

Facing challenging times with wisdom

Proverbs 25, 2 Chronicles 29-32

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Introduction: To face challenging times successfully, we need a safe refuge, a good source of wise counsel, and courage to keep going in faith. Wisdom can be defined as seeing ourselves and our world through God's eyes, but this ability is only activated when we acknowledge our need for God's presence in our lives and His lordship over us (the same lordship He confirmed and demonstrated at the cross). Wisdom is the fruit of responding with all our heart to God's call to live under His reign (what Jesus established at Calvary). When God's wisdom rules our heart, then it provides the right response to family problems, personal dilemmas, health crises, financial challenges, religious controversies, political turmoil, social instability and upheaval – you name it! So we're looking today at the example of King Hezekiah, who was hungry for true wisdom. His biblical reputation: ***"Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after him"*** (2 Kings 18:5-7). Archaeology confirms the historicity of his 8th-century B.C. reign through the discovery in Jerusalem (2015) of a round seal dating to that time period, inscribed with the name of the owner, Hezekiah himself (date of his reign, 715-686 B.C.).

1) As a young king he felt the weight of responsibility for ruling the nation of Judah well. Kings need a lot of wisdom to govern, but Hezekiah especially needed it, because when he came to the throne, the conditions he inherited were appalling: the temple doors in Jerusalem had been closed by his father Ahaz, and idolatrous altars had been set up in ***"every corner"*** of the city (2 Chr. 28:24); the towns of Judah were full of sacred stones and Asherah poles, pagan altars and high places (2 Chr. 31:1). It wasn't easy to go against what had become politically correct for an entire generation, but Hezekiah's resource was the Word of God, especially the writings of Solomon (from 12 generations before him). How do we know this?

You may be surprised to learn what a "literary" person Hezekiah was. Prov. 25:1 introduces a section of ***"proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah transcribed"*** (Prov. 25-29). Here was a monarch who valued God's Word and sought to let it impact his own life and restore unity among God's people. 1 Kings 4:32 says Solomon spoke over 3,000 proverbs. When we do the math, we find roughly 663 proverbs in the first two sections of the book (Prov. 1-9 and 10-24); then we find 137 in the last section (Prov. 25-29; the final chapters are attributed to other wise men). So where are all of Solomon's other proverbs? **Only a fraction of Solomon's proverbs actually "made the cut"** as inspired Scripture. The first two sections were already compiled, so Hezekiah singled out 137 more

to be copied and included in the canon of Scripture. What were his criteria for picking these and not others? The inspiration of the Holy Spirit was clearly the primary factor, but what did He use in Hezekiah's life to guide him? Probably the spiritual yearnings that developed in his heart during his younger years, with all the godlessness around him; so the inspired proverbs resonated with him in a special way. The Holy Spirit was guiding and impressing him with truth especially relevant to his heart. So Hezekiah collated these "unclaimed treasures" that **came "alive" to him as God's Word**, and they helped him govern his kingdom. This "alive" quality is true of all Christian Scripture: Heb. 4:12 teaches that the **"Word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword."** Peter wrote that the incorruptible seed of **"the Word of God lives and abides forever"** (1 Pet. 1:23). This "alive" factor is what makes Scripture impact us so deeply (not just Hezekiah), in every age. **Have you discovered this for yourself?** These proverbs should resonate in our hearts like they did in Hezekiah's.

So as Hezekiah recognized the "inspired quality" of these proverbs, they became part of the motor of **spiritual restoration that marked his reign**. Their truths addressed his personal circumstances: he needed courage to face his fears, anxieties and threats. Many of these proverbs speak of ways in which a kingdom is preserved and prolonged. The opening proverb (25:2) shows us the youthful king's desire and passion to know the wisdom of God: **"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the honor of kings is to search it out."** Others show the same longing for God's perspective: **"Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a ruling rightly given"** (v. 11); **"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you"** (vv. 21-22); **"Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control"** (v. 28); **"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations"** (27:23-24); **"When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers, but a ruler with discernment and knowledge maintains order. A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops"** (28:2-3); **"When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan"** (29:2); **"By justice a king gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down"** (29:4). All these reflect Hezekiah's concern to rule well with trustworthy principles of government.

These reflect another set of concerns the young ruler had: **"If anyone turns a deaf ear to instruction, even their prayers are an abomination"** (28:9); **"Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble"** (28:14); **"Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom will be delivered. Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses"** (28:26-27); **"The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern"** (29:7); **"If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will be established forever"** (29:14). Many of the proverbs reflected Hezekiah's concern to care for the underprivileged and to distinguish clearly between the wise and foolish, the righteous and wicked, between those who would help to build the kingdom up and those who would only tear it down.

2) Hezekiah's reign began with the re-opening of the temple. 2 Chron. 29 tells how in the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them, bringing in the priests and Levites to instruct them in their duty of consecrating themselves and cleansing the temple of all defilement. 2 Kings 18 says he also removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles, even breaking apart the bronze snake Moses had made (the

people had begun to worship it). So an important feature of Hezekiah's early days was his desire to cleanse the land of idolatry and re-establish God's rights over the nation. Within a matter of 16 days, they finished cleansing the temple and began performing the ritual sacrifices. So Hezekiah called the people together, instructed the Levites to lead in worship with the instruments as David had taught, and then they sacrificed and feasted together in a great celebration. This sweeping purification could well have been inspired in Prov. 25:4-5: ***“Remove the dross from the silver, and a silversmith can produce a vessel; remove wicked officials from the king's presence, and his throne will be established through righteousness.”***

Next came the decision to celebrate Passover a month later than what the law called for; they hadn't been able to celebrate it at the regular time because not enough priests had consecrated themselves. So in preparation, Hezekiah sent messengers to call even the people of Israel to come and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem with their brothers and sisters of Judah (2 Chr. 30), for this was their common heritage (even 12 generations after their separation!). Messengers were sent with a letter from the king to all the people from Beersheba to Dan – the whole of Israel and Judah. Some scorned and ridiculed, but others gave an amazing response: from Asher, Manasseh, Ephraim, Issachar, and Zebulun, many humbled themselves and undertook the journey to Jerusalem. These visitors from the northern kingdom were not turned away, even though they hadn't cleansed themselves properly according to the temple law, but Hezekiah prayed for them and God heard his prayer. Even though they were a month late with this Passover and all these ritually unclean people participated, what they realized was that ***hearts turning to God were more important to Him than the letter of the law!*** The rejoicing was so great that first week that they decided to keep going another week, and Hezekiah himself donated thousands of sheep and goats for sacrifice and feeding of the crowds. Then his officials followed suit, because generosity begets more of the same! They were having revival right there in the Old Testament! The whole country was affected, and the northern kingdom as well! After the celebration there was even more eagerness to tear down the idols and pagan altars, and when the call went out for the collection of the tithes, the response was overwhelming. The people gave generously the firstfruits of their grain, new wine, olive oil and honey, and all that the fields produced. They brought a tithe of everything (this was also evidence of God's deep work in their hearts). The testimony of Scripture says, ***“This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly”*** (2 Chr. 31:20-21). So what will happen next?

3) His faith would be put to the test with an invasion from the enemy and a mid-life health crisis.

If you're thinking, “Now wait – this is not fair! After all of Hezekiah's good works, why would the Lord treat him like that?” But there's no biblical wisdom in that kind of thinking! We are NOT exempt from the trials of this fallen world, no matter how faithful we may be! (Remember our Savior!) Hezekiah's “mid-reign crisis” was twofold: an invasion by the Assyrians, and later a life-threatening personal illness. The Assyrian siege was especially strategic: instead of launching a military assault, they opted for a propaganda campaign, trying to undermine the morale of the people, casting doubt on Hezekiah's convictions, claiming divine authority for their own mission. Next they railed against the God of heaven, claiming He could never save them. Hezekiah trembled, but he turned to God and His Word for guidance and strength. He encouraged the people to trust in the Lord, whose

power was greater than all the Assyrian forces. So when Sennacherib's messenger delivered a threatening letter to Hezekiah, he took it to the temple, spread it out before the Lord, and prayed over it. The Lord's answer came through the prophet Isaiah that Sennacherib would never enter the city or even shoot an arrow there. That night the angel of the LORD wiped out 185,000 of the Assyrian troops, and Sennacherib, humiliated, went scurrying back to his own land, where he was soon assassinated.

Meanwhile, Hezekiah had another battle to face: his health began to fail due to an infectious boil, and the prophet Isaiah told him to put his house in order because he would not recover. Hezekiah took the news very hard, so he turned over in his bed and began to weep, pouring out his soul in prayer before the Lord. The Lord heard his plea and added 15 more years to his life (no guarantee that the Lord will do the same in your case or mine). In those 15 years he engendered a son who would be the worst king Judah ever had in all its history, following the ways of his grandfather Ahaz. Hezekiah would also receive envoys from Babylon during this time, congratulating him on his recovery, and he would open his storehouses and his palace to show them all his treasures. Later Isaiah clarified that Hezekiah's action was prophetic of what was to come, because all those treasures would be carried off to Babylon in the future (about 100 years). ***"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool; he who puts his trust in the Lord shall be delivered"*** (Prov. 28:26).