

# *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*

by  
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## Chapter 12 "Saul and Evil Spirits"

A final subject to consider involves Saul and the realm of evil spirits. Questions concerning evil spirits are much discussed today, and this makes the consideration timely. The subject falls within the compass of this volume, for Saul experienced the coming of an "evil spirit" to influence him immediately after God's Spirit departed from him. This is stated in 1 Samuel 16:14: "But the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him." The verse implies that the latter took the place of the former, and the fact that "the LORD" is related to both spirits in the verse suggests that this replacement was intentionally permitted by Him. Questions thus arise regarding the identity of this "evil spirit" and the reason why God permitted the replacement. One is prompted to inquire also if the second spirit was allowed to have the same influential position in respect to Saul as God's Spirit.

Still another area of inquiry concerns Saul's visit to the woman of Endor and the resulting appearance of Samuel, who had died sometime before. The subject again pertains to the spirit realm--particularly the realm of the departed dead--and is therefore timely once more and fits logically into the discussion.

### **A. Saul and His Evil Spirit**

The time during Saul's reign when he first experienced the influence of the evil spirit may be determined approximately. His total reign lasted forty years (Acts 13:21). The evil spirit first came on him after God's true Spirit left him (1 Sam. 16:14), and this apparently occurred shortly after Samuel anointed David to take Saul's place (16:12,13). David began to reign in Hebron soon after Saul's death, in 1010 B.C.<sup>1</sup> He was then thirty years old (2 Sam. 5:4), meaning that he was born in 1040 B.C. He could hardly have been less than fifteen years old at the time of his anointing (having been left to attend the family's sheep), giving a date for this event of about 1025 B.C. Since Saul had been anointed in 1050 B.C. (forty years before 1010 B.C.), he would have reigned about twenty-five years by the time God's Spirit left him and the "evil spirit" came upon him. This means he was under the influence of the latter approximately fifteen years. Since his years of greater strength as a king resulted from the Spirit's special empowerment, it follows that his better years in comparison with his weaker ones were of the same proportion.

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1 Following the two forty-year reigns of David and Solomon, the date of the division of the kingdom is commonly placed at 931/930 B.C.; cf. Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 39-52, for discussion.

**1. Identity of the "evil spirit."** A first question concerns the identity of Saul's "evil spirit." Who or what was it? A first fact to make clear is that it was a true spirit-type being, and not merely a bad attitude or guilty conscience, as held by some expositors.<sup>2</sup> The intended parallel with God's Spirit, who had just left Saul, is too apparent to see this replacement as other than a true spirit being. Besides this, the language used regarding this spirit is not satisfied by the idea merely of a guilty conscience. For instance, the spirit is said to have been "from the LORD" (1 Sam. 16:14). Also, when David would play before the king, at a time when the evil spirit would come upon him, the spirit would then leave (16:23), but a guilty conscience does not come and go in this fashion. And, further, on more than one occasion when the evil spirit came on Saul, he even seized a spear and tried to kill David at such a time of playing (18:10,11; 19:9); merely a bad conscience would not have affected the king in such a way.

But what sort of spirit being was it? There are two possibilities--either a good spirit, meaning an angel, or a bad spirit, meaning a demon sent by Satan. It, of course, could not have been God's Holy Spirit, for He had just been withdrawn from His place of empowerment in Saul's life. Of the two possibilities, it could not have been a good spirit either, for this spirit is specifically called an "evil spirit." It must, then, have been a demon sent by Satan. The Bible is clear that Satan has a host of demons at his command (Mark 3:22-27), and this seems to have been one.

One difficulty may be noted for this conclusion. The spirit is said to have been "from the LORD" (1 Sam. 16:14). Besides this, five times a grammatical construction is employed which gives the literal meaning of either "evil spirit of God" (16:15, 16, 23; 18:10) or "evil spirit of the LORD" (19:9).<sup>3</sup> One must ask how this spirit could have been sent by Satan if it is said to have been either "from" or "of" God.

The answer is not difficult; the spirit was sent from God in the sense that God permitted it to begin to influence Saul when God's true Spirit had been removed. This sending was passive in nature, not active. Satan was the active agent. He was the one who wanted Saul to fail as Israel's king and was all too ready to send an emissary to enhance the failure when given an opportunity. So long as God's good Spirit had been on Saul, there was no opportunity; but now there was, and God permitted Satan to use it. It must be remembered that, though Satan is extremely powerful, he can do nothing that is not permitted by God (see Job 1:9-12; 2:4-7). No doubt, God saw fit to grant the permission as a punishment for Saul's disobedience.<sup>4</sup>

**2. The rationale for Satan sending a demon.** The reason Satan wanted to send a demon

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2 For instance, George Caird (*Interpreter's Bible*, II [New York: Abingdon Press, 1936], p. 969) calls this spirit "a bad conscience produced by his [Saul's] own disobedience to what he believed to be the will of God, and his consequent break with the man who had been instrumental in bringing him to the throne.

3 The KJV uses the nonliteral "from" in each of these places.

4 Says Carl F. Keil (*Old Testament Commentary, The Books of Samuel*, p. 170): "This demon is called 'an evil spirit (coming) from Jehovah,' because Jehovah had sent it as a punishment."

to influence Saul calls for enlargement. He did not want Saul to succeed, as just observed; but, more than that, he did not want God's nation Israel to succeed. The people had not prospered during the preceding period of the judges--no doubt also then because of Satan's influence in strategic places and ways--and he did not want a different experience for them now that a king had been installed. A prosperous people would bring admiration and inquiry on the part of neighboring countries, and this in turn would lead neighbors to learn of Israel's unique belief in one God only, in contrast to their many gods. Satan did not want this.

But a principal way in which to keep the people from prospering was to bring a hindering influence on the king. Leaders of nations are always key people. A good and wise leader will usually bring about good and prosperous conditions; a poor and unwise one will bring about unpleasant conditions. Saul, Israel's first king, was a prime target for Satan's attack; to make him fail would make the new monarchical program fail at its very inception.

**3. Method employed.** A logical question--and one of major significance in the present day--concerns Satan's method in sending this evil emissary; or, from God's point of view, it concerns the method God permitted Satan to employ in sending this demon to influence Israel's king. Was the demon sent to "possess" Saul, as people were possessed by demons in Jesus' day? Or was he sent only in the sense of influencing the king, working from outside the personality of Saul? Certainly, demons that possessed people in Jesus' day worked from within<sup>5</sup> the personalities of the people involved, for Jesus is said to have cast them "out." If a definite answer is possible, it must be based on the manner of expressions used in the text regarding this spirit and Saul. Verbs and prepositions are especially important.

Perhaps the best approach to the question is to make a comparison between verbs and prepositions used in respect to this spirit's relation to Saul and those employed in respect to the relation of God's Spirit to those He empowered. Certainly one can fairly say that God's Spirit held control from within the personalities of those He empowered, and so, if similar verbs and prepositions are used regarding Saul's evil spirit, it should follow that he also held control from within Saul's personality. If these should be different, then one could doubt that this was true.<sup>6</sup>

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5 The word *within*, or *possessed*, in this context clearly means "a control over" a personality, so the demon can speak in place of the person, while using the person's voice (Matt. 8:31; Mark 4:9-12; Luke 8:30-32) and even cause him to commit acts of self-destruction (Matt. 17:15; Mark 9:18-22; Luke 9:39-42). Working from "without" seems to be limited to acting by persuasion, much as Satan with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Persuasion can be a powerful tool, especially in the hands of Satan and his hosts, but it falls short of actual control.

6 This is not to say that God's Spirit holds control over saints exactly like demons over people they possessed. He does hold control, for He indwells the person, keeps him eternally secure, and empowers him for work (none of which fits the idea of mere outward persuasion). The Spirit does this, however, in full cooperation with the person, so that the person can even hinder His work (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). No doubt, many cases of demon possession find the person working in cooperation with the demon also (mediums, for instance, people of "familiar spirits"), but it would be difficult to maintain that every case of demon possession in the New Testament involved the same. Demons may not have permitted possessed persons to enjoy the same cooperative factor that the Holy Spirit does.

The following is a list of the verbs and corresponding prepositions used relative to the Holy Spirit's coming on people:

<b>Passage</b>	<b>Person Involved</b>	<b>Verb Used</b>	<b>Preposition Used</b>
Ex. 31:3; 35:31	Bezaleel	fill, <i>male'</i>	with, <i>be</i> (both times)
Num. 11:17	Seventy elders	put, <i>sim</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i>
Num. 11:25,26	Seventy elders	rest, <i>nuah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i> (both times)
Num. 24:2	Balaam	was, <i>hayah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i>
Deut. 34:9	Joshua	was full, <i>male'</i>	none used
Judg. 3:10	Othniel	was, <i>hayah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i>
Judg. 6:34	Gideon	clothed, <i>labash</i>	none used
Judg. 11:29	Jephthah	was, <i>hayah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i>
Judg. 13:25	Samson	move, <i>pa'am</i>	none used
Judg. 14:6,19; 15:14	Samson	overpower, <i>tsalah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i> (three times)
1 Sam. 10:6,10	Saul	overpower, <i>tsalah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i> (both times)
1 Sam. 11:6	Saul	overpower, <i>tsalah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i>
1 Sam. 16:13	David	overpower, <i>tsalah</i>	unto, ' <i>el</i>
1 Sam. 19:20,23	Saul's messengers	was, <i>hayah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i> (both times)
2 Kings 2:15	Elisha	rests, <i>nuah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i>
1 Chr. 12:18	Amassai	clothed, <i>labash</i>	none used
2 Chr. 15:1	Azariah	was, <i>hayah</i>	upon, ' <i>al</i>

2 Chr. 20:14	Jahaziel	was, <i>hayah</i>	upon, 'al
2 Chr. 24:20	Zechariah	clothed, <i>labash</i>	none used
Isa. 11:2	Christ	rest, <i>nuah</i>	upon, 'al
Isa. 32:15	Israel	pour out, 'arah	upon, 'al
Isa. 42:1	Christ	give, <i>nathan</i>	upon, 'al
Isa. 44:3	Israel	pour out, <i>yatsaq</i>	upon, 'al
Is. 61:1	Christ	is (understood), <i>hayah</i>	upon, 'al
Ezek. 2:2, 3:24	Ezekiel	come, <i>bo'</i>	in, <i>be</i> (both times)
Ezek. 11:5	Ezekiel	fall, <i>haphal</i>	upon, 'al
Ezek. 36:27	Israel	give, <i>nathan</i>	in, <i>be</i>
Joel 2:28	Israel	pour out, <i>shaphak</i>	upon, 'al
Zech. 12:10	Israel	pour out, <i>shaphak</i>	upon, 'al

Summary:

Verbs	Times Used
was, <i>hayah</i>	8
overpower, <i>tsalah</i>	7
rest, <i>nuah</i>	4
fill, <i>male'</i> , clothe, <i>labash</i>	3
give, <i>nathan</i> ; come, <i>bo'</i> ; pour out, <i>shaphak</i>	2
put, <i>sim</i> ; move, <i>pa'am</i> ; pour out, 'arah; pour out, <i>yatsaq</i> ; full, <i>naphal</i>	1
<b>Prepositions</b>	

<i>upon, 'al</i>	25
with, in, <i>be</i>	5
unto, <i>'el</i>	1
no preposition used	5

The following is a similar list of the verbs and prepositions used relative to an "evil spirit" coming in contact with people:<sup>7</sup>

<b>Passage</b>	<b>Person Involved</b>	<b>Verb Used</b>	<b>Preposition Used</b>
1 Sam. 16:14,15	Saul	Terrify, <i>ba'ath</i>	none used (both times)
1 Sam. 16:16	Saul	in being, <i>hayah</i>	upon, <i>'al</i>
1 Sam. 16:23	Saul	in being, <i>hayah</i>	unto, <i>'el</i>
1 Sam. 18:10	Saul	overpower, <i>tsalah</i>	unto, <i>'el</i>
1 Sam. 19:9	Saul	was, <i>hayah</i>	unto, <i>'el</i>

Summary:

<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Times Used</b>
terrify <i>ba'ath</i>	2
in being, <i>hayah</i>	2
overpower, <i>tsalah</i> ; was, <i>hayah</i>	1
<b>Prepositions</b>	
unto, <i>'el</i>	3

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<sup>7</sup> Two other passages speak of an evil spirit, Judges 9:23 and 1 Kings 22:23. Neither is parallel in kind to those regarding Saul and so are omitted here. Neither would change the conclusions made, if they were.

upon, 'al	1
no preposition used	2

A study of these tabulations leads one to the following conclusions:

**a. Verbs connote control by the Holy Spirit.** Several of the verbs used regarding God's Spirit connote the idea of taking control of a person, working from "within." This is true mainly of the verbs *fill*, *clothe*, *rest upon*, *come in*, and *move*. *Overpower* probably also should be put in this group, especially because it is used with *upon*. The others used--*was*, *give*, *put*, *pour out*, and *fall*--speak of contact but not necessarily of control-type contact.

**b. Verbs do not connote control by the evil spirit.** In contrast, no verbs used in regard to the evil spirit speak of a similar inner control. *Terrify* shows a strong response on Saul's part, but it does not imply whether the cause came from outside his personality or from within. *In being* and *was*, both from *hayah*, are equally noncommittal, as was noted in respect to this verb in connection with God's Spirit. *Overpower* is used again, once, but it is less evidential for control here because it is used with the preposition *unto* rather than *upon*.

**c. Prepositions also connote control by the Holy Spirit.** One preposition predominates in respect to God's Spirit: It is *upon* ('al), used twenty-four of the total thirty times a preposition appears. It connotes a more intimate form of contact than the parallel preposition *unto* ('el), and this is in keeping with the idea again of personality control. Also the prepositions *with*, or *in*, both from *be*, are in keeping with the same idea, especially when they are used with the verbs *fill*, *come*, and *give*. Only once does the preposition *unto* occur, which speaks more of the idea of proximity.

**d. Prepositions do not connote control by the evil spirit.** In contrast once more, the preposition *unto* ('el) is most often used in regard to the evil spirit. It is used three of the four times a preposition is employed, with *upon* ('al) being the other. This one use of *upon* is with the relatively weak verb *was* (*hayah*), which reduces its significance.

The above evidence points to the conclusion that Saul was not possessed by a demon working from within his personality, but merely was influenced as the evil spirit worked from without. The fact that different verbs and prepositions are used, when the relation to Saul of God's Spirit and then the evil spirit are in view, cannot be overlooked. An offsetting factor might be thought to exist in that the same verb is used for the departure from Saul of both God's Spirit and the evil spirit. The verb is *sur*, "turn aside," and is used in 1 Samuel 16:14 in reference to God's Spirit leaving Saul and in 1 Samuel 16:23 for the evil spirit leaving him. However, a departure could be either from within a person or from simply being near

him, making the use of this verb of little evidential value.

The conclusion most in keeping with the evidence, therefore, is that the evil spirit influenced Saul while merely working from outside his personality. One need not think that the influence was not great, however. Satan and his hosts are extremely clever in their manner of bringing persuasion. It should be remembered, too, that Saul had a natural tendency to be timid, which could well have made for a tension in his personality, not wanting to give into that weakness. While the Holy Spirit had empowered him, he had been able to avoid this tension, but now, with that special help gone, Satan's emissary could have used it to his advantage. The power of Satan and his helpers must never be underestimated, whether actual demon possession is involved or not.

One might ask why Saul alone in the Old Testament is said to have had an evil spirit to influence him--if an outside type of activity was all that was involved--when certainly evil spirits also worked on other people to influence them. In other words, must there not have been something unique about demonic activity with Saul for him to be singled out as the object of a demon's work? The answer is that no doubt there was something special, for a specific demon was assigned to him to influence him on a regular basis. Other people were influenced, but normally not as a continuing assignment by a particular satanic emissary. A parallel case appears to have existed later in respect to a demon especially assigned to the king of Persia. His work was to influence this king, who then ruled over territory where Jews lived, to hinder God's program and activity with the Jewish people. A grand heavenly messenger told Daniel that he had been "withstood" by this demon for twenty-one days, as he had come from heaven to bring God's message to Daniel (see Dan. 10:13,20).

In passing, it may be observed that no evidence can be drawn from Saul's relation to the demon for the belief that Christians can be possessed or controlled by demons. Some Bible students have tried to do so, for Saul surely was a child of God, having been chosen by God Himself as Israel's first king. Saul, however, was not demon possessed or controlled. In fact, the Bible does not seem to tell of any cases where a Christian was controlled in this way.

**3. The nature of the evil spirit's work.** The nature of the work done by this evil spirit is best analyzed by looking at the four different occasions when it is mentioned in connection with Saul.

**a. The initial coming to Saul.** The first mention appears at the initial coming to Saul, which was immediately after the departure of God's Spirit. Three references to the spirit are made in this context: one concerning the coming proper, in 1 Samuel 16:14, and then Saul's servants refer to it twice in verses 15 and 16. They counsel the king to procure a musician to play music and help alleviate Saul's troubled state when the spirit brought its influence on him.

One word from the context is particularly important for determining the type of work done. It is the word *ba'ath*, translated in KJV as "troubled," but much better rendered "frightened" or even "terrified." The word appears sixteen times in the Old Testament, and in every instance but here the KJV translates it with some word meaning "fear." For instance, in Job

7:14 it is used in the verse, "Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions." The word for "terrifiest" is this word. Or again, Isaiah 21:4 uses it, saying, "My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me; the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me." Here the closing word *fear* is the translation used. See also 2 Samuel 22:5; Job 3:5; 18:11; Psalm 18:4; et al. There is no reason for changing from this basic idea in the passage concerning Saul.

One aspect of the evil spirit's work with Saul, therefore, was in making him afraid. He was made fearful concerning matters that involved him. A fear complex often couples itself with suspicion, especially in people of position. Saul's actions from this time on show that this truly became the case with him. He became suspicious of others, as both his fear and suspicion became linked in turn to a sense of insecurity. All three elements emerged strongly in his antagonism to David. David was valuable to Saul, being his only military leader capable of defeating the Philistines. But for all this value, Saul's fear, suspicion, and sense of insecurity overrode his better judgment, and he pursued the young man in a persistent attempt to kill him.

It may be noted in passing that Saul's sense of insecurity was probably heightened by the fact of a rather poor performance by himself as king, even while God's Spirit remained on him. When he had assumed the rule, a major task before him had been to unify the tribes into a working whole, but he had not been successful. There is little evidence that this had been accomplished to any significant degree. Criticisms of him in this regard may have been circulating, and this could have been used by the evil spirit to make the sense of insecurity, suspicion, and fear all the greater.

**b. Left Saul when David played.** The second reference concerns the departure of the evil spirit from Saul whenever David played his stringed instrument. An indication that he did is given in 1 Samuel 16:23: "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

The main point of significance concerns a limitation of control on the part of the evil spirit. He would "withdraw" (*sur*, "turn aside, depart") from Saul when David would play. David's instrument was the *kinnor*, a stringed instrument, which produced soothing music. Quite clearly, this type of music was not found compatible by the evil spirit. The tune may also have been something from the ceremonial singing of the Levites, and this too would have been out of keeping with his nature. The demon did not like it and left Saul when he heard it.

In passing, the observation may be made that music regularly carries psychological influence on people, some music for good and some for bad. The type of music one listens to is important. He can either be calmed and refreshed by it, or excited and disturbed. This passage suggests that it may carry even a wider power, one that influences the spirit world. David's sweet music created an atmosphere the evil spirit could not stand. It is only logical to believe that a contrasting type would encourage his presence and activity. Christians of any day need to be careful what kind of music they permit to enter their mind.

A second point to notice is that this passage may provide further indication that the demon did not possess Saul, but only influenced him from without. It would depart from him just as a result of David playing. In the New Testament, people who were demon possessed were not relieved that easily.<sup>8</sup> It took a special act on the part of Christ or one of the apostles to cast demons out of people. The word *sur*, as used here, is not fairly treated, either, by the possible explanation that the demon, while possessing Saul, merely was made inactive for a time. The word regularly speaks of turning aside from, leaving, departing, and is so used approximately three hundred times in the Old Testament.

**c. Attempts on David's life.** The third and fourth references concern Saul's two attempts to kill David with a spear. The third, 1 Samuel 18:10,11, states that the evil spirit came on Saul and that he then seized a nearby spear and cast it at David, saying, "I will smite David even to the wall with it." The fourth, 1 Samuel 19:9,10, again speaks of the evil spirit coming on Saul "as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand" and adds that as "David played with his hand . . . Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin." Both times, however, David escaped without harm. It may be that in the third instance Saul only thrust at David while still holding the spear, for David is said to have "avoided out of his presence twice." In the fourth, however, Saul clearly threw the weapon, for the indication is given that he "smote the javelin into the wall."

It should be realized that many months had passed between the occasions of the second and third references to the evil spirit coming on Saul. The second is made at the time of David's first coming to the palace to play, while the third appears only after he had been there for some time, with both the Goliath struggle and many succeeding battles with the Philistines, having intervened. During this time, he had served as Saul's chief military commander (1 Sam. 18:5) and, because of his several victories over the Philistines, the people had come to speak of him as having killed his "ten thousands" and Saul only his "thousands" (18:7,8). This had given both time and reason for Saul to become jealous of the young military strategist, and this jealousy provides the background for the new situation existent at these third and fourth times.

In looking at these times, two matters are noteworthy. The first is that in neither case was the evil spirit dissuaded from his work with Saul by David's playing. Before he had been, but not now. These times, rather than departing, he reacted by influencing Saul to try for David's life. It should be noticed, then, that he did react. He did not simply remain with Saul without doing something. The reason for the different form of reaction was no doubt the different situation that now existed. Saul had sinned in becoming jealous of David and this provided the demon with just the advantage he needed to react in the new way. He would not escape the music by running away but by having the player killed. One may believe that even this jealousy had been significantly fostered by the demon; for just because the demon is not mentioned during this extensive intervening time is no reason to think he had not been active. Very likely he had been, and now he was able to build on what he had seen accomplished in Saul's sinful attitude. Because of the jealousy, the demon was

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8 It is true that the New Testament speaks of demons leaving and returning to people (see Matt. 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26), but this seems to have been voluntary on their part. Saul's demon, however, did not want to leave, but found the music too incompatible to remain.

able to withstand the opposing atmosphere of the music<sup>9</sup> so that he might influence Saul to make the attempt on David's life.

The thought follows that people, by attitudes and states of mind they permit for themselves, can make the work of Satan's hosts either easier or harder. The apostle Paul warned the Ephesians, "Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). Saul clearly had done this. Where earlier David's music had been enough to put the demon to flight, now, because of the permitted jealousy, Saul could be influenced to try for the young man's life. How careful the Christian needs to be in not making Satan's opposing work easier.

The second matter is that these two attempts on David's life give further evidence that Saul's suspicions and fears did concern especially a sense of insecurity on his throne. He could become quickly jealous of David simply because of David's success in defeating the Philistines, seeing him as a rival (see 1 Sam. 18:8). If he had felt secure, he would have been glad for such results, for the Philistines were Israel's chief enemy. Because he did not, Satan's emissary could use the fact to foster jealousy and this in turn to bring the two attempts to take the young man's life.

**d. Summary.** In summary, the nature of the evil spirit's work with Saul was to exploit a weakness Saul already had. The demon worked on Saul's sense of insecurity as a king to make him fearful of losing his throne. Then he employed Saul's recognition of David's success as a reason to influence him to become jealous of the young man. And then he built on this to withstand David's music to influence Saul to kill his talented musician. At first he had found it necessary to flee when David played, but Saul's weakness and sin in jealousy gave him the advantage he needed.

One may safely believe that it was this same continued influence on Saul which brought the distraught king to kill eighty-five priests of Nob and their families somewhat later (1 Sam. 22:18,19). The evil spirit is not mentioned in connection with this tragic occasion, but it logically follows that his influence was at work just as in the earlier instances. One cannot believe that he had desisted in his work with Saul just because Saul had failed to kill David. This is not the way of Satan and his hosts. It is more likely that he continued to work to Saul's detriment for the rest of Saul's life, though he is not said specifically to have done so.

## **B. Saul and the Woman of Endor**

Our attention now turns to the other type of occasion when Saul had contact with the spirit world. This was the time when he made request of the woman of Endor<sup>10</sup> that she bring Samuel back from the dead so Saul might consult with him (1 Sam. 28:7-25). The occasion

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9 This idea of withstanding the music may account for the one use of the stronger verb *overcome* (tsalah), to describe the demon's work. It occurs in the first of these two instances (1 Sam. 18:10). The evil spirit was able to "overcome" the influence of the fine music on Saul and so influence him to try for David's life.

10 The name "Witch of Endor" is often used for this woman, but it is improper because she was not a witch. A witch is one who purports to work magic, while the woman of Endor corresponds to one called a medium today.

has significance in itself, due to its relation to the general idea of contact with the departed dead, and it has significance for the more basic question herein discussed concerning possible involvement of evil spirits and God's Holy Spirit.

**1. The incident described.** The incident transpired at the close of Saul's life, after approximately fifteen years of influence by the evil spirit. The Philistines had been growing stronger, due for one reason to the fact that David had not been Saul's army commander since having fled as a refugee (1 Sam. 21:10). The Philistines had been able to move north from their own territory (thus against Canaanites who held the coastal region at this time yet) and then eastward through the Esdraelon Plain. They had moved as far as Shunem (28:4), just west of Mt. Moreh, when Saul arrived with his army at Mt. Gilboa.<sup>11</sup> Apparently Saul's army was much smaller than that of the enemy--due no doubt to lack of confidence in him by Israelites because of his poor leadership in recent years--and Saul was taken with fear. He tried to obtain information from God regarding the impending struggle, but God would not answer him either by "dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" (28:6)--as a result certainly of his wicked ways--and therefore he sought out this woman of Endor. The community of Endor was located on the east of Mt. Moreh, almost straight north of Saul on Mt. Gilboa, thus making it possible for him to visit the woman without coming in contact with the Philistines to the northwest.

In going to this woman, Saul disguised himself and went by night, for he had previously and properly made her kind illegal in the land (28:9). The woman spoke of her illegal status when Saul first arrived, but Saul reassured her and then asked that she bring "up Samuel" from the dead. The woman proceeded with her practiced techniques for attempting to do this.

**2. Samuel really appeared.** The question has often been asked whether Samuel actually appeared or not. The answer is quite clear, however, that he did appear. It is directly stated in 1 Samuel 28:12 that "the woman saw Samuel," that as a result "she cried with a loud voice," and that she was thus made to realize that her client was none other than Israel's king, Saul. Further, 1 Samuel 28:15-19 records an actual conversation between Saul and Samuel, and Saul could not have conversed with someone who was not there.

The form in which Samuel appeared, however, is not clear; it may have been corporeal or it may have been only as a type of apparition. The woman was able to see the form, but apparently Saul was not, for the woman had to describe Samuel to him (28:14). It may be that the woman, as she saw Samuel, was in a different room from Saul, or it may be that God gave only the woman the ability to see Samuel in the type of apparition God had given His departed saint. The presence of Samuel was real, however, whether in corporeal or apparition form; Saul was able to converse with his departed adviser. If Samuel was in another room, the conversation must have been by means of a door or passageway.

**3. No approval of spiritism, however.** Because Samuel really appeared and Saul was able to talk with him, the argument is sometimes used that the practice of spiritism is thereby

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<sup>11</sup> This would have placed Saul roughly four miles southeast of the Philistines; see Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-yonah, eds., *Macmillan Bible Atlas* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), map 96.

authenticated; the dead really can be contacted. This conclusion does not follow, however, as at least three reasons show.

**a. The Bible condemns spiritism.** One reason is that the Bible elsewhere clearly condemns all practice of spiritism, and the Bible never contradicts itself. Even before the Israelites entered their land, God made this clear. In fact, he then condemned any manner of divination, speaking of "any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer . . . or a wizard, or a necromancer," and He included "a consulter with familiar spirits" (literally, "one who asks an *'ob*," the same term as used regarding this woman). He further gave the reason for this condemnation: "For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD" (Deut. 18:10-12). God had not changed His mind since the people had come into the land, and even Saul realized this in that he had declared practitioners of these nefarious arts illegal (1 Sam. 28:9). Numerous other passages speak similarly, e.g., Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; 2 Kings 23:24; Isaiah 8:19; Acts 19:18,19.

**b. Samuel's appearance was by a special act of God.** Another reason is that the appearance of Samuel was not the result of this woman's art but the direct supernatural intervention of God. Several factors indicate this. First, the woman herself was definitely surprised at Samuel's appearance and as a result was made to fear. Saul even counseled her, "Be not afraid" (1 Sam. 28:13). She did not expect to see Samuel, then. She evidently was not accustomed to having such concrete results come from her arts.

Second, this appearance of Samuel brought the woman to a recognition that her client was none other than Saul. Because of Saul's disguise and manner, she had not recognized him before, even having spoken of him in the third person as having cut off such people as herself from the land. That she did recognize him now, then, shows that Samuel's appearance was so unexpected that it made her realize the one inquiring must be unusually important, and she would have known Saul was in the area due to the impending battle with the Philistines. This means also that she must have realized God Himself had made Samuel thus appear, in order to give information to this important person.

Third, the message Samuel gave to Saul, having thus appeared, was clearly from God. It was in no way a message that Saul wanted to hear but only one that he needed to hear, having acted in disobedience to God as he had. In other words, what Samuel did say was what God wanted to be said, and therefore it follows that God was the One who had sent him to say it. Samuel told the king in clear terms the worst possible news. Because Saul had been disobedient to God, God would deliver Israel into the hands of the Philistines and both Saul and his sons would be killed even on the "morrow," with the kingdom then being given to David (1 Sam. 28:17-19). No doubt Saul had come to the woman hoping for some encouragement; what he received, however, was the very opposite. It constituted, really, a further rebuke for Saul, because he had also now disobeyed God in coming to this woman.

It follows that, if God was the One who made Samuel appear, and not the woman, this was not a case of spiritism at all. And if it was not an act of successful spiritism, then obviously no approval for spiritism can be taken from the occasion. It was *in spite of* the woman's techniques that God made Samuel to appear, not *because of* them.

**c. Unusual actions of the woman.** Still a further reason is found in the unusual actions of the woman, after Samuel had again disappeared; she did not act as a professional of her art would be expected to act. Her conduct showed that she knew something had happened which was beyond her normal powers. She first showed sympathy for Saul, having heard the dire information that Samuel had just spoken to him. Then she offered him food, that he might regain the strength he evidently needed, having fallen prostrate at the news spoken. When he refused this at first, his own servants joined with the woman in urging him to accept her hospitality, which he then did. Her provision amounted to nothing less than an entire "fat calf" besides "unleavened bread" (1 Sam. 28:22-25). If what the woman had experienced in Samuel's appearance had been normal, she would not have acted in this generous fashion toward one who had just tricked her, even if he was the king. She could be expected rather to have set a high fee to such a one for services rendered; this would be in keeping with normal professional conduct, and she really had nothing to fear from Saul as king, for he had come to her and was in her debt, and, moreover, he would die the following day, in view of Samuel's words.

**4. Meaning of the term "gods."** A question may be asked regarding the woman's meaning when she said, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth" (1 Sam. 28:13). She said this just before describing the form of Samuel to the inquiring Saul. What is the relation between her reference to "gods" and the appearance of Samuel? One part of the answer is that, though the Hebrew word for "gods" (*'elohim*) is plural, it need not be so translated. The term is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament and normally refers only to one deity, usually the true God of heaven. And that it should be translated in the singular here follows from Saul's resulting question, "What form is he of?" in which he used the singular *he*, and also by the woman's answer in describing what she had seen as "an old man," again using the singular. The fact that deity was not intended by her in using the term is indicated also by the manner of the woman's reply. She did not describe a god but only "an old man." Her use of the term was no doubt a way by which she thought to indicate a nonterrestrial, nonearthborn being, supernatural in kind.

**5. Possible involvement of an evil spirit.** The question of whether or not an evil spirit was involved in this occasion is pertinent to our discussion. The term *evil spirit* (*ruah ra'ah*), used regarding Saul, is not employed here, but another term is, which may refer to a specific class of evil spirits. The term is *'ob*. It is used sixteen times in the Old Testament and frequently in reference to the person himself who practiced as a medium (e.g., Lev. 19:31; 20:6; 1 Sam. 28:3,9; 2 Kings 21:6; et al). A few times, however, it is used for the being such people would contact in this practice. For instance, Deuteronomy 18:11 calls such a person "one who asks an *'ob*." Isaiah 29:4 speaks of the *'ob* as being "from the ground." And in our story, the woman is called the "possessor of an *'ob*" twice in verse 7, and in verse 8 Saul asks her to divine for him "by the *'ob*." All of this suggests rather strongly that an *'ob* was thought of as a spirit by which mediums could bring up departed dead from the ground. The fact that the mediums could themselves also be called by the term may indicate that these people were so closely associated with the *'ob* in their work that they came to be practically

identified with it.

A further question concerns whether or not such a spirit existed, or if its existence was merely in the minds of people. In other words, Is there a specific spirit or group of spirits that Satan has assigned to work in connection with mediums? The answer these verses suggest is that this may be the case. It is generally accepted that people who claim to be mediums today do have contact with--if not being empowered by--evil spirits. It is only logical, then, to believe that similar people long ago had the same true of them. Since this woman who was consulted by Saul is called a "possessor of an 'ob," she certainly was believed to have such a spirit. It may well be that she did; and, if so, in this respect at least, an evil spirit was involved in this instance. As has been seen, however, it was not the woman or this evil spirit that was responsible for the appearance of Samuel. He appeared by the supernatural act of God Himself.

By implication, one may safely say that another evil spirit was involved in this occasion also. This spirit was the evil spirit that regularly worked on Saul at Satan's command to influence him wrongly, and here did so in persuading him to make this God-displeasing visit. It must have been this spirit that was largely responsible, for the visit was directly contrary to the revealed law of God, it was something Saul himself had made illegal sometime earlier, and it was just the type of action that Satan would have wanted Saul to do. God had refused to give Saul an answer from any source of information related to Him--dreams, Urim, prophets (1 Sam. 28:6)--and, therefore, Satan would answer him from his false source. Satan's emissary, then, would have been the one to influence Saul to make the visit. Interestingly, though Satan would have been the one to influence Saul, it was God who thwarted Satan in employing the occasion to have Samuel give Saul the message He desired. No doubt Satan had an entirely different type of message to impart through the woman by the more normal procedure.

**6. Possible involvement of God's Spirit.** Since this appearance of Samuel to Saul was effected by a supernatural act of God, the question is appropriate whether or not the Holy Spirit may have been the specific person of the Godhead who did it. An affirmative answer is likely. Though no mention is made concerning the Spirit, the type of work done in making Samuel appear must be categorized as normal for the Spirit. Samuel was made to appear as a way of bringing rebuke to Saul for his sin in general and now for this added disobedience in consulting the woman. Such rebuke falls under the heading of discipline, and this is an area of work assigned to the Spirit.

This means that the same Spirit, who had left Saul some fifteen years earlier for empowerment in his reign, was still interested in him as to Saul's own life conduct. As seen in an earlier chapter, He would still have indwelt Saul, so far as maintaining Saul as a child of God, and in this capacity He of course was interested in Saul's spiritual relationship with God.<sup>12</sup> Severely grieved at Saul's continued misconduct, He now brought reprimand by

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<sup>12</sup> **KM comment:** Not all scholars agree with Dr. Wood that Saul experienced regeneration and was a saved man. For example, C. F. Keil comments as follows on 1 Sam. 10:6: "This transformation is not to be regarded indeed as regeneration in the Christian sense, but as a change resembling

bringing Samuel back from the dead to communicate the message of rebuke.

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regeneration, which affected the entire disposition of mind, and by which Saul was lifted out of his former modes of thought and feeling, which were confined within a narrow earthly sphere, into the far higher sphere of his new royal calling, was filled with kingly thoughts in relation to the service of God, and received '*another heart*' (ver. 9). *Heart* is used in the ordinary scriptural sense as the centre of the whole mental and psychical life of will, desire, thought, perception, and feeling... Through this sign his anointing as king was to be inwardly sealed" (p. 100; italics original; *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel*, 2 vols., vol. 2 in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975; original publication date, 1868]). Paul Heinisch makes this observation: "Conversion implies a break from one's former mode of life. It must be genuine 'with all one's heart and with all one's soul' --an external acknowledgment of having sinned is wholly insufficient. Saul regretted not having observed Yahweh's command and Samuel's directions, but his sorrow proceeded merely from the evil consequences of his actions. There is no conversion without abandoning sin because sin breaks intimacy with God" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Wm. G. Heidt, 1955, p. 265, cited by J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), p. 299. (Payne gives his own view on p. 242 that Saul was a saved man.) It also should be noted that for a man of God to anoint someone a king does not necessarily indicate that man was saved (Elijah was sent to anoint Hazael king of Syria, 1 Kings 19:15, and Jehu king of Israel, 1 Kings 19:16). Also, one particular incident strongly suggests that Saul was not saved. A born-again child of God would hardly kill all the priests at Nob and their families with no sign of remorse or repentance (1 Sam. 22:6-19).