

BIBLE STUDIES

*“Men From The Past With A Message For The Present”***JABEZ: A LITTLE-KNOWN MAN WHO PRAYED A WELL-KNOWN PRAYER****I Chronicles 4:9,10**

“Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, “Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!” So God granted him what he requested.”

Have you ever been bored with the Bible? Well, the first 9 chapters of I Chronicles are perhaps the most uninteresting chapters in the Bible to read. It is dry reading, like driving all day through a desert. In fact these nine chapters have been called the Desert of the Old Testament!

Why did God include all those long, hard-to-pronounce, sometimes humorous names in the Bible? Why did God make the desert? So that He could make an oasis! Without the desert there would be no refreshing oasis with its welcomed water and sun-shielding trees. Likewise, right here in the middle of this literary desert of nine chapters, is an oasis! After reading hundreds of names we come to two verses that break up the monotony of the literary landscape and refresh us. Here is a well of water that blesses our souls.

Jabez suddenly appears among a long list of unknowns. This two-verse biography is perhaps the briefest of all biographies in the Bible. We do not know where he lived, the name of his father or mother or what his occupation was. We only know that he prayed a prayer that God answered. Several years ago book Bruce Wilkinson wrote a book titled, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*. It has sold over eight million copies. All this from a little book that's only 93 pages long. Jabez, from obscurity to notoriety overnight! So, let us take a closer look at both the obscure man, and his outstanding prayer.

The Name He Wore.

His mother named Him Jabez because he caused her pain in childbirth. The Hebrew means “to grieve” or “be sorrowful.” (I Chron. 4:9). Some names given to Bible characters were burdens to bear like Abigali’s husband, Nabal, whose name means “fool,” which he was! (I Sam.25:25) However, Jabez seemed to get along very well with his name.

The Reputation He Had.

“Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.” Why and in what way we are not told. Some have suggested it was because he prayed. That may have been the case, but let us not strain at the statement and read into it more than what is on the surface. Otherwise, it will be sheer speculation. Just leave it as God caused it to be written: “He was more honorable than his brethren.” Joseph was more honorable than his brothers; David was more honorable than

his brothers; Jesus was more honorable than His brothers. Just leave it at that and let us move on.

The Prayer That He Prayed.

This is what we are interested in, his prayer. There are many, many prayers in the Bible, some of which are rather lengthy, and others that are remarkably brief. Jabez' prayer is short and rather simple. However, since Bruce Wilkinson wrote his little book *"The Prayer of Jabez"* some have tried to make the prayer more than a prayer. One of the tabloids took the prayer, placed it in a cut-out shield and told people how to place the shield on a lottery ticket to win the lottery or place it under a pillow at night and sleep on it to get the answer they wanted.

Attention! This prayer is not a magic formula or an Aladdin's Lamp! Prayer is very personal and must come from the heart, therefore, pray your own prayer! We can use Bible prayers as examples of how we should pray – as models, not mantras. Jesus gave us a model pattern prayer to show us how to formulate our own prayer, but He never meant for us to simply repeat that model prayer all of our lives. It is an outline and we must fill in the specifics from our multiple and varied experiences of life. The prayer Jabez can be used as an example but was never meant to be recited over and over.

Jabez' prayer is in four parts:

- 1) He prayed that God would bless him – He prayed for God's provision.
- 2) He prayed that God would enlarge his borders - He prayed for God to prosper him;
- 3) He prayed that God's hand would be upon him - He prayed for God's presence;
- 4) He prayed that God would keep him from evil - He prayed for God's protection.

So what is so unusual about this prayer? Let's look at it phrase by phrase in order to discover why God was pleased enough with his prayer to have it forever recorded in scripture.

HE PRAYED FOR GOD'S PROVISION OF GRACE.

"Oh, that You would bless me indeed...."

The blessing of God is His grace outpoured. God's grace is His favor. Jabez prayed for God to bless him – that is, to grace him with favor. He wanted his life to have the stamp of heaven upon it. Without the rain of God's blessings upon our lives and the freshness that it brings, we will be like the desert, barren and dry! *"It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it."* (Prov. 10:22)

God's grace blessings come in various forms. I Peter 4:10 refers to the *"manifold grace of God."* The Greek word for *"manifold"* is *"poikilos"* and means: *"various, divers, manifold."* The Amplified Bible uses the term *"many-sided grace"* of God. In Paul's extremity, God said, *"My grace is sufficient for you."* (II Cor. 12:9)

God's throne is a throne of grace dispensing favors to undeserving men and women. In Hebrews 4:16 we are encouraged to: *"come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."* That is what Jabez did – he went to the throne of grace.

In order to be blessed – that is, graced by God, our lives must be well-pleasing to Him. The very first Psalm tells us who God blesses: *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.”* (Psalm 1:1)

In order to qualify for God’s blessings, we must be “blessable.” We cannot live an ungodly life and expect God to bless us. John Maxwell states it this way: “Our prayers should ask God to help us do what he is blessing, not bless what we are doing.” (*Partners in Prayer*) Jabez must have qualified for God’s grace blessing for we read *“So God granted him what he requested.”* There is nothing wrong with praying for God to bless you, if it is for the purpose of being a blessing!

HE PRAYED FOR GOD TO PROSPER HIM WITH GROWTH.

“..... and enlarge my territory....” (nkjv) or, *“enlarge my border”* (nasb)

When Jabez prayed that God would prosper him, he must have had righteous motivations and purposes in mind for God answered him and God does not prosper the unrighteous. Growth should be the aim of every righteous person. We are told to *“Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* (II Peter 3:18)

An enlarged border or territory suggests several things:

- *An enlarged territory or border suggests a broader surface.*
Some have suggested that Jabez was simply asking for more land. Some that he was asking for greater opportunities or an enlarged realm of influence. In either case, he got that for which he prayed.
- *An enlarged territory or border suggests an expanded horizon.*
Jabez must have been a faith-visionary; he could see beyond his present station in life and beyond his immediate horizon to the potentialities and possibilities that lay ahead.

We’ve heard the saying, “The sky is the limit.” There is only one thing that limits the servant of God who desires to see God’s work grow and that is a lack of faith! Jabez must have been a man of faith. He had a faith that saw beyond the horizon of the mundane. Jesus said, *“Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”* (John 4:35)

- *An enlarged territory or border suggests a greater responsibility.*
To whom much is given, much is required. There is no God-given opportunity without corresponding accountability. This one thing is for certain: God will not give us a larger field of service until we have worked well the field we have!

We need God’s blessing. It is not wrong to pray for God to bless us by expanding our borders. However, we must remember that God blesses us so that we will be a blessing to others. We are not to be reservoirs but channels. God said to Abraham, *“I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.”* (Gen.12:2) Did you get that? “I will bless you and you shall be a blessing.”

*"Have you had a kindness shown? - Pass it on:
It was not given for you alone, - Pass it on.
Let it travel down the years,
Let it wipe another's tears,
Till in heaven the deed appears: - Pass it on."*

HE PRAYED FOR GOD'S PRESENCE TO GUIDE HIM.

"... that Your hand would be with me.... "

The Hebrew word for hand used in the above statement is "yâ d" and means an open hand indicating direction, in distinction from "kaph" which means a closed hand. Jabez' appeal to God for His hand to be with him means the same as if he asked God to be present with him. In fact, that is exactly what he was asking. God is not disconnected from His hand. If God's hand is present, God is present.

Throughout the Bible the phrase "*the hand of the Lord*" occurs. Sometimes the phrase is: "the hand of the Lord was with" and sometimes "the hand of the Lord was upon" other times "the hand of the Lord was heavy upon." Examples:

The Hand of Judgment:

Exodus 9:3 – *"The hand of the LORD will be on your cattle in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the oxen, and on the sheep—a very severe pestilence."* This is judgment upon the Egyptians.

I Sam.5:6,9 – *"But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors" – "the hand of the LORD was against the city (Gath) with a very great destruction."*

I Sam.7:13 – *"And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel."*

Psalms 32:4 – *"For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me...."* – David.

Acts 13:11 — Paul said: *"And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time."* Elymas the sorcerer in Cyprus.

The Hand of Blessing.

Ezra 7:28 – *"So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me...."*

Psalms 139:5 – *"You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it."* David.

Ezek. 3:22 – *"Then the hand of the LORD was upon me there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out into the plain, and there I shall talk with you."*

Luke 1:66 – *"And the hand of the Lord was with him."* - The young child, John the Baptist.

Acts 11:21 – “*And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.*” - Barnabas and Saul in ministry.

Jabez prayed for the hand of the Lord to be with him. He wanted the presence and leadership of the Lord. In Romans 8:14 we read again, “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*” Jabez prayed for the guidance of the Lord. I pray regularly the words of the hymn:

*“Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.”*

- William Williams

HE PRAYED FOR GOD’S PROTECTION TO GUARD HIM.

“...and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!”

Jabez prayed that God would deliver him from evil or keep him away from sin. Aren’t these similar words to those Jesus included in the pattern prayer that He gave? Matthew 6:13 records: “*do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

Pigs love the muck and the mire. Sheep may accidentally fall into the mud but they soon scramble out. It is the nature of pigs to love the mud-hole; the nature of sheep to shun it. While people are neither pigs nor sheep, these animals do reflect the environments that toward which some people gravitate. Some persons seek out evil and revel in evil deeds with evil companions. Jabez had a different nature for he shunned evil and asked God to keep him from evil.

He wanted to be protected from the harm of evil, but he also wanted to be kept from sinning, because he knew that sin causes pain. It brings pain into the world. It brings pain into the life of the one who commits it, and it brings pain into the lives of those whom the sin was committed against. But most of all, sin causes God pain. His name means, “to grieve” or “sorrowful” and he did not want to experience the pain that sin brings or cause others pain by sinning.

Are we sensitive to sin and evil around us? What about sin within us? Are we as conscientious about sin as Jabez was? He did not want to stumble and he did not want to cause others to stumble. We would do well to pray as did Jabez.

CONCLUSION

Jabez’ biography begins with the words, “Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.” Perhaps now we know why he was “*more honorable than his brothers.*” A person with such a God-consciousness, who craved God’s blessings, who had a broader vision, valued God’s presence with him and hated evil, is an honorable person in any age and in any culture.

And then we are told that “*God granted him that which he requested.*” This mini biography of Jabez is a testimony to the goodness of God despite his birth and circumstances. God heard the cry of this honorable man and granted his requests.

The Bible says “*ye have not because ye ask not.*” God wants to bless us, but He wants us to ask, and to ask from a pure heart and out of the right motive. There is something powerful about calling on the name of the Lord.

God says, “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*” (Ps 50:15) And again, “*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*” (Jeremiah 33:3) Salvation by calling on the name of the Lord: “*And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*” (Acts 2:21)

Jabez asked much and obtained much. The Lord did great things for him, therefore, he was no longer sorrowful, but glad! This little-known man who prayed a well-known prayer should be an encouragement to all of us to live faithfully and pray believingly!

QUESTIONS

1. If you could ask God to bless you in some way right now, what would it be?
2. What, other than material blessings, do you pray for?
3. How does sin cause pain?
4. What was the last prayer request you asked of God, for which you received the answer?

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