

THE TRANSFER OF POWER FROM SAUL TO DAVID IN 1 SAM 16:13-14

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The two verses found at 1 Sam 16:13-14 are relevant to at least two issues that are much discussed in OT studies. First and most obviously are the questions of the Spirit of YHWH and the evil spirit from YHWH. Much effort has gone into understanding the nature of both of these and their relationships to the humans they came upon.¹ A second issue—although not one that the passage specifically addresses—is that of the monarchy in Israel, among the most-discussed aspects of which is the question of whether God was in favor of its establishment.²

The issue more directly faced here is that of the transfer of power from Israel's first king, Saul, who had forfeited his kingship, to Israel's second kind, David, who would become the standard for succeeding generations. This issue is the subject of most of 1 Samuel 13-31 in both its political and spiritual dimensions, but in these two verses the emphasis is upon the movements of the spirits and of Samuel, and they serve to emphasize and symbolize this transfer of power.

This paper is concerned with these movements and their interrelationships. The favor with which YHWH looked upon David, and his rejection

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¹ A large bibliography may be found dealing with the Spirit of YHWH; most of these works deal with the evil spirit mentioned here as well. Two works dealing specifically with God's Spirit in the OT are L. Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Tokyo: Seibushna, 1972), and L. J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976). Many OT theologies have sections on God's Spirit; see e.g. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2. 46-68; W. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979) 201-209; J. B. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 172-176. In addition, many general books on the Holy Spirit have sections on God's Spirit in the Old Testament; see e.g. M. Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 18-31; G. T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (New York: Paulus, 1976) 1-124. A recent treatment that attempts to function as one starting point for study of the Holy Spirit in the OT and to place such study on a sound methodological footing is D. I. Block, "The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of *ruah* in the Book of Ezekiel," *JETS* 32 (1989) 27-49.

² Two trenchant presentations arguing that God was in favor of the monarchy in 1 Samuel are J. R. Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal: A Study of I Samuel 11:14-12:25* (Cherry Hill: Mack, 1978), and G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History* (SBLDS 87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986). See also D. M. Howard, Jr., "The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets," *WTJ* (forthcoming), a review of Gerbrandt's book; "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms," *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988) 19-35, a broader survey of the same issue.

of Saul, are captured dramatically in the movements in these two verses. The spiritual transfer of power here is symbolic of the more visible political transfer of power that eventuated.

Before proceeding we must note that these verses are by no means a self-contained text. They occur on either side of a major juncture within the book of 1 Samuel: 1 Sam 16:1-13 contains the story of David's discovery and anointing by Samuel, while 16:14-23 tells of the beginning of Saul's tormented life and the introduction of David into Saul's court.

Nevertheless we can see several important relationships between these two verses, based upon the movements of the characters—relationships that help to bridge the gap between the two blocks of material of which they are parts and to highlight the transfer of spiritual and political power from Saul to David. The four movements to be considered are (1) the coming of the Spirit of YHWH upon David, (2) Samuel's departure from David, (3) the departure of YHWH's Spirit from Saul, and (4) the coming of an evil spirit from YHWH to terrorize Saul. The first two are in 16:13, the second two in 16:14. Each of these will be considered first on its own, then in conjunction with the other movement in the same verse, and finally in conjunction with the remaining two movements.

I. MOVEMENTS IN 1 SAMUEL 16:13

1. *The movement of the Spirit of YHWH.* The Spirit of YHWH's coming upon David was significant for him in two ways. First, it was a mighty empowerment, a sign of YHWH's favor upon him. This came immediately after his anointing as king and served to legitimate his kingship at a time when Saul was still king.

The OT speaks often of the Spirit of YHWH's (or the Spirit of God's) coming upon individuals.³ It was usually for specific purposes, the common element being one of empowerment. Often it had to do with empowerment for impressive physical accomplishments, such as in Judges,⁴ and often it concerned empowerment for the important task of speaking YHWH's word.⁵

³ The "Spirit of YHWH" (*rûah YHWH*) is referred to a total of 24 times: Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6; 16:13, 14; 2 Sam 23:2; 1 Kgs 18:12; 22:24 (=2 Chr 18:23); 2 Kgs 2:16; 2 Chr 20:14; Isa 11:2; 40:13; 61:1; 63:14; Ezek 11:5; 37:1; Mic 2:7; 3:8. (In addition, in 1 Sam 19:9 the *rûah YHWH* is an "evil" [*rā'ā*] one; in Isa 40:7; 59:19; Hos 13:15 it refers to the "breath" or "wind" of YHWH.) The "Spirit of God" (*rûah 'ēlohim*) is referred to 12 times: Gen 1:2; 41:38; Exod 31:3; 35:31; Num 24:2; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; 2 Chr 15:1; 24:20; Ezek 11:24. (In Job two additional forms are found: 27:3 [*rûah 'ēloah*] and 33:4 [*rûah 'ēl*].) In addition, the Spirit of YHWH or Spirit of God is referred to via suffixes—"my Spirit," "your Spirit," etc.—some 26 times.

⁴ Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14.

⁵ Gen 41:38; Num 24:2; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 19:20, 23; 2 Sam 23:2; 1 Kgs 22:24 (=2 Chr 18:23); 2 Chr 15:1; 20:14; 24:20; Isa 61:1; Ezek 11:5; Mic 3:8; cf. 2 Pet 1:21. Other references to "the Spirit" with reference to speaking may also be found (e.g. Ezek 2:2; 3:24). It also is instructive to note that the "Spirit of God" is mentioned in Gen 1:2, a chapter that heavily emphasizes creation by word (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). This is consistent with a large number of the references to the Holy Spirit's "filling" of believers in Acts as well; see 2:1-4, 7-8, 11; 4:8-12; 6:3-5, 10; 7:1-60; 11:24, 26; 13:9-11.

The implication in most of the references to the Spirit is that it came upon individuals in this powerful way for limited time periods to accomplish the specific purposes mentioned. Even though it is seldom mentioned as leaving any individual⁶ it came upon Samson and Saul several different times, implying that it had left them in some way in the interim periods.⁷

The second way in which the Spirit's coming upon David in 16:13 was significant is that it was "from that day forth." There are no references to its coming upon him again. Indeed, later we see that David feared its withdrawal (Ps 51:11 [13]), implying a more permanent or sustained empowerment, different from the usual pattern seen in the OT.⁸

2. *Samuel's movement.* The second movement in 16:13 is that of Samuel's departure from David. Immediately following the notice about YHWH's Spirit coming upon David we are told that Samuel went home to Ramah. On one level this is a concluding editorial comment, used to tie off an episode. Indeed this type of notice is common in 1 Samuel, whereby someone returns home from the place of the just-completed action.⁹ Thus the statement functions as a standard literary device to achieve closure.

On another level this notice functions significantly to close off Samuel's involvement in the book. After it Samuel does not figure prominently at all. He appears three times again, but not as an active character. His death is mentioned in 25:1, and he is then called back from the dead by Saul in chap. 28. His only involvement while still alive comes in 19:18-24, where he appears as a passive (and nonspeaking) backdrop to an occasion of Saul's prophesying.

So this notice of his leaving closes off his last true involvement as a character. Previously Samuel had been a major figure in the book, whose involvement was central to the transition to the monarchy and to the transfer of kingship from Saul to David.

Now, therefore, when the movement of YHWH's Spirit onto David symbolizes this transfer, so also does Samuel's movement away from

⁶ Except once, in the text under consideration here (1 Sam 16:14), referring to Saul (see below). Note also that YHWH himself left Samson when he cut his hair (Judg 16:20).

⁷ The exact nature and extent of the Spirit's presence with individuals in the OT is beyond the purview of this paper. Many would see the presence of the Spirit in the OT as being only periodic in individuals' lives, mainly for empowerment for specific tasks (e.g. Neve, *Spirit* 22-24, with reference to the early periods). Others see his activity as including not only this special empowerment but also regeneration, indwelling, sealing and filling, and thus constituting a more permanent presence in these lives (e.g. Wood, *Holy Spirit*; Block, "Prophet" 40-41). The latter appears to be closer to the implicit (and sometimes even explicit) message in the OT, but in either case the repeated empowerment by the Spirit in several specific cases implies a special presence or fullness at certain times that was not the norm.

⁸ J. P. Fokkelman notes that the special significance of this coming of YHWH's Spirit upon David is highlighted even by the sentence structure of the story in 16:1-13: The story is constructed with very short sentences (in his colometric division it consists of 61 cola), of which the statement about YHWH's Spirit's coming upon David stands alone as the longest in the story (*Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986], 2. 133).

⁹ Prior to this passage such formulae are found in 1 Sam 2:11, 20; 6:16; 7:17; 8:22; 10:25, 26; 14:46; 15:34.

David do this. As a prophet, Samuel had been the guarantor of the legitimacy of the newly inaugurated monarchy¹⁰—both Saul's and David's. Now that the latter had been anointed as YHWH's true choice, and especially now that YHWH's Spirit had come upon him, Samuel no longer was needed. It would be YHWH's Spirit that would energize and empower David "from that day forward" (16:13), not Samuel or his advice.

3. *Summary.* Thus we see that the movements of YHWH's Spirit and Samuel in 16:13 are significant in and of themselves. They become even more significant, however, when they are seen in relationship to each other. When YHWH's Spirit came upon David, his anointer left since he was no longer needed. David was now in good hands.

II. MOVEMENTS IN 1 SAM 16:14

1. *The movement of the Spirit of YHWH.* In 1 Sam 16:14 we see first that the Spirit of YHWH departed from Saul. The Spirit previously had come upon Saul on two occasions (10:6, 10; 11:6); the departure now was in punishment for his sins. This was a tragic and momentous occasion for Saul: It is the only time in the OT that YHWH's (or God's) Spirit is said specifically to have left someone, and we see in 18:12 that Saul understood the import of this. He had forfeited the presence of YHWH himself: "Saul was afraid of David, because YHWH was with him (*ʿimmô*) but had departed from Saul (*mēʿim šāʾûl*)."¹¹ In 16:14 the Spirit of YHWH departed; in 18:12 it was YHWH himself who is seen to have departed.¹²

2. *The movement of the evil spirit from YHWH.* An evil spirit from YHWH began to "terrorize" Saul.¹³ The departure of YHWH's Spirit did not merely leave a neutral vacuum in Saul's life. The void was filled by this evil spirit, also coming from¹⁴ YHWH as an integral part of the punishment.

This was significant for Saul in two ways: (1) It was a source of torment for him, one that terrified him, and we see its effects being dealt with in this passage (16:15–23). (2) It was an ongoing torment, repeatedly

¹⁰ On the importance of the prophetic perspective in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, books that otherwise are concerned primarily with the establishment of the monarchy, see D. M. Howard, Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody, forthcoming), chap. 5 and references there.

¹¹ The prepositions are similar: Both are built upon *ʿim*, "with," an important term of relationship (see H. D. Preuss, "'et; 'im," *TDOT* [rev. ed.], 1. 449–463); *mēʿim* is literally "from with" (or "beside"; BDB 768–769). The import here is that YHWH's presence with Saul was now gone.

¹² The verb is the same in both cases: *swr*, "to leave, depart."

¹³ So NASB, which is more to the point than RSV or NIV, which have "tormented." The root here is *bʿt*, which has strong connotations (*NJPSV* has "terrified"). See S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913) 134; Wood, *Holy Spirit* 134. (On the frequentative force of this verb here see n. 16 below.)

¹⁴ The preposition here is *mēʿet*, which has essentially the same force as *mēʿim*; see BDB 86–87 and n. 11 above.

coming to torment Saul.¹⁵ Within the verse this also is confirmed, since the force of the verb here is frequentative.¹⁶ Not only once, but repeatedly and continually, the spirit terrorized Saul from that time on.

The two events in 16:14—the one Spirit's leaving and the other's coming—appear to be part and parcel of the same event. As noted above, this is the only time in the OT where YHWH's Spirit is said specifically to have departed from someone. Significantly it also introduces the only period of time when God directly sent an evil spirit to afflict someone.¹⁷

The close relationship between these two events is reflected even in the chiastic arrangement of the subject nouns and the verbs in the verse:

A	B	C
And the Spirit of YHWH	departed	from Saul,
B'	A'	C'
And it terrified him,	an evil spirit	from YHWH.

The structure here serves to emphasize that the one event was a natural consequence of the other, completing it, so to speak, just as the second part of the chiastic structure closes off and completes the first.¹⁸

3. *Summary.* Again in 16:14 the movements of YHWH's Spirit and the evil spirit have important implications of their own. These are dramatized further when they are considered in juxtaposition. The evil spirit was sent to fill the void left by the good Spirit's withdrawal. Both events—the one being the reverse side of the other—were tragedies for Saul.

III. MOVEMENTS IN 1 SAM 16:13-14

The four movements in 1 Sam 16:13-14, in addition to being significant by themselves and in paired relationships in each verse, also are significant as they are compared with each other across the boundaries of the verses. The movements of the figures here—YHWH's Spirit, Samuel, the evil spirit—in relationship to each other effectively tell the story of the transfer of political and spiritual power from Saul to David. The transfer in the immediate context is related to the empowerment by YHWH's Spirit, but it is symbolic of the transfer of political power as well. Before

¹⁵ Aside from this immediate occasion (16:14, 15, 16) see also 16:23a; 18:10; 19:9. In 16:23b the evil spirit leaves Saul but its departure is only temporary, as is clear from this verse itself as well as the later verses.

¹⁶ It is generally analyzed as a Piel perfect with *waw*—"consecutive," following a perfect verb at the beginning of the verse. This construction often confers frequentative force upon the second verb of the sequence; see GKC §112h; Driver, *Notes* 134; H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 140.

¹⁷ An "evil spirit" from God is mentioned in Judg 9:23, but it came "between" Abimelech and the Shechemites (not "upon" anyone). Such a spirit came "upon" (or "against") Saul several times (see n. 32 below).

¹⁸ On the various functions of chiasms, including that of closure, see *inter alia* F. I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974) 119-140; *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (ed. J. W. Welch; Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981).

proceeding with the discussion of these movements, however, the relationship of vv. 13 and 14 must be considered since they each belong to a different episode.

1. *The story juncture between 16:13 and 16:14.* 1 Sam 16:14 comes at what has been seen by many as a major juncture in the book. Many scholars have identified an independent literary source in this section, stretching from 1 Sam 16:14 to 2 Samuel 5, which they have labeled with such titles as "The History of David's Rise" or "David's Rise to Power." It was first identified by L. Rost in 1926 in passing fashion and has been studied by many since.¹⁹ Its purpose has been seen to legitimate David's kingship by reporting on his rise to power in Jerusalem from humble beginnings as a shepherd boy or by functioning as an apology, a defense against various charges that David illegitimately usurped power from Saul.²⁰

Even without reference to such a hypothetical document²¹ there can be little doubt that there is a major break in thought between 1 Sam 16:13 and 16:14. 16:1-13 is a natural episodic unit telling the story of David's selection to be king. The rest of the chapter—16:14-23—also is such a unit, telling of Saul's torment and the relief he received from David's presence. It serves to highlight David and to tell of his introduction into Saul's court.

Other evidence points in the same direction. First, we may reiterate the point made above that the first episode ends with a typical formula of closure with Samuel returning home to Ramah (16:13).

Second, the discrete nature of 16:14-23 also is clear from the bracketing effect of two strikingly similar phrases at beginning and end. The first phrase in 16:14 is "And the Spirit of YHWH departed from Saul," while the last phrase of 16:23 is "and it departed from upon him, the evil spirit." The verbs are the same (*swr*), and between the verses there is a chiasmic arrangement of the pattern ABC/B'C'A'.

¹⁹ L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982) 8 and n. 12, 105, 109-112; see further N. P. Lemche, "David's Rise," *JSOT* 10 (1978) 2-25; P. K. McCarter, "The Apology of David," *JBL* 99 (1980) 489-504.

²⁰ See McCarter, "Apology," and references there.

²¹ The current trend in Biblical studies as a whole is toward unitary readings of texts as literary wholes, and such hypothetical "pre-texts" as the "History of David's Rise" largely are ignored in favor of texts in their final form. The books of Samuel are among the most studied from this perspective; cf. C. Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!* (AnBib 81; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); L. M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12* (Sheffield: JSOT/Almond, 1985); J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (2 vols.; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981); M. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1985); D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978); *The Fate of King Saul* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980); P. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986); R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989). Such works typically notice breaks and contrasts such as those in this text, but none deals in any depth with the specific issues under discussion in this paper.

Third, even the syntactical ordering in the first phrase in 16:14 serves to emphasize the introduction of new material. The normal order in Hebrew narrative is *waw*-“consecutive” + prefixing verb form²² + subject. This construction is the workhorse of Hebrew narrative, and normally it is strung along in chains to indicate consecutive action. Any change in this order within narrative material signals an alternative function for the immediately following material. One common type of clause in these cases is a circumstantial clause.²³

At the beginning of 16:14 the expected syntactical sequence is broken by a circumstantial clause, and the new material is introduced with the following word order: *waw*-conjunctive + subject + suffixing verb form.²⁴ There are many types of such clauses performing various functions; this one is most likely what Andersen calls an “episode-initial circumstantial clause.”²⁵ These often introduce new characters or new developments into a story or state preliminary circumstances of some sort. Here the dramatic new development of YHWH’s Spirit’s departure, which is preliminary to the large story to follow of Saul’s decline and David’s rise,²⁶ is undoubtedly the impetus for the use of this construction.²⁷

2. *The movements of the spirits in 1 Sam 16:13-14.* Despite the clear break between the two verses we can see several close ties between them. Two of the most significant have to do with the movements of the spirits in the verses.

The first—and most obvious—of these is in the movements of YHWH’s Spirit. Their relationship is as follows: (1) The Spirit of YHWH comes upon David (v. 13c), while (2) the Spirit of YHWH leaves Saul (v. 14a). Each of these movements has been examined above in isolation as well as in the context of its own verse. Now, however, we can see them playing off each other as well.

The Spirit of YHWH is seldom seen in the OT as empowering more than one individual at a time.²⁸ Here in light of the larger context it

²² Often called the imperfect.

²³ Andersen, *Sentence* 77-93.

²⁴ Often called the perfect.

²⁵ Andersen, *Sentence* 79-80.

²⁶ All of 1 and 2 Samuel can be seen to be built upon different characters’ declines juxtaposed against others’ rises. Early in 1 Samuel, Samuel’s rise is shown against Eli’s decline; later, David rises while Saul declines; finally, in the latter half of 2 Samuel, David declines while his sons vie for the throne. J. A. Martin (“The Literary Quality of 1 and 2 Samuel,” *BibSac* 141 [1984] 131-145) makes a similar point and develops it further, calling it the “reversal-of-fortune motif.” See also J. P. Fokkelman, “Saul and David: Crossed Fates,” *Bible Review* 5/3 (June 1989) 20-32.

²⁷ Otherwise one would expect a major document such as the “History of David’s Rise” to begin with an introductory time margin or other similar phrase. Usually these are introduced by *wayēhi*. See Andersen, *Sentence* 63-64, 79; R. E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 66-70.

²⁸ The one exception is in 1 Sam 19:20-24, where three sets of Saul’s messengers, and then Saul himself, “prophesied” when the Spirit came upon them. This was clearly a temporary presence with each of them, however, and not a permanent presence or empowerment.

appears as though the one movement is the necessary corollary of the other—that is, when YHWH's Spirit came upon David in a permanent way he must necessarily have left Saul. It is not that the Spirit could not have maintained a special presence with both but rather that this appears to be the pattern of his activity in the OT. Particularly in this section of 1 Samuel the presence of YHWH's Spirit symbolizes, among other things, his favor on his chosen king. First the Spirit came upon Saul and then left him, coming upon David instead.

The Spirit came upon Saul twice when he was the king or king-elect (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6). More significantly, in the first instance he was to be "turned into another man" (10:6), and God "gave him another heart"²⁹ (10:9). These seem to indicate that Saul was to experience God's continuing presence and empowerment in some way. When the Spirit came upon David "from that day forth" (16:13), God left Saul permanently (16:14; cf. 18:12) to return only momentarily (by his Spirit: 19:23). YHWH's Spirit and YHWH's special favor were not upon both Saul and David at the same time.

A second link that ties 16:13 and 16:14 together can be seen by comparing the movements of YHWH's Spirit and that of the evil spirit from YHWH. The following summarizes their movements:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| (1) The (good) Spirit of YHWH | comes upon | David (v. 13c) |
| (2) The (good) Spirit of YHWH | leaves | Saul (v. 14a) |
| (3) An evil spirit from YHWH | comes upon | Saul (v. 14b) |

We observe that (3) is an echo of (1) in terms of the action that transpires. A spirit comes upon each character—the good Spirit upon the now-chosen king, the evil spirit upon the now-rejected king. In addition both actions are in perpetuity: For David it was "from that day forth," and for Saul it was a continuous terrorizing that he experienced.

If these are plotted with reference to the actions we can see an ABA' pattern, typically called an envelope construction or inclusio(n), a pattern often serving to highlight the bracketed element.³⁰ In this case the highlighted element would be the departure of YHWH's Spirit, certainly a most dramatic event and completely unprecedented.

The implications here are important. YHWH's Spirit did not depart from Saul and an evil spirit afflict him in isolation without reference to any other person or event. YHWH's Spirit had descended upon David at the same time. The exact temporal sequence of these three movements is not so important here³¹ as the fact that they are integrally linked with each other, each one a logical consequence of the other. It can fairly be said that the three movements were part of one larger event and that the

²⁹ Lit. "God turned to him another heart."

³⁰ See H. V. D. Parunak, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure," *Bib* 62 (1981) 165-166, who calls this an "odd' chiasm," referring to the odd (vs. even) number of elements.

³¹ I.e. whether all three were instantaneous or sequentially followed each other.

coming and going of these spirits are symbolic of the larger issue of the transfer of the kingship.

3. *The movements of Samuel and the spirits in 1 Sam 16:13-14.* Finally we are in a position to clarify the relationships of all four movements as they are juxtaposed against each other:

(1) The Spirit of YHWH	comes upon	David (v. 13c)
(2) Samuel	leaves	David (v. 13d)
(3) The Spirit of YHWH	leaves	Saul (v. 14a)
(4) An evil spirit	comes upon	Saul (v. 14b)

We have noted that Samuel's departure performs the function of highlighting the arrival of YHWH's Spirit upon David in 16:13. When it is considered in connection with 16:14 we see that it becomes part of a chiasm based upon the movements with an ABB'A' pattern.

Both David and Saul experienced the loss of a positive influence: David did not see Samuel again, and Saul did not experience YHWH's Spirit again as he had to this point. Yet a spirit from YHWH came upon each of them to replace their losses: In David's case it was YHWH's Spirit, while in Saul's case it was an evil spirit from YHWH. Stated another way, when YHWH's Spirit came upon David his anointer left, leaving him in good hands. When YHWH's Spirit left Saul an evil spirit came upon him, leaving him in dire straits.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus we see that the movements of the spirits and Samuel in 16:13-14 are all significant and that each is related to the other in some way. The movements very effectively tell the story of the transfer of power—spiritual and political—from Saul to David.

To summarize: In 16:13 YHWH's Spirit came upon David, empowering him and legitimating his kingship spiritually, at the same time that Samuel—the one who had anointed him and thus legitimated his kingship politically (as well as spiritually)—was leaving. In 16:14 YHWH's Spirit left Saul, at the same time that an evil spirit from YHWH was coming upon him—and both events symbolized his lost kingship. In the two verses YHWH's Spirit was transferring his influence from the once-favored king to the now-favored king. The movements of Samuel and the evil spirit emphasize the point that YHWH now favored David and not Saul. A major turning point in the story of 1 Samuel is found precisely at this juncture. After this events would be radically different from those before this, precisely because of the movements in these two verses and the larger truths they represented.

In conclusion it would be pertinent to review the activity of the "evil spirit" from YHWH that is introduced here in view of its extraordinary nature and in view of its sole other occurrence.

The Old Testament speaks on eight occasions of an "evil spirit" (*rûah rā'â*) that emanated from or belonged to YHWH or God. The term occurs once with reference to Abimelech (Judg 9:23) and seven times with reference to Saul (1 Sam 16:14, 15, 16, 23a, 23b; 18:10; 19:9).³²

Concerning the morality of God's sending such a spirit upon individuals, the answer in brief is that it happened in response to their sin.³³ With reference to Abimelech the evil spirit was "between" (*bēn*) him and the Shechemites, and it was the cause of discord between them. Both parties had sinned (Judg 9:1-9), and they deserved each other. In Saul's case the evil spirit terrorized him after his offenses that led to his forfeiting the throne of Israel (1 Samuel 13, 15; see especially 15:23b).

Concerning the nature of this spirit, it must be seen as more than a mere mental disturbance in Saul's case.³⁴ It certainly introduced the effects of mental disturbance but, coming immediately after the departure of YHWH's Spirit, it must be seen as an active, external power. Some see a demon here,³⁵ although it may have been more in the nature of a spirit of calamity or distress.³⁶

It is noteworthy that the only occasions where God sent an evil spirit on individuals involve the early kingship and (technically) Israel's first two "kings," both of whom proved to be unworthy candidates for the office. Undoubtedly this was a reflection of God's feelings about the way in which a monarchy was established in these two cases, and about these two individuals as well. Abimelech was "king" over at least a portion of Israel for three years. But he seized the kingship illegitimately, he was a poor candidate for the office at any rate, and he exercised authority wrongly when he had power.³⁷ Saul too came to power out of ill-conceived and illegitimate motives on the part of those asking for a king, and he too quickly demonstrated his unsuitability for the office despite his initially having been chosen and anointed by God for the kingship.

We then may note that it is the next king—David—who is the standard throughout the rest of Israel's history. He is the first "king" who did not

³² The term appears in slightly different form in several of these cases.

³³ For brief attempts to deal with the theological dimensions of the problem see G. L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 179-180; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 reprint) 170, 195.

³⁴ So also e.g. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel* 140-141; P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 280-281.

³⁵ E.g. Keil and Delitzsch, *Samuel* 170; Wood, *Holy Spirit* 127-129.

³⁶ BDB 948, e.g., lists the 1 Samuel references under the heading of "*bad, unpleasant*, giving pain, unhappiness, misery," and the Judges reference under the heading of "*bad, unkind*, vicious in disposition or temper." The Hebrew root often carries connotations of unpleasantness or misery, free of moral or ethical concerns. The "evil spirit," therefore, may not have been a spirit that was the embodiment of moral wickedness (like demons) but rather a spirit that boded ill for Saul, one that produced harmful results for him.

³⁷ See Gerbrandt, *Kingship* 129-134, for a review of Abimelech's defects and sins.

disqualify himself from the office, and he was favored by the special presence of YHWH's Spirit from the day of his anointing onward (1 Sam 16:13). This special favor shown to David, a Judahite king, reflects in a small way God's positive attitude toward the idea of Israelite kingship in general, rightly understood,³⁸ as well as his specific favor upon Judah, which had been announced centuries earlier (see Gen 49:8-12).³⁹

³⁸ On this point see the references in n. 2 above.

³⁹ My thanks go to the board of regents of Bethel Theological Seminary and to Bethel's alumni board for a sabbatical leave and a sabbatical grant, respectively, that facilitated completion of this and other related work.