

# **WHEN PROPHETS PLAY THE LYRE: SAUL AND THE STRINGS OF THE SPIRIT**

**Biblical Studies Interest Group**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the meetings, it is noticeable that while some in the rear are opposing and arguing, others are at the altar falling down under the power of God and feasting on the good things of God. The two spirits are always manifest, but no opposition can kill, no power in earth or hell can stop God's work, while he has consecrated instruments through which to work.<sup>1</sup>

A recurring notion in 1 Samuel (chapters 10, 16, 18-19) appears to highlight the relation of King Saul to the Spirit, prophesying and the playing of the lyre. Saul initially receives the Spirit of the LORD and begins to prophesy as predicted by Samuel once Saul hears the music of the prophets at Gibeah. Later, the Spirit of the LORD departs from Saul and comes upon David. With the departure of the Spirit of the LORD a "troubling spirit of God" comes upon Saul causing sudden violent outbreaks. The only relief from the troubling spirit is the music of Spirit-endowed David on the lyre. Further, the "prophets prophesying" appears to function musically throughout this literary unit being included with the overcoming of Saul twice to "prophesy" when encountering a group of prophets prophesying (in the first instance explicitly with music and suggestive in the second). A literary and theological interpretation of the relevant texts is

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<sup>1</sup> An editorial testimony from the revival taking place at the Azusa Street Mission that was printed in the first issue of the *The Apostolic Faith* 1.1 (September 1906), p. 1.

offered for discerning the role of the Spirit in the instrumentation of the prophets in 1 Samuel with several proposed implications drawn from and for Pentecostal practice.

Music plays a significant function in the Pentecostal congregation as that which prepares the spirits of the gathered to be attuned to the Spirit of the one gathering. The sounds of voices and instruments played by the Spirit call for testimony, preaching, confession and enraptured transformation. Songs of the Spirit flow over the worshippers as tongues are raised in praise to the Lord. Bodies are strewn about the altar as the singing continues. Weeping and wailing, praises and confessions can be heard ringing in the midst of the singing saints. The Spirit comes over one; and then another. Prophecies proclaiming the victory of the Lord resound. Words of consolation and rebuke echo in tones resonating within the Spirit-ed. The music transforms. The songs empower. The atmosphere is charged with the Spirit.

Thus, one finds the Benjamite Saul, son of Kish, overwhelmed by the Spirit again and again in the first book of Samuel. These troubling texts offer a melody for hearing the Spirit's relation to Saul and the music of the Spirit-ed: 1 Sam.10.1-12; 16.13-23; 18.6-14; and 19.8-24. Saul is promised to be made new. Saul is tasked to act once the Spirit descends. Saul is overwhelmed by the lyres and cymbals and finds himself joining the prophetic band. Saul is troubled and only finds relief in the rests offered at the hands of Spirit-empowered David strumming songs of deliverance. At the repeating crescendo, Saul finds himself utterly overcome with the dissonant spirit and seeking to end the ministering minstrel, but is cast down in a parody of his son Jonathan intermingled with his first encounter as concluding cadence. How should one hear the Spirit in these accounts? What does Gibeah have to do with Azusa?

Though much could be said about the therapeutic nature of music (as much has already been said in numerous volumes)<sup>2</sup>, this does not seem the point of these texts. In fact, the musical instrumentation is just that: instrumental. It is the Spirit who carries forward the movements. One might in fact surmise from these texts that it is the LORD who plays the instruments by His Spirit to will and do what he desires. And these instruments in the hands of the LORD can be played to lift and relieve the spirit or to compel the spirit to melancholy notes of despair. How one might respond to the strings of the Spirit’s strumming finds one voice in these troubling and relieving accounts.

### **1 SAMUEL 10.1-12 – THE MUSIC BEGINS – SAUL’S CHARISMATIC ANOINTING**

Israel demands a king like the other nations around them to fight their battles and make them to have a great name. The LORD grants them a king, Saul, from among the Benjamites, the son of Kish. The prophet of the LORD who has been introduced as hearing the word of the LORD previous to this account is Samuel whom the LORD entrusts to anoint this king. Saul was thus anointed by Samuel to “rule” and to “save” (1 Sam. 9.16; 10.1). It is notable that the use of

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of music therapies with extensive bibliography see, T. Wigram, I. Nygaard Pedersen, and L. O. Bonde, eds. *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy: Theory, Clinical Practice, Research and Training* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004). Several articles which speak to the use of music therapy related to the Church and drawing on several of the following passages can be found in C. O. Aluede, ‘Music Therapy in Traditional African Societies: Origin, Basis and Application in Nigeria,’ *Journal of Human Ecology* 20/1 (2006), pp. 31-35; ‘F. Adedeji, ‘The Theology and Practice of Music Therapy in Nigerian Indigenous Churches: Christ Apostolic Church as a Case Study,’ *Asia Journal of Theology* 22/1 (2008), pp. 142-154; ‘Some Reflections on the Future of Music Therapy in Nigeria,’ *The Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa* 2/1 (2010), p. 36; ‘F. Adedeji and A. Ogunleye, ‘Music as a Form of Medicine for the Church: A Theomusicological Study and Application in I Samuel 16:14-23,’ *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (2013): pp. 27-49; A. O. Ricketts, ‘Employing Music as an Aid for Healing in the Church,’ *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2013), pp. 102-111. Several books addressing this topic would be E. W. Nelson, *Music and Worship* (TX: Baptist Spanish Publishing House, 1985), D. P. Hustard, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1989), M. Coleman and L. Indquise, eds., *Come and Worship* (New Jersey: Choose Books, 1989), J. N. Corbitt, *The Sound of Harvest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), Janvier 2007, Aluede and Ekewenu 2009

the vial (ִפְּ) of oil for the anointing of Saul is the same term used for the container poured over Jehu at his anointing (2 Kgs 9.1, 3). This offers a suggestive literary contrast to the horn (קֶרֶן) used for David (1 Sam. 16.1, 13) and Solomon (1 Kgs 1.39). A. G. Auld and K. Bodner both suggest this linkage might anticipate Jehu who was also intended to deliver Israel from her enemies yet himself faces the ultimate rejection as king by the LORD.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the nature of the vial (earthenware) and that of the horn are also meant to contrast in the length of their usefulness: the former breaks easily and irreparably, while the latter endures.<sup>4</sup>

W. Brueggemann offers, “The act of kingmaking is soteriological. Saul is *to save*. The act is also ecclesiological. It is for the sake of the *community*. Saul is to save and to make this community freshly possible.”<sup>5</sup> However, while this is true of Saul’s kingmaking it would also be true of the judges to whom Saul seems to stand as a Janus-like figure between delivering and community guaranteeing judges and kings. Three signs would confirm for Saul that he was to be the appointed ruler and deliverer of Israel: two men giving direction to find the lost donkeys near Rachel’s tomb at Zilzah<sup>6</sup>, three men ascending to Bethel with offerings to share, and minstreling prophets descending from Gibeah (which is noted as near a Philistine garrison). The three signs that Saul was the Lord’s anointed would happen among the “familiar settings of a tomb and a

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<sup>3</sup> A. G. Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), pp. 110, 113; K. Bodner, *I Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), pp. 92-3. This literary link is further strengthened by both Jehu and Saul hiding their anointing from immediate inquiries.

<sup>4</sup> Y. Weinberger, *I Samuel: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2011), p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> W. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), p. 74, original emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> J. Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel* (London: Oliphants, 1971), p. 98, contends that the verbal root of Zelzah (an otherwise unknown location in Benjamin) means ‘to rush’ and may in fact be a playful way of indicating the nature of the Spirit of God ‘rushing’ upon Saul.

tree and a town."<sup>7</sup> The sacred spaces and acts of the signs would be followed by the rush of the transforming Spirit upon him to empower him to act to deliver and vouchsafe the community.

T. Cartledge suggests that the narrator has intentionally informed the reader that Saul was changed into "a new man" with a "different heart" at the point which he left Samuel rather than after meeting the prophets and prophesying with them (10.9).<sup>8</sup> Samuel had stated this change would happen after the three signs, yet Saul is not stated to be changed after the signs despite the fulfillment narrative following. The narrator appears to want this clarified that everything stated by Samuel about Saul was fulfilled even if not in the way thought at first. "This narrative is a study in what happens to one man when he is caught up in Yahweh's purpose of powerful rescue and new governance."<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that Caleb was "marked as a man with "a different spirit" who will therefore live and prosper in the land (Num. 14:24)," and Ezekiel offered "a future for exilic Israel" that Yahweh might give them a "new heart" and a "new spirit" (Ezek. 11.19; 36.26). This account

is placed midway between the hopelessness of the wilderness and the despair of exile. Saul participates in a crisis and a drama not unlike that of Caleb before him and Ezekiel after him. God claims Saul and God transforms Saul. Israel can again participate in God's promises. Thus Saul receives a new heart, a new way to be in the world. This narrative momentarily holds the possibility that Saul (and therefore Israel) may become a "new creation" for whom "the old has passed away" and "the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17).<sup>10</sup>

One might even dare to ask whether it is "too much to say that, for the moment, we are watching an adumbration of Pentecost in which the community of faith turns toward God's newness with inexplicable power and freedom?"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> E. H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> T. W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2001), pp. 133-34.

<sup>9</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 78.

T. Cartledge proposes a priestly or cultic notion in connection with the second sign for Saul where he receives the “bread” given for sacrificial offering to the priests (clarified as such by the LXX), a prophetic connection by Saul’s endowment with *רוח* where he prophesies and finally a kingly connection since this is his anointing to be king of Israel.<sup>12</sup> Might this suggestion be an offer that Saul had at least at this point begun to be a king *and* priest even if only temporarily doing these well? Further, he joins the prophetic band to the proverbial question of Israel.

What does it mean for Saul to be “among the prophets” and to prophesy with that musical band of prophets? “It is not said explicitly in so many words, but it is suggested that there is a musical component in Saul’s new heart with his “acting the prophet.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the nature of the prophetic endowment seems directly connected to instrumentation by the Spirit-ed prophets. The musical nature of the prophetic may in fact have been a common enough feature of ancient Israelite prophetic practice as even David would later sing by the Spirit playing the prophet (2 Sam 22-23) and it would seem he did likewise in his ensuing soothing tones for Saul’s troubled spirit.

Much of the discussion of the prophets of the FP seems to miss this element (which may be more apparent in a Pentecostal/charismatic worship context) of the musical and the prophetic as harmonious companions without special deference to dervishes and ecstatic practices.<sup>14</sup> For example, Cartledge offers an extended discussion of the “ecstatic prophets” and their “dervish-

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<sup>12</sup> T. Wigram, I. Nygaard Pedersen, and L. O. Bonde, eds. *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy: Theory, Clinical Practice, Research and Training*.

<sup>13</sup> Auld, *I & II Samuel*, p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> Several ETT read an explicit notion of ecstasy in the prophesying of these prophets here and in chapter 19: NJB (‘ecstasy’), CEB, NRS (‘frenzy’). The RSV used ‘prophesying’ so it is a striking move on the part of the NRS to make the shift to the language of ‘frenzy’.

like dance”<sup>15</sup> following a similar proposal as that offered earlier by J. Lindblom. Cartledge regards this text (along with 1 Sam. 19.18-24) as pointing to an earlier stage in Israelite prophetic practices where various inducements were used to gain prophetic insight. He also proposes this is comparable to charismatic expressions of worship which may offer some insight, but seems to misrepresent the nature and aim of such expressions. He states,

Analogous shamans of primitive cultures (up to and including the modern era) are known to use various naturally occurring drugs from mushrooms, tree bark, or hemp for the same purpose. It is worthy of note that modern rock bands who promote drug usage serve in a similar role as idolized shamans to a vast number of people who are supposedly more enlightened.

There is a sense in which modern charismatic churches that promote glossolalia, “holy laughter,” and “being slain in the Spirit” have preserved many of these ancient prophetic traditions. Such churches often rely on powerful music or the chant-like sermons of the preacher to induce the contagious “movement of the Spirit,” which may lead even skeptical participants to speak in other tongues, fall senseless to the floor, or laugh uncontrollably. Whether it is the Spirit of God that moves in such ways—or whether these phenomena are self-induced—is beside the point for those who find the experience to be cathartic.<sup>16</sup>

D. Tsumura offers a closer reading of the text which (in this context) does not suggest an ecstatic state for either the prophets or Saul. Instead, at most what should be stated is that they were prophesying as they played upon their instruments.<sup>17</sup>

F. A. Murphy suggests that if one follows an overall negative appraisal of Saul by the narrator of the FP, then the “six repetitions of ‘prophesy’ and ‘prophet’ could be mocking” Saul as failing to do what the Spirit was known to equip leaders to do: militarily deliver.<sup>18</sup> However, the opposite might also hold at some level. Perhaps we are meant to appraise Saul positively (at this point) as a “different man” who has been charismatically endowed by the Spirit of God to

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<sup>15</sup> Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> D. T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 286-88; R. R. Wilson, “Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination,” *JBL* 98.3 (1979): pp. 321-37 [333].

<sup>18</sup> F. A. Murphy, *1 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), p. 82.

lead Israel. "And yet, having first been a charismatic king, Saul will become the reverse [by the end of his story], a demonically haunted despot."<sup>19</sup>

"Here, at the edge of Israel's newness, is the gift (charisma) of freedom, ecstasy, and self-transcendence yielding to a purpose beyond Saul's own self."<sup>20</sup> The narrator reports that when the Spirit of God rushes upon Saul he was to "do whatever" his "hand finds to do" but with the restriction of waiting for Samuel to come after a time. He is both freed and bound.<sup>21</sup> Caquot and de Robert clarify this binding as the suggestive nearby location of the Philistine garrison for Saul to conquer by the empowering transforming Spirit:

La mention des «préfets» philistins rappelle l'occupation militaire que connaît le territoire benjaminite (en 13.3 on en trouve un à Guéba) et correspond à l'indication de 9.16. On apprend qu'il s'y trouve un haut-lieu avec une confrérie de prophètes extatiques, dont la transe semble entretenue par la musique. L'action soudaine du souffle de YHWH, exprimée par le verbe TSLCH se retrouve à propos de Saül en 11.6 dans un contexte guerrier (cf. aussi Samson en Jg. 14.6, 19; 15.14): ici elle se manifeste par la contagion de la transe prophétique, qui semble confirmer que désormais Saül est bien devenu «un autre homme».<sup>22</sup>

If he is a "new man" who is equipped as deliverer then here is his opportunity which is only later taken up specifically by his son Jonathan, but decidedly missed by Saul. Samuel has offered a clue as to just what Saul should have put his hand to do (even if Samuel immediately binds the hand of Saul to wait at Gilgal). One is left wondering just what Saul's hand will find to do with the onrush of the Spirit of the LORD.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Murphy, *1 Samuel*, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 75; D. Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), pp. 60, 68; and Murphy, *1 Samuel*, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> A. Caquot and P. de Robert, *Les livres de Samuel* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> V. P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBLDS 118; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 228-32, describes the positive reading of Saul found in 1 Sam. 11 as an attempt by Saul to do the very thing which one has come to expect those endowed with the Spirit to do as found in Judges. He notes the comparison which seems to intentionally resound with the account of Judges 19 perhaps (as he suggests) to note that Saul functions more as judge than king.



In verse 11, we find Israel inquiring whether Saul is “*really*<sup>24</sup> among the prophets?” An unnamed man answers by asking, “Who is *their*<sup>25</sup> father?” Is Saul to be under the fatherhood of another over Israel? Should we assume YHWH is that “father” as represented through the leader of the prophetic band? Should it be understood in much the way that Elijah and later Elisha would be a “father” to Israel under the authority of YHWH?<sup>26</sup> K. Bodner suggests this question concerns “divine empowerment” as not being “a hereditary privilege” despite that the term “father” is used.<sup>27</sup> It does seem to point toward a narrative theme wherein Samuel tries to maintain the control over Saul despite authorizing Saul to act.<sup>28</sup>

## 1 SAMUEL 16.13-23; 18.6-14<sup>29</sup> – DAVID’S SPIRIT-ED SONGS OF DELIVERANCE FOR SAUL’S TROUBLING SPIRIT

<sup>24</sup> Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, p. 208 n 54, contends that the uses of *hagam* (‘really’) in 10.11 and 19.24 seems best read as ‘really’ or ‘indeed’ rather than as ‘also’. He notes such a use in all other occasions (Gen. 16.13; 1 Kgs 17.20; Job 41.1 [Eng 41.9]; Esther 7.8; with an ambiguous usage at Ps. 78.20),

<sup>25</sup> The Masoretic text records this man as asking ‘Who is *their* father?’ while the LXX text records it as ‘Who is *his* father?’ The former seems to indicate a ‘father’ of the prophets. The latter reading suggests Saul’s relationship to the prophetic leadership. The Masoretic text has been followed.

<sup>26</sup> Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 135, believes this ‘father’ was actually Samuel who would have been the ‘father’ of the band of prophets.

<sup>27</sup> Bodner, *1 Samuel*, p. 96. Auld also suggests a potential link between this account of the band of prophets, where large groups are normally typified negatively in the FP, and the four hundred in the court of Ahab as Micaiah also introduces the work of the רוח. In both accounts רוח empowers for a special mission: Micaiah to lie like the other prophets and Saul to prophesy like the other prophets, *I & II Samuel*, p. 113.

<sup>28</sup> For an extended treatment of just such a reading of the Samuel/Saul narratives, see J. R. Middleton, ‘Samuel Agonistes: A Conflicted Prophet’s Resistance to God and Contribution to the Failure of Israel’s First King,’ pp. 69-92 in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Ancient Israelite Historiography* (eds. M. J. Boda and L. M. Wray Beal; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), and a less extensive though still detailed exposition arguing along the same lines can be read in T. Czövek, *Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership: A Literary-Critical and Theological Interpretation of the Narrative of Saul, David and Solomon*, (Regnum Studies in Mission; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 66-72.

<sup>29</sup> The MT and the LXX texts of 1 Sam.16-18 show decidedly differing textual traditions with numerous alternate readings including the much longer version of the MT which seems to this writer to be an expansion upon an earlier text form better represented in the LXX text form. For a detailed discussion of the use of the LXX in this extended account of David, see D. Barthélemy, ed., *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism: Papers of a Joint Research Venture* (Fribourg, Suisse: Éditions universitaires, 1986). However, it should be noted that the MT is used throughout as the base text for this literary reading not necessarily because it offers a more original text at any particular point but for its more fixed nature as a canonically received text form found in the Pentecostal tradition. Several key areas where the MT offers a longer form which is absent from the LXX in the portion below covering 1 Sam. 18.6-14 include: the repetition of the ‘troubling spirit from God’ coming on Saul that

In the course of the narrative, Saul becomes rejected and David accepted as the next king. Samuel locates Jesse’s chosen son to anoint as king and David experiences the “rush” of the Spirit of the LORD upon him “from that day onward” (1 Sam. 16.13).<sup>30</sup> The text seems to move the reader to hear another change occurring in Saul at the moment of the Spirit of the LORD rushing upon David: a “troubling<sup>31</sup> spirit from the LORD tormented [בעת] him” (v. 14). In the place of this רוּחַ (Spirit) which empowers for deliverance, Saul receives a troubling רוּחַ (spirit) to torment. This troubling רוּחַ “is ‘bad’ because the effects of [Saul’s] possession are negative and destructive” and not because somehow this is actually an “evil spirit” as to its character.<sup>32</sup>

Should these be understood as utterly different S/spirits? W. Brueggemann contends that we are to hear the “Spirit” in this text as the same consistently rather than as two different ones.<sup>33</sup> The very same source is accredited with sending both the Spirit of the LORD upon David and the troubling spirit upon Saul in much the same fashion as Micaiah ben Imlah will later testify

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had earlier been mentioned in 1 Sam. 16 (18.10), the claim of Saul prophesying as David played (18.10), and Saul’s attempt to spear David (18.10, 11). The MT seems to offer a more theologically developed explanation of Saul’s attempts on David and David’s justification for fleeing. This is one of the reasons for this text to be included with the passage from 1 Sam. 16.13-23 rather than to have its own distinct section. The other reason is because it seems to be a repetition of sorts as explanation for the abandonment of Saul to the troubling spirit and David’s flight.

<sup>30</sup> It is usually contended that the Spirit only came upon individuals for a singular act and that the abiding presence of the Spirit does not happen until the NT era following Jesus. This verse seems to indicate otherwise. In point of fact, Saul himself had the Spirit of the LORD upon him for some time until we encounter the anointing and endowment of David. While most commentators seem to ignore this abiding sense as contradicting the tendency to distinguish the Spirit between the testaments, Tsumura contends that there is no indication of a ‘spasmodic’ endowment of the Spirit upon Saul as the text only now states the Spirit of the LORD left him. He argues for the Spirit also abiding in the OT as evidenced by both Saul and David. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 423.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Troubling’ is a better rendering than ‘evil’ which carries some moral implications which may or may not be present at various points in these texts.

<sup>32</sup> D. I. Block, “Empowered by the Spirit of God: The Holy Spirit in the Historiographic Writings of the Old Testament,” *SBJT* 1/1 (1997), pp. 42-61 [47]; Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, pp. 426-428, discusses this ‘spirit [of Yahweh] which brings forth disaster’ as a better rendering than ‘evil spirit’ as the grammatical construction is not adjectival, but a construct chain.

<sup>33</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 125; R. Routledge, ““An Evil Spirit from the Lord”—Demonic Influence or Divine Instrument?” *EvQ* 70.1 (Jan-Mar 1998): pp. 4, 5.

before Ahab about the lying Spirit.<sup>34</sup> Both are attributed to the LORD (or God in verse 23) even though the language still seems to suggest some differentiation as to their purposes and effects. Is there a sense in which the רוח (however characterized) is in fact always bringing about hostility in order to bring life: whether toward those who are truly enemies or those only perceived as such (cf. Jdg. 3.10; 6.34; 9.23; 11.29; 14.6, 19; 15.14; 1 Sam. 11.6)? “Saul encounters God’s dark side...Saul...knows the demonic side of God not only through divine absence, but also, paradoxically, through YHWH’s persecuting presence in the form of an evil spirit.”<sup>35</sup>

How does Saul find<sup>36</sup> relief from this tormenting spirit? His servants suggest the lyre playing David whose instrumentation will make Saul feel “better”. There is a rather ironic twist in that Saul’s servants assure him he will feel “better” (טוב – 1 Sam. 16.16) once the musician comes to bring his relief even as the very one called to bring his relief had been just previously described by Samuel to Saul as “better” (טוב – 1 Sam. 15.28 ) than him.

There is another play on words often missed in translation which adds poignancy to the function of these terms in the narrative.<sup>37</sup> The רוח (spirit) which troubles Saul departs as David would play the lyre and Saul would be given רוח (the verb meaning “to give room/space/relief”).

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<sup>34</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 125.

<sup>35</sup> Murphy, *1 Samuel*, p. 189, citing J. C. Exum and J. W. Whedbee, ‘Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections of the Comic and Tragic Visions,’ pp. 153, in Y. T. Radday and A. Brenner, eds., *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1990). Routledge likewise makes a case for this troubling Spirit being both the result of Saul’s rejection of the Spirit of the LORD and that this not only makes Saul susceptible to the troubling spirit, but also that the LORD actively sends this troubling spirit upon Saul, R. Routledge, “‘An Evil Spirit from the Lord’,” pp. 6, 7.

<sup>36</sup> The request by Saul that he be ‘provided’ (רצה) someone to help him find wholeness (1 Sam. 16.17) utilizes the same term for the word of Yahweh to Samuel that the LORD had ‘provided’ (רצה) someone to be king for the aid of Israel (1 Sam. 16.1). See Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> R. D. Bergen, ‘Evil Spirits and Eccentric Grammar: A Study of the Relationship between Text and Meaning in Hebrew Narrative,’ pp. 320-35, in R. B. Bergen, ed., *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994).

“Saul’s desperate concern was how to have the spirit of life available, rather than the troubling spirit. The narrative makes clear that David makes the spirit of life available to Saul. Saul has life only because David mediates it to him. David is a life giver, even to Saul!”<sup>38</sup> It is the “healing music”<sup>39</sup> played on the lyre<sup>40</sup> which brings relief (רוח) at this point from the hands of David, but it is also music (of maidens) that later will stir up Saul to seek David’s life (1 Sam. 18.7-11)<sup>41</sup> despite that the lyric which vexes Saul’s spirit seems to be intended to actually celebrate Saul equally alongside David and not actually to aggrandize David more than Saul.<sup>42</sup> Apparently the maiden’s praises offer up “a certain rhythm [that] gives Saul the blues.”<sup>43</sup>

David plays well for the relief of Saul, but one wonders what form of Spirit-ed music might offer such relief? The texts of Samuel point toward a prophetic song which might itself be indicative of the very type of music played by the Spirit-ed David on such occasions: 2 Sam. 22. This song of David is also offered in the Psalms (18) and offers several terms of note which are also found in our text before us (cf. 2 Sam. 22.1-6). The “terrifying” (בעת) of the “Spirit from the Lord for troubling” which so bothered Saul is what David sings about on the day he found deliverance from the hand of Saul (שאול).

“For Death’s waves encompass me, Belial’s torrents terrify (בעת) me,

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<sup>38</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, pp. 126-27; see also Auld, *I & II Samuel*, p. 191; and Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 433.

<sup>39</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 125.

<sup>40</sup> The lyre (בנור) was regarded by some in the ANE as having ‘divine power’ and was listed among the gods worshiped at Ugarit, though nothing of this sort seems to pertain to ancient Israelite beliefs. On which, see, Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 429; on the Ugaritic texts see *KTU* 1.47:32; 1.118:31.

<sup>41</sup> Bodner, *I Samuel*, p. 175.

<sup>42</sup> This follows a pattern within Hebrew poetics which is similarly exemplified in Deut. 32.30; 33.17; Mic. 6.7; Ps. 91.7; 144.13, see Bodner, *I Samuel*, pp. 194, 195; Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 136.

<sup>43</sup> Bodner, *I Samuel*, p. 195.

Sheol's (שאול) cords entangled me, Death's snares entrapped me."<sup>44</sup>

This limerick rings with the words which must have also tormented Saul who believes death always to entrap him and to suffer the terrorizing of רוח. David, however, knows the one upon whom he must call and who will come to his aid. While Saul calls for a musician, David calls for the LORD. That both kings had the Spirit of the LORD upon them did not mean they were kept ever free from the terrors surrounding them. The difference is only in their responses to those terrors. We hear Saul returning to his first endowment of the Spirit of the LORD when he first encountered the instruments of the prophets and himself entered their company (1 Sam. 10.5-10). Yet he seeks only the instrumentation of another, while David becomes the instrumentation. The psalms of David are the songs of the Spirit. It is such Spirit-ed songs which overcome trouble and make way for new life.

As Saul sits in his house and David plays the lyre, the troubling Spirit which again rushes upon Saul causing him to prophesy (18.10) just as the Spirit of the LORD came upon him at his anointing when he met the minstrel prophets and joined their band (1 Sam. 10.5-10). Are we to understand Saul's words that he will "nail David to the wall" as a *false prophecy* since it does not come to pass despite the will to bring it about? Is this an attempt by the troubling spirit to overcome the delivering Spirit? Despite his failed attempt on David's life, once again we will find David soothing Saul until the moment Saul tries to spear David in 1 Sam. 19.9, 10 and David once for all takes flight.

### **1 SAMUEL 19.8-24 – A SPIRIT-ED FINALE – OVERCOMING SONGS OF THE SPIRIT**

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<sup>44</sup> 2 Sam. 22.5-6; Ps. 18.5-6 MT, 18.4-5 ETT.

We hear again, as in 1 Sam. 18.10-11, that a "troubling Spirit" (this time of the LORD<sup>45</sup>) comes upon Saul where he tries once again to spear David playing the lyre to bring Saul relief from this terrorizing (1 Sam. 19.9). Saul sits enthroned with spear in hand appearing ready to do whatever his hand finds to do as the רוח comes upon him, yet here "Saul has the proclivity to become a thing, and God is satirizing him through this, through his becoming the javelin in his hand and turning into a human weapon of murder."<sup>46</sup> David escapes to the side of Samuel at Naioth in Ramah where Saul hears he has fled (1 Sam. 19.18-19). Has David fled to Samuel at Ramah seeking the endorsement and protection of the king-making prophet-priest of Israel? Saul enlists his messengers to capture David (and Samuel?) at Naioth in Ramah, but they are overcome by the prophesying prophets with Samuel. They join the prophetic company.<sup>47</sup> A second troop is sent and likewise they join the prophets. Yet a third group of messengers are sent who also join the band. At last<sup>48</sup> Saul arrives at Naioth seeking David and Samuel. Even while approaching Naioth, Saul is overcome by the רוח and begins again to prophesy as he continues to Naioth in Ramah. The narrator has already alerted us that Saul did not "see" Samuel until the day of his death (1 Sam. 15.35) and thus we wonder about this earnest quest for Samuel and just what its end will be. However, as Saul arrives at the scene he is overcome (as his three groups before him) by the Spirit and prophesies so as to never actually engage Samuel until the day of his death (fulfilled in an unlikely turn of phantasmic proportions in 1 Sam. 28).

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<sup>45</sup> This reading follows the MT. The LXX reads 'of God'.

<sup>46</sup> Murphy, *1 Samuel*, p. 190.

<sup>47</sup> Verse 20 refers to the 'company' (להקת) of the prophets prophesying which occurs only here in the HB.

<sup>48</sup> It should be of significance that Saul once again fails to understand what he should: they are at Naioth. He seems blind to see what he ought to see throughout the accounts of 1 Samuel and incapable of finding what ought easily to be found.

This overpowering of Saul by the Spirit of God (and the three groups sent to seize David in Ramah) echoes back to the earlier overcoming of Saul following his anointing to lead Israel (1 Sam. 10.9-13). There he was overcome by the passing minstreling prophets and joined their band. Here again he is overcome by the Spirit and prophecy (including his three groups of messengers).<sup>49</sup> In the earlier account this is the beginning of his reticent anointing to the kingship of Israel. Here he is stripped of the very emblems of kingship which he has come to cling to with the fingers of a tormented spirit. While the scene of Saul’s being overcome at the meeting of the singing prophets in 1 Sam. 10.9-13 signaled a beginning which seemed to anticipate a Spirit empowered leading of Israel, by 1 Sam. 19 we encounter a Saul given over to being terrorized and terrorizing as he quickly falls upon his own demise. From beginning to end Saul is overcome by the Spirit.<sup>50</sup> As Saul falls to the ground before Samuel one is reminded that Samuel had earlier announced Saul’s reign would not “arise” (1 Sam. 13.14).<sup>51</sup>

We might best understand the stripping of Saul in prophetic manifestation as he walks along and finally lay on the ground to be a removal of his royal clothes and not actually about nudity.<sup>52</sup> Saul involuntarily “takes off” (פָּשַׁט) his garments before David (1 Sam. 19.24) in direct contrast to his son Jonathan who voluntarily “takes off” (פָּשַׁט) his own royal garments (1 Sam.

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<sup>49</sup> This seems to offer a prescient literary echo for the later attempt by King Ahaziah to fetch Elijah wherein three bands of men are overcome (in that case by fire from heaven – 2 Kgs 1.9-14).

<sup>50</sup> See the comments toward this end in Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>51</sup> Bodner, *1 Samuel*, p. 211.

<sup>52</sup> Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 499, who also notes S. R. Driver as contending for just such a reading that does not require absolute nudity, but instead seems to entail the removal of the royal outer garments, in *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel; With an Introduction on Hebrew Palaeography and the Ancient Versions and Facsimiles of Inscriptions and Maps* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 160. See TWOT on ‘naked’ (עָרַם) where it is specified that it was most likely Saul simply divested himself of his royal garments.

18.4).<sup>53</sup> What Jonathan did out of his love for David, Saul would do only under the unwilling compulsion of the Spirit.<sup>54</sup> Saul stands (or better, lies) in stark contrast to his son Jonathan.

While Saul must be humbled to remove his royal attire, Jonathan has freely given these emblems to David.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps one might also see in Saul an unwilling prototype of the willing elders found in the Apocalypse who themselves remove their royal emblems and cast themselves down before the true King, “the root (and offspring) of David” (Rev. 5.5; 22.16), as the living creatures join their prophetic praises to the Almighty and to the Lamb (Rev. 4-5).

“The narrative suggests that God’s transformative spirit is peculiarly allied with and attentive to David. Before that compelling, inscrutable, inexplicable power, Saul is helpless.”<sup>56</sup> Are we meant to hear once again that Saul is clueless about the whereabouts of that which he seeks? The donkeys of 1 Samuel 10 and David and Samuel of 1 Samuel 19. Here again, Samuel is sought while Saul is at a place of water (1 Sam.9.11-13).<sup>57</sup> Here again three signs are given. Here again Saul is transformed into a different man. Here again the proverb of Saul’s association with the prophets is repeated. Here “Saul’s epigraph is repeated at the end of the chapter, as an epitaph.”<sup>58</sup> V. P. Long refers to 19.24 as a “satirical recapitulation” intended to indicate that the people did not think Saul to be of the sort to prophesy (themselves regarding the prophets positively).<sup>59</sup> So perhaps Saul’s inclusion among the prophets appears more like ridicule as he lays prostrate removed of his regal robes and prophesying...overwhelmed by רוח.

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<sup>53</sup> Bodner, *1 Samuel*, p. 210.

<sup>54</sup> J. W. H. Van Wijk-Bos, *Reading Samuel: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2011), p. 109.

<sup>55</sup> Long has previously noted this narrative analogy in *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, pp. 40, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 145.

<sup>57</sup> Bodner, *1 Samuel*, p. 210; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses Vol. 2* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), p. 281.

<sup>58</sup> Murphy, *1 Samuel*, p. 199.

<sup>59</sup> Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, pp. 208, 209.



## CONCLUSION

In these stories, Saul has been open to God's spirit, for good or ill. The God of Israel (in the words of Hannah) "kills and gives life, brings down to Sheol and raise up" (1 Sam. 2.6). Saul was raised and has been brought down. At each pivotal turn of the song of his story רוח from the LORD is present to give life and to terrify it, to empower for deliverance, to exalt the humble and humble the proud. The instrumentation is the minstreling prophets at the first and last and the Maestro of Judah, son of Jesse. Their Spirit-ed songs overwhelm Saul to make him a new man, to relieve his torments and to torment him further, to move him to lay aside his claims to kingship and at the last to declare that the king of Israel must be one endued with and yielding to the רוח of the LORD to give and assure the life of Israel and the LORD's abiding presence with them.

Scholarship has tended to portray these accounts as offering a purview into a primitive retelling of earlier times where dervish-like prophets worked in frenzied states and attributed their ministrations to the רוח.<sup>60</sup> However, the text seems to indicate for itself that these prophets and the state of the רוח by which they ministered might actually best be found in the preserved tunes of the shepherd king David. It is the words of this king who found himself early on composing words of praise and adoration, calling for vindication and deliverance, declaring the blessing upon the messiah of Israel that gives voice to the prophets and their musical prophesying.

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<sup>60</sup> For an extended discussion of this proposal and some of its difficulties as well as an attempt counter to the one proposed in this paper, see S. Parker, 'Possession Trance and Prophecy in Pre-Exilic Israel,' *VT* 28.3 (July 1978): pp. 271-285. He writes that 'It seems clear that we have to do with some kind of trance state, or altered state of consciousness,' p. 272. A similar proposal to Parker can be found in Wilson, 'Prophecy and Ecstasy,' pp. 321-37.

Perhaps this is the juncture at which Pentecostal forms of worship offer a potential alternate view to this scholarship. The worship of Pentecostals in their confessions, praises, and testimonies move the gathered to respond. The refrains lay low the proud and lift high the humbled. The Lord Jesus, the son of David, the Messiah of God, is enthroned in the praises of the congregation. He is entreated to vindicate and to judge. Several implications might be suggested by this correlation.

First, music matters. Music is an essential element of Pentecostal expressions in worship whether via singing in tongues, instrumentation, or choruses. Early Pentecostals shared numerous testimonies pertaining to their music: in tongues and interpretations,<sup>61</sup> heavenly choirs (even angelic),<sup>62</sup> and spontaneously learning instruments<sup>63</sup> and choruses which flowed from the Spirit.<sup>64</sup> In this way, their music functioned to give congregational voice to the Spirit among them so that even the "least" would have voice and the mission of God would hold sway.

Second, it calls for a prophetic community. In the traditional churches music was written out, but in many Pentecostal settings music might simply be created in the moment as prophetic gifts were exercised to speak in song as the Spirit enabled.<sup>65</sup> There is a fellowship of the prophetic community among the minstreling ministers of the Spirit. This prophetic community lays bare by the Spirit the hearts of those present and demands an altar experience toward altered lives.<sup>66</sup> Even their bodies are laid low by the overwhelming crescendo of the Spirit's presence as

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<sup>61</sup> *AF* 1.1 (Sept. 1906): p. 3; 'Holy Ghost Singing,' *AF* 1.1 (Sept. 1906): p. 4; 'Russians Hear in Their Own Tongues' *AF* 1.1 (Sept. 1906): p. 4; 'A Message Concerning His Coming,' *AF* 1.2 (Oct. 1906): p. 3; 'Came from Alaska,' *AF* 1.3 (Nov. 1906): p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> 'Gracious Pentecostal Showers Continue to Fall,' *AF* 1.3 (Nov. 1906): p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *AF* 1.1 (Sept. 1906): p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> 'Baptized on a Fruit Wagon,' *AF* 1.3 (Nov. 1906): p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> 'The Holy Ghost from Heaven,' *AF* 1.3 (Nov. 1906): p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> 'Tongues Convict Sinners,' *AF* 1.1 (Sept. 1906): p. 4.

they cry aloud in praise and confession.<sup>67</sup> The Scriptures gave shape to the visions of these songs as they filled them with a vocabulary and a cadence attuned to the Spirit of Jesus.<sup>68</sup> The sanctifying work of such music created a new people who went from their gatherings into the world alive and empowered with the Spirit. It would not be enough to simply speak for the Spirit; one must be transformed anew by the Spirit. St. Augustine (sermon 162A) reflecting upon the texts of First Samuel noted, "Saul is prophesying, he has the gift of prophecy, but he has not got charity. He has become a kind of instrument to be touched by the Spirit, not one to be cleansed by the Spirit."<sup>69</sup> Such a state of uncleanness ran counter to the intent of the Pentecostal prophetic worshiping community. Thus the discerning of spirits among the prophetic community functions to address the intent of the one speaking and acting.

Finally, Pentecostal forms of worship are intent on life-giving victory and wholeness. Saul was tormented because of his disobedience and eventual rejection by the LORD. The Spirit which had come forcefully upon Saul to deliver Israel and vouchsafe their life as God's people would be replaced by that of torment. The songs of the prophetic spirit called for obedience, surrender, holiness, boldness, faith, hope, and above all, love.<sup>70</sup> The songs of the prophetic spirit create space for healing and wholeness. Spirit-ed songs bring victory over all other powers and authorities.<sup>71</sup> These Spirit-ed instruments of worship become the weapons of the Lord's deliverance and testify to the dawning kingdom in the midst of the saints.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *AF* 1.1 (Sept. 1906): p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> 'A Message Concerning His Coming,' *AF* 1.2 (Oct. 1906): p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> As cited in Murphy, *1 Samuel*, p. 197.

<sup>70</sup> *AF* 1.1 (September 1906): p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> 'Arrested for Jesus' Sake,' *AF* 1.1 (September 1906): p. 4; 'Came from Alaska,' *AF* 1.3 (Nov. 1906): p. 2; A. K. Mead, 'Sister Mead's Baptism,' *AF* 1.3 (Nov. 1906): p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *AF* 1.2 (Oct. 1906): p. 3; 'Spanish Receive the Pentecost,' *AF* 1.2 (Oct. 1906): p. 4.

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