

Compromise & Peace: Two Opposing Pathways 2 Samuel 3

"I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign overall that your heart desires"

Introduction:

com-pro-mise

1. *an agreement or a settlement of a dispute that is reached by each side making [concessions](#).*

"an ability to listen to two sides in a dispute, and devise a compromise acceptable to both"

2. accept standards that are lower than is desirable.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word "*compromise*"? Depending on your experience and temperament (glass half full or empty), the idea of compromise can elicit either a negative, neutral, or reluctant positive response. When dealing in relationships with family, believers, and unbelievers, compromise is inevitable, particularly in this broken world of imperfection. Historically, there have been some enormous compromises in our country. In 1820, the US passed the **Missouri Compromise**, which admitted Missouri into the union as a slave state, while simultaneously bringing in Maine as a free state, keeping balance in the country and outlawed slavery above the 36° 30' latitude line in the remainder of the Louisiana Territory. This was a compromise that failed to address the real issue but literally kicked the can down the road in dealing with the sinful practice of slavery, one which would be solved with an immense amount of blood and death four decades later.

We are coming up on a national election in November that embraces another compromise that is embedded in our Constitution, and that is the *electoral college*. Our founding fathers wrote this in as a compromise of who elects a President, either Congress or by popular vote. This was to balance out the same issue as representatives in Congress, making sure each State was represented. Though it has been modified since, it is still the law of the land (though some would like to end it – for the same reason every politician seeking more power wants to change laws), and it is why a presidential candidate could win the *popular vote* and still lose the election.

We can analyze compromises throughout history and disagree on the terms, but that is exactly the point. Compromise seeks to settle disputes and bring peace, whether that peace is temporary or lasting. Compromise recognizes the frailty and sinful nature of mankind, whether or not one acknowledges sin exists. There are times where compromise can be positive for everyone – like when Erin had to stop being my fiancé and become my wife – but most times it requires a giving up of something. The key to true peaceful compromise is making sure each party gives up **preferences** and holds onto **truth**. We should always be willing to give up things that are opinions but should never compromise on the absolutes God has given.

What does this have to do with our study? We come back to David as he is back in the land of Israel, but is relegated to the city of Hebron for the first 7 ½ of his 40-year reign. What strikes me about David is the fact that though he was the **greatest earthly king Israel ever had**, and though he was light-years above Saul in his ability to lead, his rule was anything but smooth. In fact, there are **6 chapters** of 2

Samuel where things were great – victory over Philistines, peace, and right relationship with God – but the rest of the book was filled with sin, consequence, and heartache. ***Does that sound like a pattern in most of our lives?*** Life on this side of heaven is always going to feel uneven, with legitimate good and sweet times that are gifts of grace, but those are often intertwined with challenges, sorrow, hurt, and pain. We also see David beginning to lead more than 600 men and attempting to unify a nation that had been defeated and split. His goal was to bring the followers of Saul and join them together to be able to fulfill what God had called Israel: *to glorify Him through pure worship of Him alone, to be a light to the nations around and call them to worship as well.* This is NOT categorically different than the call we have as a church, so understanding these principles is imperative.

Negative Compromise with Problematic Results

And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; 3 and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; 4 and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; 5 and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.

Today, the test case of true masculinity is having *daughters*, since it takes a real man to raise them, with the upside being that they are more likely to take care of parents at the end of their life (*mostly joking*). To appreciate this section of 2 Samuel we have to have a little cultural context of Ancient Near East thinking. An abundance of sons normally meant a large and growing company of trusted leaders to deploy the resources of the kingdom. Many sons meant a secure line of succession and strong future. But there was more at play than simply producing sons. If you notice which wives he chose, it is clear he was making **political** partnerships as well. Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel secured the political base in the southern Judah. Maacah was the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, which was located just north of Ish-boshth's base east of the Jordan. This would have given him an ally and friend in his pursuit to neutralize Saul's forces in the north. From a worldly perspective, David made shrewd decisions in these marriages in Hebron, and would have signaled to the nations around that David was indeed growing in strength and influence.

But (hopefully) we see the obvious problem with this way of operation. Yes, this would have been *culturally acceptable and even lauded by the world around*, but this was NOT God's will for David, Israel, or us today. God has always created marriage between one man and one woman, and all sexual expression is reserved for this union ALONE, and every other action or desire outside of it is classified as **sin**. This is as important in our day as much as it was in David's, and yet in David's time it had become a subtly acceptable, sanitized sin that "everyone was doing", so it must be ok. When God's people act just like the world, they lose the opportunity to display the goodness and joy of God's plan for all.

What was David violating? We need to look back at **Deuteronomy 17:17** where the Law laid out practices of Israel's future kings. It says, "***And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.***" The command was abundantly clear, though I chuckle to myself when I read commentaries that try to differ between what "many" meant, which reveals the nature of mankind and our sinful heart that tries to play games with God's Word, making it yield to our will rather than our will to it! This will be David's son Solomon's downfall as well, since we read in **1 Kings 11:1-2**, "***Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with***

*them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon **clung to these in love.*** It is clear that David’s family had a vice, a besetting sin, and they did not fight against it but rather gave in, and that had dire consequences for the future.

Compromise in sin is often subtle, starting small, with a whisper and such a small step toward it that it seems almost insignificant. The first step toward sin may not even be sinful at all, but simply puts us that much closer to compromising God’s clear will. For David, his monumental and consequential sin will take place years into the future when he lusted after another man’s wife after seeing her bathing, and entered into an adulterous affair that led to mass murder. This chapter shows the steps to how *that sin came about*. Though David obviously had many marriage partners, they did not satisfy his need to have more. Instead of rejoicing in the wife of his youth (Prov. 5:18) and being intoxicated with one wife, he compromised with more. Instead of “abstaining from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3) and fulfilling God’s will, he gave into his passions and lusts. The sting of compromise produced sons and heirs in the short run, but these sons gave him heartache, with **Amnon** raping his half-sister Tamar and was murdered by his brother **Absalom**. **Absalom** not only murdered his brother but committed treason against David in the future. **Adonijah** staged a coup against David’s choice for the throne in Solomon, creating familial and national tension.

David’s compromise here is a cautionary tale for every believer this morning, myself included. People do not typically go from 0 to adultery in a day, or 0 to isolation, or 0 to hopelessness in a day. It typically is a slow march of seemingly insignificant compromises along the way: *a ceasing of God ordained means of grace* (Bible intake, prayer, fellowship, service, etc.), *a willingness to do embrace what we know is wrong* (what we view or intake in terms of worldly counsel), and *a refusal to acknowledge, confess, and repent of sin when it is recognized, instead allowing sin to grow and fester*. Sin is built to multiply, so it must be cut off at the root and we must be aggressive in its death. David’s compromise was not initially judged by God, but it grew to a sin that had dire consequences.

Positive Compromise with Problematic Results (3:6-39)

The rest of the chapter tells a story of resolution and murder, of peaceful union and bitter jealousy, of forgiveness and vengeance. In studying this chapter, it is immediately problematic since it does not give us certain information about the motivation behind certain actions. It tells of Abner defecting from Saul’s house and moving to David with all of Israel behind him since he was frustrated and disenchanted with Ish-bosheth’s leadership. *Was Abner going to try to take the throne from Ish-bosheth? Did he really take one of Saul’s concubines? Was he genuine in his coming to David or was it all part of some deceptive plan?* Often the author will clarify intentions to the reader, but in this story, they are nebulous as best. But here is why I believe he leaves it this way: *this is what we are left with in most of life, as we try to make decisions and compromises without knowing all the motives behind them*. Especially when it comes to **forgiving others**, when their actions *look* repentant but we are not sure about their intentions. This is a story of how one party was willing to forgive the egregious actions of a family member, where another stewed in their bitterness, leading to sinful vengeance. What we will see is this parallels a well-known **parable** in the New Testament, and informs us of how can make concessions with each other without negative compromise.

Abner's full circle story arc:

We saw Abner, the cousin of Saul and powerful general of Saul's remaining army, initiate a brazen interaction with David's men, venturing as close to the border of David's territory as one could get. This led to the death of 20 of David's men, but 360 of Abner's, leading him to scurry back across the Jordan River and back up north. Unfortunately for him he was dogged by the brother of Joab (David's general) named Asahel, leading to him having to run him through with his spear in self-defense. Though this death happened in the context of war and thus not considered murder, Joab was determined to avenge his brother and had a deep seated anger toward his enemy that would only be assuaged in the fury of murder.

The text is clear: *"Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul"* – meaning Ish-bosheth was more of a front man to the real mover and shaker in this band. It's here where the text begins to be as clear as mud. Ish-bosheth **accused** Abner of taking one of Saul's concubines name Rizpah to himself. This would have been a power move that not only would have brought shame on Ish-bosheth but would begin to infringe on his authority. This is a similar move that **Absalom** would pull against David in the future of his kingdom (2 Samuel 16:20-23). We do not know if this was a true move or a perceived one, but what we do know is that **Abner did not take kindly to the accusation**: *"Am I a dog's head of Judah?"*, which would have been equivalent to *"am I a cat's head"* today. Abner, being incredulous of the accusation, 1) upheld that he had been nothing but loving to the house of Saul, 2) made it known that he was now going to transfer the kingdom to David, 3) left Ish-bosheth fearful and speechless (v. 11).

Abner then moved on his promise. He sent messengers to ask David to make a covenant with him, and he would deliver the rest of the people to him. In a move that was probably motivated by political prowess more than love (but again, not clear), David asked for Michal to be delivered back to him, which she was. Abner was the one who finally told her new husband, **Paltiel**, to return home (v. 16). This is a somewhat tragic scene, but such is typical when sinful choices are involved, like Saul's taking Michal away from David in the first place. Abner conferred with the **elders of Israel and the tribe leaders of Benjamin**, desiring to bring all to David and fulfill what was promised to David by God (v. 19). As Abner came into Hebron with 20 of his men, David threw them a feast and Abner recommitted his covenant loyalty and love, going away in **peace**.

Was Abner repentant? Time would have told, but David was willing to **trust** the words and actions of Abner, risking the fact that it could have been artificial. Forgiveness is a risk, forcing us to trust the words of others and the work of Christ. ***"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*** (Eph. 4:32). This powerful truth means we are able to compromise in relationships, but NOT convictionally. What we are willing to give up in the deal is our **pound of flesh, our meting out of justice, our satisfaction of making the other person pay!** When God forgives us IN CHRIST, it means that HE bore all the wrath and shame on Himself, satisfying God's justice completely. The payment has been made on the cross, where God made **"peace by the blood of His cross"** (Col. 1:20). Even if the person sins again, we are freed up to forgive again when there is repentance again, and that can be repeated "seven times in a day" (Luke 17:1-4), a statement that had the disciples cry out "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5). David was willing to overlook the rebellion and death that Abner had caused, bringing him into his kingdom and committing to move forward. This type of convictional "compromise" is essential in every relationship, as it is assured we will sin against each other which means we must forgive in order to keep bitterness, envy, wrath, and anger at bay.

But not all were willing to forgive Abner with open arms and hearts. When Joab heard that Abner had been in the city of Hebron and had a meal with David, leaving **in peace**, he uttered the harsh words, **“What have you done!”** This was overstepping, even for a general, but he also went on to tell David that Abner was NOT to be trusted. It is clear in the text that Joab still held onto **bitter vengeance** toward Abner, but also he lacked any kind of trust in his change of heart, and possibly a bit of jealousy and envy, since now his enemy had the ear of David and his growing trust. That is when Joab allowed his anger to move from his heart to his hands. He met Abner at Hebron, took him (unsuspectingly since David had made peace) to the gate of the city where business and commerce would have been done, and ironically ran him through in his stomach, avenging the death of his brother.

There were **three major problems with this vengeance killing:** 1) Hebron was a “city of refuge”, established in Joshua 20 so that if there was an inadvertent killing, one could be safe from retribution in this city until there could be a proper trial. 2) Abner killed Asahel in self-defense during a battle, releasing him from the charge of murder and not deserving of this death; 3) Joab went against the explicit decree and instructions of David, becoming insubordinate and less than loyal, which would actually dog him the rest of his life.

When David heard what happened, he responded in an extreme way, showing how serious he took what happened: 1) He **professed his own innocence**; 2) He **curled** Joab and the generations of his family to come (v. 29). 3) He **officially mourned the death of Abner with the nation**, compelling Joab and his family to do the same. This not only showed all the people of Israel that David did NOT want Abner to die, but it pleased the people (v. 36), paving the way for a united kingdom.

To close, I wanted to show some parallels to another story that Jesus told in **Luke 15**, which we know as “The Prodigal Son”. In that story, you had a younger son who wished his father dead, asking for an inheritance early so that he could spend it on his pleasures. When he had spent everything and came to the end of himself, he had no other recourse but to return to **his father** and hope that he could get hired on as a servant on the family farm. As he professed his sin, his father sprinted after him, embracing him and clothing him in the family garb and symbols. The Father forgave the son and restored him to full sonship, causing the father to order up a celebration of a son who had been lost had been found, who was dead was now alive. This is the picture of **the gospel that offers forgiveness of sin**, not by works to make up for it but in the work of Christ who paid for it.

But not all rejoiced. The older brother was indignant, bitter, lacked trust in the brothers change and did not care even if he did. He was not only jealous but he was downright angry with his Father. *“Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!”* (Luke 15:29-30) Indignant, the son questioned the father’s goodness and sanity, much like Joab. Where Joab would go and kill Abner, the story of the Prodigal son would see the older son go into the city a few weeks later and beat his father to death with a piece of wood! The older brother represented the Pharisees and religious leaders who could not comprehend forgiveness, so they had to get rid of the One who stood in their way of perceived happiness.

The right kind of compromise is needed in relationships. We cannot compromise to the standards of the world, becoming like them in our thinking, actions, or giving into our passions. But we must be willing to

forgive as God in Christ forgave us. When we do, we can have healthy, ongoing, joyful relationships that are unified and **at peace**. Failure to do so means we will be set in our ways of anger, bitterness, wrath, and vengeance, leading only to expressions of these which lead to egregious consequences. Jesus has freed us in the gospel to forgive, and the only question remains whether we will trust Him or not.