

# **The Enduring Results Of Compromise**

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Have you ever compromised about something you thought was just a little thing, something you considered inconsequential? What about more important matters? Have you compromised a belief only to realize that what you thought was a conviction was really a preference? Have you let your standards slip?

Nothing erodes convictions and standards faster than compromise. Human beings are rather skilled in this area, and this skill runs the gamut of humanity. Even Solomon, known and extolled for his wisdom, fell victim to compromise, and it severely tarnishes his reputation. If we compromise our obedience to God, we also expose our reputation to suspicion or disrepute—especially with God Himself!

God appeared to Solomon on at least two occasions (I Kings 3:5-14; 9:2-9), both times offering him tremendous blessings. Nehemiah 13:26 records that Solomon "was beloved of his God" for a good part of his life. Sadly, some time later, "The LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel" (I Kings 11:9).

All indications are that Solomon compromised with God's way because of expediency; he decided to give in to his wives' idolatrous practices for personal and political peace or advantage (verses 1-8). That is what compromise is—a weakening or giving up of our principles or ideals for reasons of expediency. Expediency is doing or considering what is of selfish use or advantage rather than what is right or just. Expediency is always based in self-interest.

Although God had given him wisdom far above any person before or since save Jesus Christ, Solomon still allowed himself to reject God's commands by not using the wisdom at his disposal. Wisdom is the right application of true knowledge, and compromise erodes it quickly. Unlike Solomon, we cannot compromise the wisdom God has given us by His spiritual revelation if we are to "hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Hebrews 3:14). Compromise can steal away our eternal life if we are not careful!

Solomon's example teaches us a lesson about how dangerous compromise with God's law is, particularly in those areas we may view as small and unimportant. His apostasy late in life shows how seemingly inconsequential compromises can lead to greater sins and the resultant difficulty in repentance. The Bible gives no indication that Solomon repented before he died. We can see, then, that the more we compromise, the harder it is to return to "the faith . . . once delivered" (Jude 3, KJV).

## **Principles Governing Kings**

As the children of Israel stood poised to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, Moses accurately predicted that Israel would eventually reject God's divine leadership, preferring a human king like other nations (Deuteronomy 17:14). Israel did this about 350 years later in the time of Samuel the prophet (I Samuel 8:1-7).

Tolerantly, God instructs Moses to tell Israel how to make the best of this mistake by giving guidelines a godly king should follow. These governing principles are listed in Deuteronomy 17:15-20. As we examine these principles, we will compare them to the life of Solomon to see how well he followed them.

### ***Horses***

The first guideline requires that the king should "not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again'" (Deuteronomy 17:16). Given the size and scope of the empire he inherited from his father David, Solomon no doubt needed means for transportation and trade. Beyond this, horses were prime war materiel in those days, particularly for pulling chariots, so multiplying horses can indicate territorial aggression and a warlike spirit. Most importantly, it can show a lack of faith in God and too great a faith in armies.

I Kings 10:26, 28 says that Solomon had thousands of horses imported from Egypt. The next verse reveals further proof of his departure from these royal guidelines: He also imported chariots and sold horses and chariots to other nations. What surfaces here is nothing more than a tenth-century BC arms race! Solomon armed the Hittites and Syria, providing them with the means to attack Israel and Judah in later years (I Kings 11:23-25; 20:1; II Chronicles 22:5). In so doing, he violated one of the "smaller" precepts of God's law, first given to Israel 450 years earlier.

### ***Wives***

In the second guideline, God's instruction through Moses again leaves little room for interpretation or doubt. Israel's leader was not to "multiply wives to himself" (Deuteronomy 17:17). Solomon may have subconsciously reasoned, "If importing horses from Egypt has brought no immediate penalty, what is the harm of taking a second wife?" Yet he eventually took a third, a fourth, a fifth and so on. Each new wife confirmed his decision to violate God's law.

By the end of his reign, he had 700 wives, not to mention an additional 300 mistresses or concubines (I Kings 11:3)! God's prohibition of royal bigamy was a means of protecting the king from having his heart turned away from Him. Solomon failed to heed this wise principle.

He compounded the problem even further by marrying,

many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you'" (verses 1-2).

In Deuteronomy 7:3-4, Moses predicts the deadly results of marrying non-Israelite women: Such wives would lead their husbands "to serve other gods." Solomon disregarded these warnings. When he was old, he allowed his foreign wives to turn his heart "after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God" (I Kings 11:4).

From the "minor" infraction of importing horses from Egypt, he eventually condoned, or at least was an accessory to, the sins of idolatry and murder, sins he would not have contemplated seriously at the beginning of his reign.

Murder? How so?

Solomon not only "went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites" (verse 5), but he also "built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, . . . and for Molech, the abomination of the people of Ammon" (verse 7), whose rituals involved the horrible rite of child sacrifice by fire (Leviticus 18:21; Jeremiah 32:35). Archaeologists have found skeletal remains of infants at three sites where this brutal human sacrifice occurred. These Solomonic high places for Chemosh and Molech stood for three centuries before Josiah finally destroyed them (II Kings 23:10, 13).

As a result of Solomon's perverted disobedience, several of his corrupt successors to the throne even caused their children to "pass through the fire" (II Kings 16:3; 21:6). How degenerate can someone be to sacrifice his own child as a burnt offering to Satan's idolatrous creations?

### ***Silver and Gold***

After his prodigious wisdom, Solomon is best known for his colossal—seemingly astronomical—personal wealth. While riches are not evil in themselves, God admonishes the Israelite king not to "greatly multiply silver and gold" for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). Beyond the greed factor, God gave this warning, not because He wants His rulers to be poor, but because of the effect amassing wealth has on the general populace. When a king gathers all of a nation's wealth to himself, the citizenry experiences acute financial oppression.

I Kings 10:14-25, 27 describes Solomon's nearly unbelievable wealth in detail. He was so wealthy that he "surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches" (verse 23). He generated an income of 666 talents of gold per year (verse 14), and "silver [was] as common in Jerusalem as stones, and . . . cedars as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland" (verse 27). He even charged a hefty, yearly set fee for anyone who desired to hear his wisdom (verse 25)! Money just seemed to pour into his coffers.

Obviously, much of this wealth came to him from trade and as gifts like that from the Queen of Sheba (verses 1-2, 10). However, he took advantage of his people to garner a great deal of wealth in the form of high taxes and using resident aliens as forced labor on public works projects (II Chronicles 2:17-18; 8:7-10). After he died, the people sent emissaries to his son Rehoboam to request a lightening of their work and tax burdens, but he rebuffed them, causing Israel's rebellion under Jeroboam (I Kings 12:1-20; II Chronicles 10). From the biblical perspective, amassing wealth like this is a terrible abuse of power.

Solomon had no excuses. He was fully aware of these instructions. Deuteronomy 17:18-19 shows that Israel's kings were to read all of the book of the law, write it out by hand, keep it with them, and read it continually. Solomon knew it was wrong to import horses from Egypt, take many wives and enrich himself. Apparently, he considered these infractions too minor, too small, to limit him from such action.

## **Victim of Compromise**

Wise Solomon fell victim to the same temptation that the rest of us so often face: to compromise in what we think are small concerns or the "gray" areas. The danger in such reasoning is that small compromises weaken character and over time, lead to major sins. Just as we can grow in character little by little, so we can backslide in the same manner.

Solomon's experience is a warning of what will befall us if we follow his example of compromise. His series of compromises gradually but inexorably distorted his understanding of God and His ways. The psalmist of Psalm 111:10 writes, "A good understanding have all those who do His commandments," and its converse is equally true. If we slacken our resolve to keep all of God's commands, even those we might deem as less important, we will gradually lose our God-given understanding of His way to eternal life.

King Solomon may not have understood how far-reaching his "little" sins would be. By giving His royal sanction to the worship of pagan deities, Solomon set a precedent that was followed by most of Judah's kings after him. His example was retained by the ten tribes of Israel in Samaria and in their subsequent wanderings. His religious influence still pervades the thinking of the monarchy of the line of David to the present day.

Solomon, having learned the hard way, writes, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Satan begins making his inroads in our lives when he influences us to compromise on God's law and follow our own way. Once we compromise, the process of sin has begun, and its ultimate end is death (see James 1:14-16).

The time to stop the process is in the beginning, when the situation and the pulls are still small and simple. It is the little compromises—the ones we think are so meaningless—that grow into full-blown sin and apostasy. Nip sin in the bud! And the enduring consequences of compromise will never have a chance to bloom.