־רעה מאת יהוה)."⁴² The רוח־רעה is described in various ways throughout 1 Samuel 16 and beyond, but here it is first introduced through the rare verb בעת. In its Piel form, as we have it here, it mostly appears in poetic texts.⁴³ In Job in particular it appears relatively regularly, meaning something like "terrify."⁴⁴ Alternatively, and perhaps closer to its meaning here in 1 Samuel 16, Psalm 18.5 uses בעת to speak of the threat of death in these terms: "The cords of death encompassed me (אאפוני); the torrents of destruction assailed me (יבעתוני)." Initially, then, this spirit "assails" Saul; it comes upon him by force.⁴⁵ But while the arrival of the רוח־רעה in 16.14 is clearly disturbing, its exact effect is unclear and can only really be assessed through careful attention to the remaining narrative.

As we have seen, the end of 1 Samuel 15 provides the context for Saul's affliction in 1 Samuel 16. However, even as there is continuity between the narrated events of 1 Samuel 15 and 16, there is also a divergence in Saul's presentation. While in chapters 10–15 Saul is able to shape events, he acts in decisive ways, albeit with certain negative consequences, but here in chapter 16, he is consistently guided by others. Perhaps the impression is given that it is no longer Saul who has the power to shape his own circumstances. It is his servants who step forward in v.15 to diagnose his plight, which they do with startling accuracy, mirroring the language of the narrator almost exactly (v.14:

doublet is unhelpful; see the detailed discussion in Seidl (1986: 39-55); cf. Smith (1899:149); McCarter (1980: 30, 282); Dietrich (2012: 253). Whatever account we give of the text's pre-history, some explanation has to be given for the interlocking allusions that hold the two parts of the chapter together; cf. Green (2003: 282). The primary source of tension between 16.1-13 and 16.14-23 is the description of David in 16.18 as a "man of war" that contrasts with the youngest son and acting shepherd in 16.1-13.

40. Cf. Howard (1989: 473-483).

41. 15.34: וילך שמואל הרמתה; 16.13: ויקם שמואל וילך הרמתה.

42. Given the broad semantic range of the adjective רע, in translation I tend to prefer the relatively bland term "bad," as this seems to capture something of its potential semantic breadth; cf. Chapman (2016: 150-151); Dohmen and Rick (1997: 560-588).

43. In later prose (Esther, Daniel, Chronicles), it appears in a Niphal form and means quite straightforwardly "to be terrified"; *HALOT*, 1:147.

44. For instance, Job 7.13-14, "When I say, 'My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,' then you scare me (והתתני) with dreams and terrify me (תבעתני) with visions..."

45. The LXX translates with πνίγω (to suffocate; to stifle); this is the only use of this verb in the LXX.

היהוה בעתתו רוח־רעה מאת יהוה (רוח־אלהים רעה מבעתך; v.15: 46 The perspicacity of Saul's court attendants is all the more striking given that they proceed to offer a solution to Saul's affliction in v.16, which proves to be perfectly suited (v.23): seek out a man who is "skilled in playing the lyre."⁴⁷

All seems to be well and good here, as far as it goes. However, a layer of irony is added to the situation in v.17 when Saul commands his servants, "Provide a man for me (ראוֹנָא לִי אִישׁ) to play well..." Here, at last, we have Saul's first words since his rejection in 1 Samuel 15, and they echo, quite clearly, YHWH's words in 16.1, "For I have provided (כִּי־רִאִיתִי) for myself (לִי) a king among his sons." Thus, the interplay between the two parts of the chapter is confirmed. With this resonance, Saul's election of David is set up as a subordinate counterpart, or corollary, of YHWH's election of David.⁴⁸ For, of course, David is the one who is provided.

Previously we have seen Saul's servants offering insightful advice for Saul's relief.⁴⁹ Yet in v.18, the role of one of these servants is brought into question.⁵⁰ If Saul's own call for a musician echoes YHWH's call for a king, then the lad's recommendation of David in v.18 confirms that Saul in chapter 16 is trapped in connection with his neighbor.⁵¹ David is recommended and praised in the highest possible terms. He is certainly qualified for the role (יָדַע נֶגֶן). But the lad, for reasons that are unclear, has much more to say.⁵² David is described in terms that will come to make sense as his career progresses, but now, while he tends the sheep,⁵³ the endorsement seems a little exaggerated.⁵⁴ However, the final phrase of endorsement, "and YHWH is with him," seems to act as the core note of introduction and as a summary of all that will distinguish David from Saul henceforth.⁵⁵ In other words, the one "seen" (רָאָה) by this youth is the one "provided" (רָאָה)

46. There has been some debate around the form רוח־אלהים רעה; Henry Preserved Smith sees the phrase, along with its counterpart from 1 Sam. 19.9 (רוח יהוה רעה), as ungrammatical; Smith (1899: 149); for more on the possible grammar, see Tsumura (2007: 427). In general, I am content to follow a traditional rendering of the phrase רוח־אלהים רעה is given as an example of a construct phrase that is indefinite even though the following genitive is a unique appellative (אלהים) in Waltke and O'Connor (1990: 241). The distinction in the spirit's origin between אלהים and יהוה is unclear but has been picked up in source-critical terms; cf. Campbell (2003: 176).

47. Quite why the playing of the lyre is recognized as the remedy for Saul's spiritual situation is unclear; that, within the world of the text, it is assumed to be the correct response is the substantive point for our purposes. In general, speculation that seeks to identify Saul's affliction in contemporary terms is unconvincing, as are attempts to read David's music in manipulative terms; e.g., Friedmann (2014: 107-108).

48. See Bodner (2008: 173).

49. On the significance of the servants in Saul's presentation, see Hildebrandt (2015: 186-188).

50. For a brilliant account of Saul's servants in 1 Sam. 16, see Johnson (2013: 201-215).

51. Again, רָאָה is used to introduce David (הנה ראיתי בן לישי בית הלחמי); Bodner (2008: 173).

52. Some interpreters are certainly inclined to find the lad's verbosity suspicious; see Brueggemann (1990: 125-126); Dietrich (2012: 252).

53. In 16.19 Saul requests: שלחה אלי את־דוד בנך אשר בצאן (cf. 16.11); see Dietrich's reflections on the significance of this connection; Dietrich (2012: 266).

54. Cf. the insights in Johnson (2012: 206-213).

55. McCarter (1980: 218).

by YHWH. He not only holds the key to Saul's relief, but he is also distinct from Saul in the most fundamental way.

David's service constitutes an opportunity too good to pass up, and Saul sends word to Jesse to have David sent to him (16.19). David is duly sent into Saul's service and is presented before him.

We are then told, simply, in v.21 that "he loved him." There is, however, some confusion as to who loved whom. Commentators and translators have typically made Saul the subject, such that Saul is pleased with David's service and loves him.⁵⁶ This translation has the advantage of thickening the irony and pathos in an already deeply ironic narrative.⁵⁷ Saul loves the one sent by YHWH to replace him. Still, on balance, to read Saul as the subject of ויאהבהו seems a peculiar move. For it seems unlikely in a verse in which David is undoubtedly the subject of three of the four *waw*-consecutives, and Saul the referent of each of their respective object markers, that we would switch subject and object for the penultimate *waw*-consecutive verb with no indication that this is taking place.⁵⁸ It is occasionally suggested that Saul's love for David here forms part of a wider trope in which David receives love from those who surround him.⁵⁹ Thus, Saul here is in line with Jonathan and Michal in loving David. However, the striking thing about the subsequent narrative is the way in which Saul is so alienated from his offspring precisely because they love David, and he does not; the contrast in their approaches to David is what is so arresting. Accordingly, an appeal to the love of Jonathan and Michal for David would seem to give us no grounds here for assuming that it is Saul who loves David. As it is then, it seems more natural to see David here as offering devotion to his lord.⁶⁰

David's devotion to Saul is balanced in v.22 by Saul's pleasure in David's service. Saul sends to Jesse to request that David be given leave to remain with Saul because David has "found favour" in Saul's eyes.

The narrative reaches its climax, or consummation, in 16.23. There are a number of elements in this verse that pick up on what has previously been said in the chapter. The "spirit of God" visits Saul, and David plays for him for the first time.⁶¹ David's music is the ideal remedy for Saul. When he plays, Saul is refreshed (רוח) in contrast to his affliction by the spirit (רוח), and it is well with him. The diagnosis of the servants is confirmed, and David's presence, ironically enough, provides relief. Saul's affliction becomes intermittent, as v.23 seems to provide a statement of Saul and David's ongoing practice

56. Thompson (1974: 335); cf. LXX^L; NRSV; Smith (1899: 149); McCarter (1980: 281); Auld (2012: 189-190); Tsumura (2007: 431-432); Klein (1983: 167); Hertzberg (1964: 142); Brueggemann (1990: 126); Firth (2009: 189); Borgman (2008: 41).

57. Fokkelman (1986: 139-140).

58. See Wong (1997: 554-55).

59. Klein (1983: 167); Fokkelman (1986: 139-140); Auld (2012: 190).

60. Dietrich sees this as more syntactically likely but plays on the ambiguity in suggestive ways; Dietrich (2012: 268).

61. The sense in v.23 is probably a general one, "Whenever the spirit of God came to Saul, David took the lyre..." But this is the first time that we are told of David playing. MT only reads רוח־אלהים, and it is possible that רעה has dropped out given its wide attestation in other textual witnesses (some Hebrew manuscripts, LXX^L, Syriac, Vulgate). Even so, as the MT stands, it is clear that רוח־אלהים refers to the רוח־רעה that troubled Saul in v.13. This is made explicit with the final words of the verse (וסרה מעליו רוח הרעה).

(והיה בהיות). Thus, a pattern is set here for much of the rest of the Saul-David narrative. Saul's affliction by the רוח רעה is persistent, but David's music is an effective remedy. The final note of the chapter, that "the bad spirit departed (וסרה) from him," echoes, and forms an inclusio with, v.14 (ורוח יהוה סרה).⁶²

We can now try to draw some of these observations together. The irony of 16.14–23 comes through the fact that Saul welcomes into his presence the one anointed to replace him. This is the first narrative featuring Saul since his rejection in chapter 15, and the role of the spirit seems to confirm that Saul's existence will be very different this side of his rejection. Just as Saul's appointment was confirmed by the arrival of the spirit as a "sign" and David's anointing was confirmed through the arrival of the spirit, so Saul's rejection is likewise confirmed through the arrival of a counter spirit. There seems little doubt that the role of the רוח רעה in 16.14–23 mirrors the confirmatory function of the spirit of YHWH in chapter 10.⁶³

We may push a little further though. In 1 Samuel 11, the spirit of YHWH empowered Saul for military exploits in a manner familiar from the book of Judges. The linguistic resonance between Saul's experience in 1 Samuel 11 and David's experience in 16.13 (צלח) probably points to the spirit having a similarly empowering function for David. The arrival of the spirit of God indicates that its recipient is ready to shape events and act in power to bring about his purposes. Does the רוח רעה have an analogous function in 1 Samuel 16.14–23? Not explicitly. Still, we might consider the fact that a number of elements in Saul's presentation are suggestive in this regard. First, Saul is guided in the chapter almost exclusively by his servants. He shows no awareness of his own plight and no inclination to act to remedy it without his servants' encouragement and diagnosis.⁶⁴ Saul takes no initiative for his own good. Second, through the distinctive linguistic resonance between Saul's request in 16.17 (רארנא לי איש) and YHWH's order in 16.1 (כי־ראיתי בבנו לי מלך), we see that when Saul does act, he only does so in subordination to YHWH's purposes. The man Saul requests as a musician, YHWH has decided on as king. Third, and finally, it is no surprise then that Saul's careful search for a musician ends only with his welcoming his anointed replacement into his own court. What is more, the chapter ends with Saul's dependence on another servant. Saul relies on David's music and thus on David himself, his replacement, for his well-being (16.16; טוב).

All of which is to say that, in 16.14–23, we are granted a glimpse of Saul's existence going forward. Gunn aptly describes 16.14–23 as "the rest of the story in microcosm."⁶⁵ The רוח רעה arrives in 16.14, and from that point we see a depiction of Saul that will dominate the remainder of 1 Samuel, a helpless figure, unable to shape proceedings in any decisive way. Saul is dependent on those around him and especially on the one who will replace him. In this sense, the רוח רעה may well have an analogous role to the spirit

62. Tsumura (2007: 426).

63. Cf. Rose (1974: 53).

64. "...the servants in 16.14-23 function as an indirect evaluation of the character of Saul... They demonstrate the royal characteristics of control, oratory skill, spiritual insight, and problem-solving which their master, by comparison, lacks." Hildebrandt (2015: 187-188); cf. Seidl (1986: 48-49). Bodner highlights the similarities between the servants in 1 Sam. 9 and 16; Bodner (2008: 173).

65. Gunn (1980: 78); cf. Rose (1974: 56-57).

of YHWH earlier in the narrative. Its arrival stands at the head of Saul's new career in which he often appears essentially impotent. Thus, Saul may now be a non-figure inasmuch as he is rendered incapable of definitive action. The spirit of YHWH empowered him for action in 1 Samuel 11, so it seems quite possible, at least, that the arrival of the רוח רעה in 16.14 symbolizes his new incapacity for definitive action.⁶⁶ Readers reach the end of 1 Samuel 15 with some confusion surrounding how exactly Saul's rejection is to be worked out. Through the confirmatory sign of the רוח רעה, this confusion is addressed. Saul, as an elected king, is driven by a confirmatory power; now as a rejected king, he is debilitated by an anti-power. To be the rejected king is to be prevented from shaping events and moving the narrative forward; Saul is now only king in name.⁶⁷ Thus, rejection means not deposition or death but impotence. The signal that this change has taken place and that Samuel's words from 15.28 have taken effect is the substitution of the spirit of YHWH with the רוח רעה.

Of course, all this, to some degree, runs beyond the specifics of 1 Samuel 16. Furthermore, there will be times in the subsequent narrative that Saul does seem to act decisively (e.g., 1 Sam. 22). However, echoing Gunn's point above, 1 Samuel 16.14–23's prominent position at the opening of Saul's new career as the rejected king of Israel gives it interpretive capital in our understanding of the remainder of the narrative. Consequently, it does seem as though the contrast between the empowering spirit of 1 Samuel 11 and the debilitating spirit of 1 Samuel 16 provides an appropriate way of thinking about the sea change in Saul's fortunes following his rejection.

This kind of approach might find some support when we turn to the second explicit appearance of the רוח רעה in 1 Samuel 18. The immediate context of the spirit's appearance in 1 Samuel 18.10 clearly parallels that of 1 Samuel 16. David has just defeated Goliath in combat (1 Sam. 17) and, in 1 Samuel 18.2, Saul takes David into his court and then places him over his warriors (18.5). However, at this point things begin to turn sour. David meets with extraordinary success, and "the women from all the cities of Israel" sing his praises in 18.7: "Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands."⁶⁸ This comparison arouses Saul's ire and seems to be the origin of his concern about David. We then receive the note in 18.10:

¹⁰And it was, on the next day, a bad spirit of God rushed at Saul (ותצלח רוח אלהים רעה אל־שאול) and he prophesied (ויתנבא) in the house and David was playing by hand as he did day by day and the spear was in Saul's hand. ¹¹And Saul hurled the spear, for he said, "I will strike David into the wall." And David evaded Saul twice.⁶⁹

66. See the similar remarks in Edelman (1991: 117).

67. There may be an analogy between the relationship of 1 Sam. 15 and 16 and 1 Sam. 13 and 14. In 1 Sam. 13, Saul receives his first word of rejection. In 1 Sam. 14, Saul is presented as a hapless figure in striking contrast to the confident and competent Jonathan. Perhaps a similar dynamic is on display here; following his rejection in 1 Sam. 15, Saul is presented as helpless in 1 Sam. 16 in contrast to David who has YHWH with him. This contrast is, of course, continued into 1 Sam. 17–18. On 1 Sam. 14, see Jobling (1976: 367–376).

68. There is some debate over how exactly באלפו and ברבבתיו might parallel one another. However, it seems certain that the latter exceeds the former; cf. Brueggemann (1993: 228–229).

69. The whole text from v.6 is difficult, and the omission of vv.10–11 from many LXX manuscripts complicates matters and perhaps suggests a very late insertion of these verses; cf. McCarter (1980: 305–309); Smith, (1899: 168). Here I attend to the MT as best I can.

Saul here encounters the רוח רעה once again. This time, however, we are told that he “prophesied” or perhaps he “raved.” While נבא as a verb usually indicates some significant interaction with YHWH in the Old Testament, it can have more negative connotations.⁷⁰ The juxtaposition of Saul’s attack on David in v.11 with the arrival of the רוח רעה in v.10 perhaps suggests a relationship of cause and effect. However, it may be significant that Saul’s animosity toward David has already built in the preceding verses and, therefore, does not necessarily have its cause in the רוח רעה itself. Quite what relationship the רוח רעה has to Saul’s subsequent actions of aggression is obscure here.⁷¹

The picture here is somewhat more confused than it was in 1 Samuel 16. It is not quite clear that David’s music has the same salutary effect that it did in the earlier passage.⁷² However, the note that David played “day by day” (כיום ביום) suggests some continuity with what has gone before. A further point of continuity with 1 Samuel 16 is the presentation of David vis-à-vis Saul. The text continues in v.12: “And Saul feared David for YHWH was with him and he had departed from Saul (ומעם שאול סר).”⁷³ Just as in 1 Samuel 16, Saul’s desertion by YHWH is paralleled with his experience of the רוח רעה and David’s experience of YHWH’s presence. This contrast, in turn, reverberates through the surrounding verses as David meets with continual success, and Saul’s endeavors are frustrated. Something similar is echoed again in 1 Samuel 19.8–10 where the context mirrors 1 Samuel 18 in striking ways. David returns from extraordinary success against the Philistines, and Saul seeks to kill him unsuccessfully. The overall depiction is one of a debilitated king, contrasted with an ideal figure who moves from strength to strength. Yet, at the heart of this contrast lies the two figures’ differing experience of YHWH and the spirit. The sense, therefore, is created that the רוח רעה not only confirms Saul’s rejection but also is central in the contrast between David and Saul. David is the successful figure; he accomplishes everything he turns his hand to, and YHWH is with him. Saul is a debilitated, impotent figure who is afflicted by the רוח רעה.

The point here has not been to establish a tight case for the explicit presentation of the רוח רעה as a means of Saul’s debilitation following his rejection. Rather, the case is a more subtle one. If we can be reasonably confident that the רוח רעה mirrors the spirit of YHWH in confirming Saul’s rejection, then is it possible that it also mirrors the function of the spirit of YHWH in depicting and rendering Saul as a king incapable of definitive action? If the spirit of YHWH empowered Saul for action, is it reasonable to read the רוח רעה as doing the opposite? When we read the passages of 1 Samuel 16, 18 and 19 through this lens, we see that the presentation of Saul is suggestive of just such a function for the רוח רעה. In 1 Samuel 16, Saul is a figure trapped in a web of unintended consequences, guided by those around him and dependent on David for his well-being. In 1 Samuel 18, Saul is outdone by David. Indeed, in terms of the chapter’s presentation, the

70. See, for instance, 1 Kgs 18.29.

71. It is not necessarily the case then that vv.10-11 present Saul in a sympathetic light as “an attempt to understand Saul’s nature...” Contra Hertzberg (1964: 158).

72. Although, this probably does not substantiate Edelman’s point that the “evil divine spirit” is an “outside force” that is “attempting to thwart the divine plan”; Edelman (1991: 138). See, instead, Chapman (2016: 160).

73. See the comments on the presentation of David in 1 Sam. 18, particularly in relation to שכל, in Forti and Glatt-Gilad (2015: 390-400).

role of the רוח רעה and the presence of YHWH seem central to the distinction between the two figures. David's success is attributed to YHWH's presence; surely we are to see Saul's relative ineffectiveness as, in part, dependent on the רוח רעה. Thus, we see what it means for Saul to be the rejected king – not killed, not deposed, but debilitated.

Conclusion

We can now review all that we have said more broadly. The רוח רעה in 1 Samuel 16, 18 and 19 is distinct in the Old Testament for its presentation as a parallel to the spirit of YHWH. We have seen the ways in which a shared vocabulary is used to introduce each spirit. What is more, the רוח רעה is introduced as a direct replacement for the spirit of YHWH in 1 Samuel 16.14 and thus serves to confirm Saul's rejection. By using the parallel between the two spirits as a heuristic lens for reading the role of the רוח רעה in 1 Samuel 16 and 18 in particular, we have seen how the presence of the רוח רעה stands at the head of the new depiction of Saul as one incapable of shaping events.

The tragic readings with which we began seek to designate the רוח רעה as an explicit example of a wider dynamic in the Saul narrative, stemming from the scene at Ramah in 1 Samuel 8, in which a hostile fate drives Saul to destruction.⁷⁴ Thus, the רוח רעה constitutes a "persecuting presence" that highlights for the reader the true source of Saul's failing and demise: YHWH himself.⁷⁵ My own account suggests a somewhat different dynamic. The parallel between the two spirits, which I have traced, suggests a striking discontinuity between Saul's life as an elected king and his existence as a rejected one. Thus, the parallel roles of the רוח רעה and the spirit of YHWH implicitly point to the significance of 1 Samuel 13 and 15 as crucial moments in Saul's career in which his prospects take a decided turn. By carefully highlighting the parallel between the spirit of YHWH and the רוח רעה, and the distinct presentation of Saul to which each spirit contributes, we end up placing greater weight on 1 Samuel 13 and 15 as career-altering events for Saul. This in turn undermines the sense that the presence of the רוח רעה makes explicit a hostility to Saul latent from the outset of the narrative. On the contrary, the רוח רעה emerges to replace the empowering spirit that had rested on Saul before his rejection and while he was still the elect king. The arrival of the רוח רעה marks the advent of a dramatic change in Saul's fortunes and presentation.

By binding the presence of the רוח רעה to Saul's rejection, we can also make sense of another element of the Saul narrative. Saul's rejection in 1 Samuel 15 is somewhat opaque in its implications.⁷⁶ Saul is not killed following his rejection, nor is he deposed; things seem to continue much as they were. As it is then, the question presents itself: what does Saul's rejection mean? Perhaps the presence of the רוח רעה goes some way toward answering this question. As the spirit of YHWH has confirmed Saul's election, so the רוח רעה may confirm Saul's rejection in 1 Samuel 16.14. But also, as the spirit of YHWH has empowered Saul for action, so too can a case be made that the רוח רעה debilitates Saul and strips him of the capacity to influence and shape events. As I have

74. See Gunn (1980: 128); Exum (1992: 22); cf. Polzin (1989: 100-108); Jobling (1998: 85-88).

75. Exum (1992: 40).

76. It seems reasonable to accept that in 1 Samuel 13, it is Saul's dynasty that is rejected; cf. Birch (1976: 85).

already suggested, then, rejection for Saul does not mean death or deposition. He continues as king. The difference now is that he no longer rules as YHWH's chosen and empowered king. His rule is hampered by the רעוּת רָעָה, and he is unable to shape events in decisive and meaningful ways.⁷⁷ The arrival of the רעוּת רָעָה signals the realization of Saul's rejection; rejection for Saul means futility.

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77. The depiction of Saul I am suggesting here may cohere with Stephen Chapman's case that Saul "over-lives" following his rejection; Chapman (2016: 240); Chapman here draws from Wilson (2004).

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