

Jabez: Passion For Blessing

1Chronicles 4:9,10

Bryn MacPhail / June 5, 2011

I admit that in a series entitled, 'Great Prayers of the Bible', this prayer seems out of place. Who is Jabez anyway?

Up until a few years ago, the name Jabez was regarded as little more than the answer to a difficult trivia question. Everything that the Bible has to say about Jabez can be found in two verses, in 1Chronicles 4:9, 10.

Making his presence in Scripture even more obscure is the fact that the two verses about Jabez are in the middle of one of those lengthy genealogical tables.

And, most of us, if we are honest, will admit to frequently passing over the first nine chapters of 1Chronicles because we lack the ability to stay alert while reading genealogies of such length.

In recent years, however, the name Jabez has become quite well known in many Christian circles thanks to a best-selling book written by Bruce Wilkinson entitled, 'The Prayer of Jabez'.

And as we examine and unpack the prayer of Jabez, we need to keep in mind the principles for prayer that we have learned elsewhere in Scripture.

This is, in part, why I was compelled to bring you a series of messages on prayer—believing that no single biblical prayer will suffice in teaching us everything we need to know about prayer.

The account about Jabez begins in 1Chronicles 4:9 where we learn that Jabez “**was more honourable than his brothers**” and that his mother gave him a name which means ‘sorrowful’, because she “**bore him with sorrow**”.

It is amazing to me how Jabez became such a man of honour even while bearing a name that meant ‘sorrowful’.

This is probably going to sound judgmental, but who names their child the equivalent of ‘sorrowful’?!

As you can tell, I’m a little sensitive when it comes to naming a child. Do you know what the name ‘Bryn’ means? It means ‘mound’ or ‘little hill’—which might be more tolerable if I were 6 feet tall or more!

Perhaps you have noticed on Eastern Rd, on the south side, a big beautiful home that is named ‘Bryn Mawr’. Now, ‘Bryn Mawr’ means ‘hill by the sea’. That’s more impressive, isn’t it?

But no, I am named ‘little mound’ and Jabez is named ‘sorrowful’.

Let’s look at the prayer of Jabez to the God of Israel: “**Oh that Thou would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou would keep me from evil, that I may**

not cause pain!” And then we read **“God granted (Jabez) what he requested.”**

I have a strong suspicion that the reason why the prayer of Jabez intrigues us so much is because of what is written following his prayer: **“God granted (Jabez) what he requested.”**

I suspect Jabez’s prayer would not be nearly as popular if not for the clear statement that Jabez got what he asked for. As Christians, we desperately want our prayers answered and so we gravitate to passages like this. And while it is helpful to study the prayer of Jabez, we should try to be aware of our motivations for doing so.

If we approach the prayer of Jabez as a kind of formula to coax God into giving us what we want, we misconstrue the intent of Jabez’s prayer.

With a superficial glance, some have concluded that Jabez was praying simply for temporal blessings. And if we do not accurately translate his first petition, we are likely to conclude the same.

What is Jabez’s first request? **“Oh that Thou would bless me *indeed*”** (4:10). I am thankful for the modifier, **“indeed”**—which is absent in the NIV but present in the NASB and in the KJV.

It may seem like a small thing, but I wonder if the modifier **“indeed”** holds the key to understanding the nature of the blessing that is requested by Jabez.

We rightly call a great many things ‘blessings’, but not all blessings are alike. Some things are blessings in name only; they gratify our wishes for the moment, but fail to satisfy our long-term expectations (Spurgeon).

Other things that we rightly term as ‘blessings’—our daily bread, our home, our family, good health; as wonderful as these things are, we must confess that they are all temporary. None of these things last forever.

But what is the prayer of Jabez? “**Oh that Thou would bless me *indeed!***” To be most blessed, to be blessed “**indeed**”, one must receive that which cannot wear out or expire.

I want to suggest to you this morning that to be blessed “**indeed**” is to *receive God and all His benefits.*

To be blessed “**indeed**” is to receive from God the Father His only begotten Son.

To be blessed “**indeed**” is to receive, from Christ, *His righteousness and the forgiveness of sins*; it is to receive, from Christ, *His Spirit* and the *transforming power* found therein (Phil. 3:8-10); it is to receive, from Christ, *citizenship in the heavenly city*, the new Jerusalem (Phil. 3:20, 21).

Did the blessings obtained by Jabez include earthly, temporal blessings?

I have no doubt that they did, but we must not reduce the blessings of Jabez to temporal blessings. Jabez did not look to God for superficial assistance, but rather, he asked to be blessed “**indeed**”.

Did Jabez’s prayer anticipate the coming of Christ and the particular benefits of a relationship with Him? No—which is why the prayer has some ambiguity.

Without knowing *precisely* what God would give, Jabez prays that God would grant him the very best of what He has to offer.

This is a wonderful example for us—to seek the very best from God.

C.S. Lewis, I think, has rightly identified a common shortcoming in our walk with Christ. *Our problem is not that we want too much, but rather, that we want too little.*

Lewis puts it this way: “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Jabez was not too easily pleased and neither should we. Pray with Jabez that we would be “**blessed indeed.**”

We move to the second petition of the prayer, where we hear Jabez pray “**enlarge my territory**”. What **territory** is Jabez speaking of? Is Jabez asking the Lord for a larger property? Is he asking for a larger slice of his inheritance? No; such a petition would be out of step with the rest of the prayer.

I think J.C. Philpot is on to something when he says that “every (Christian) soul has a border.” We begin with “a slip” of spiritual territory and, at first, we struggle to move beyond our doubts, our fears, and our guilt. But as the Lord enlarges our “spiritual territory” we find our faith becomes strengthened, while our doubts and fears gradually subside.

I also think the prayer “**enlarge my territory**” might be a prayer about *influence*. Not that Jabez was seeking to be famous, but rather it appears as though he is seeking to expand his influence as it relates to his worship of the Lord.

I certainly resonate with that. Whether I’m spending time at the Urban Renewal Centre or whether I am playing in the Nassau Street Hockey League, my hope is that my Christian influence is being felt.

And as a congregation, I think you’ll agree that we don’t simply want to impact one another with how we conduct ourselves, but we want to make a profound difference in our community. To this end, we should pray, “Lord, enlarge my territory.”

This takes us to the third petition, **“that Thy hand might be with me”**. Jabez understands that the expansion of his spiritual territory is not to be a solo effort. If progress is to be made against fear, guilt, and anxiety, if we are going to succeed in expanding our spiritual influence, then nothing short of supernatural assistance will do.

When Jesus said to His disciples, **“apart from Me you can do nothing”** (Jn. 15:5), He was stating in the plainest of terms the truth that spiritual progress would be impossible without Him.

Such a petition is evidence of Jabez’s humility. Jabez did not see himself as a spiritual giant, but rather, he saw himself as someone who desperately needed the hand of God to lead him every step of the way.

We see this unequivocally in his final petition, **“that Thou would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!”** Jabez recognizes that, without the Lord’s help, his inclination is to do that which dishonours God and to do that which causes harm to others.

Such a petition is not too different from the petition Jesus teaches us in The Lord’s Prayer: **“deliver us from evil”** (Mt. 6:13). You see then, Jabez was not being unduly harsh with himself in his estimation of his moral composition. In advance of Jesus’ words, Jabez had the wisdom and humility to pray for deliverance from evil.

Following these four petitions, the author of 1Chronicles tells us that **“God granted (Jabez) what he requested.”**

We want this—don't we? We want God to grant what we request. Yet, we must remember that God is not some supernatural genie; He is not some cosmic vending machine, dispensing products when the correct configuration of prayer change is inserted. No. For God to grant what we request, we must request what God commends.

This is the example of Jabez. The petitions of Jabez are in step with God's purposes.

Or, to put it another way, *what Jabez wanted for himself was precisely what God wanted for Jabez.*

I recently read a quote that said something to the effect, "One of the best prayers you can pray is the prayer that asks God what to pray for."

One of our primary aims in prayer is to bridge the gap between what we want and what God wants, until it comes to be that we want the same thing!

The prayer of Jabez, because it was answered, gives us some indication of what God wants.

God wants to *bless us indeed*—He wants to give us the very best of Himself.

God wants to *enlarge our spiritual territory*—He wants to grow our faith and to extend our influence.

God wants to *help and strengthen us* as we seek to live for Him.

Fourthly, God wants to *keep us from evil* and that which would bring harm to others.

Friends, we may begin praying for what we want most. This is normal and natural. But my hope is that as we linger in prayer we, like Jabez, will ask God for that which He is eager to give.

Yes, God is eager to give good gifts to His children.

The God we worship through Christ is eager to bless you indeed.

So when we pray...when we pray, let us pray as Jabez did. Amen.