

The Prayer of Jabez

I Chronicles 4:9-10

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Introduction: “Talk about dreaming the impossible dream! A book on prayer finally climbed its way past *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* to set atop the *New York Times* bestseller list (*The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson, 2000). And not just any book. It’s a book chronicling the prayer of a little-known Old Testament character named Jabez, sandwiched in among hundreds of names in a long genealogical list. Yet amazing, Jabez has achieved superstar status and spawned a virtual cottage industry of spin-off products” (in *The Prayer of Jesus*, by Hank Hanegraaff, 2001). In the Preface to his book, Wilkinson writes, “I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers, It is brief – only one sentence with four parts – and tucked away in the Bible, but I believe it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God. This petition has radically changed what I expect from God and what I experience every day by His power. In fact, thousands of believers who are applying its truths are seeing miracles happen on a regular basis. Will you join me for a personal exploration of Jabez? I hope you will!” Let’s examine this prayer, find in I Chronicles 4:9-10, & then consider its ramifications for us today. Note 4 things about Jabez here: His fame; his name; his claim, & his acclaim.

I. The **fame** of Jabez (4:9a, “*And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren*”)

A. His **education** (“learning?”) >

1. Thought to have been a famous doctor of the law?
2. Thought to have been well known in Ezra’s day? Compare I Chronicles 2:55, “*And the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez...*”

B. His **supplication** >

1. He is known as a praying man, seeking the blessing of God.
2. “The way to be truly great is to be truly good & to pray much” (Matthew Henry).

II. The **name** of Jabez (4:9b, “*...and His mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow.*”)

A. The **recalling** of his name >

1. “*Jabez*” means: “son of sorrow.”
2. “*Because I bare him with sorrow*” suggests: hard labor is part of the curse (Gen. 3:16).

B. The **reminder** in his name >

1. To his mother: Though born in sorrow, yet she is spared & blessed with a son.
2. To Jabez: “It might also remind him to love & honor his mother, & labor, in everything, to be a comfort to her who brought him into the world with so much sorrow” (Henry).

III. The **claim** of Jabez (4:10, “*And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, & enlarge my coast, & that Thine hand might be with me, & that Thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.*”)

A. Prayer for God’s **blessing**, “*Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed*” >

1. **Asking** for blessing – the request [a command? Matthew 7:7-11].
2. **Anticipating** the blessing – the reason [a confidence? I John 5:14-15].
*Is he leaving it up to God what the blessing is to be, & where, when, how?
3. **Actualizing** the blessing – the result [a consequence? I John 5:15; Mark 11:22-26].

Summary: “The wonderful, unlimited goodness that only God has the power to know about or give us” (Wilkinson).

B. Prayer for God's **increasing**, "*and enlarge my coast*" >

1. For resources to be increased (cf. I Chronicles 29:14-16):
 - a. Material possessions? Proverbs 3:9-10.
 - b. Physical (& spiritual) health? III John verse 2.
2. For opportunities to be increased (I Corinthians 16:9):
 - a. Prayer for open doors to witness & minister.
 - b. Prayer for boldness to witness & minister (cf. Colossians 4:3-4).
3. For burden to be increased (Proverbs 29:18 & cf. Lamentations 3:51)).
 - a. In the life of Jeremiah – Jeremiah 8:19 – 9:1.
 - b. In the life of Christ – Matthew 9:36-38 (His emotion, evaluation, & exhortation).

Summary: God's math: "My willingness & weakness + God's will & supernatural power = My expanding territory" (Wilkinson).

C. Prayer for God's **residing**, "*that Thine hand might be with me*" >

1. God's hand of protection:
 - a. Joshua 4:24, "*That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD...*"
 - b. Psalm 89:13, "*Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is Thy hand, & high is Thy right hand.*"
2. God's hand of direction:
 - a. Psalm 44:1-3, "*...O send out Thy light & Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, & to Thy tabernacles.*"
 - b. Psalm 139:10, "*Even there shall Thy hand lead me, & Thy right hand shall hold me.*"
3. God's hand of consolation:
 - a. To soothe & bring comfort – Psalm 37:24.
 - b. To strengthen & bring courage – Psalm 63:8.

Summary: "You do not become great; you become dependent on the strong hand of God. Your surrendered need turns into His unlimited opportunity. And He becomes great through you" (B.W.)

D. Prayer for God's **keeping**, "*that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me*" >

1. Because of the persuasiveness of sin: its reality.
 - a. The deceitfulness of sin – Hebrews 11:25, "*... the pleasures of sin for a season.*"
 - b. The destructiveness of sin – Proverbs 14:12, "*...the end thereof are the ways of death.*"
2. Because of the protection from sin: its restraint.
 - a. Keep away from temptation & keep the devil at bay (James 4:7).
 - b. "*Lead us not into temptation*" (Matthew 6:13).
3. Because of the product of sin: its result.
 - a. "*Grieve me*" – cause shame & sorrow.
 - b. "*Grieve not the holy Spirit of God*" (Ephesians 4:30).

IV. The **acclaim** of Jabez (4:10, "*...And God granted him that which he requested.*")

Matthew Henry concludes: "What was the success of his prayer: God granted him that which he requested, prospered him remarkably, & gave him success in his understandings, in his studies, in his worldly business, in his conflicts with the Canaanites, & so he became more honorable than his brethren. God was of old always ready to hear prayers, & His ear is not yet heavy."

Conclusion: How should we understand *The Prayer of Jabez*? One describes it as "a raging success which will probably continue to build because it's evangelical & American, this whole notion that if you know the right technique, the right form, that prayer will be efficient & effective" (*Publisher's Weekly*). Wilkinson declares: "By claiming that daily recitation of the prayer can turn you into... someone like him." Yet others have described it as "the quintessential example of fast-food Christianity" & "others worry that *The Prayer of Jabez* relies more heavily on personal stories than on passages of Scripture." Next week will we continue our analysis of this prayer recorded in I Chronicles 4:9-10.