

Frank Wallace

# The prayer of Jabez

*a prayer for increase*

*“And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.”*

1 Chr. 4:9-10

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## 1. The Condition of our own Moral State When we Pray

In First Samuel we learn about Hannah, a woman with a bitter spirit who was so anxious to have her prayers answered that she continued praying until God answered her. In First Chronicles we are told about a man who prayed, Jabez, a man who received an answer to his prayer. We do not read about him anywhere else in the Bible, just in this short reference in First Chronicles.

But it is an extremely full prayer, there are many interesting things in it and I believe it provides for us a good illustration of the prayers that we could ask, and also the kind of personal qualities that could well be in us so that God grants our requests.

It might seem from a casual reading of the prayer that Jabez was very self centred, he was not praying for other people, he was asking God specifically for things for himself. But in Christianity there are situations when you must be very self centred, not that you are only thinking of your own self aggrandisement, not that kind of self-centredness, but your own personal relationship with God.

We find this continually in Paul's epistles, particularly in writing to Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine ... for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). This is a situation where we need to be self centred in the sense of building up our souls in divine knowledge and communion with God and with our Lord Jesus Christ. We will never be any help for anyone unless we have personal links with the Lord.

So do not think for one moment that here Jabez was out of line when he kept on praying for himself and for things for himself. I think that if we prayed in this way and got the answer that he got we would be of some use for other people. Now let us look at the contents of this prayer.

"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren..."

The first thing it tells us of Jabez is that he was an honourable man. How important it is to lift up holy hands in the sanctuary, for God delights to answer the prayers of those who are faithful to Him. It was so pre-eminently in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not think any mortal man could say what He said, "I know that thou hearest Me always" (John 11:42). There never was a moment when the prayers of the Lord Jesus were not answered; those prayers were heard and answered. There was constant communion with His God and Father, for He was constantly aware of God's will and purpose. The Father heard and answered His prayers and we are in the present enjoyment of those requests, never let us forget it.

In John 17 He said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word" (v. 20). And after nearly two thousand years, here we are, believers who have listened to the testimony of the apostles, as we find it especially in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Epistles. We all have benefited from the teaching that they had from Christ. The Lord's prayers are answered today in us, those of us who have believed on Him through the word of those who went before. Is not that wonderful?

There are a few passages in Scripture to indicate to us what an honourable man is. In First Samuel we read that Saul's servant said of Samuel, "... he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass" (1 Sam. 9:6). This is one thing that I want to draw attention to, the reliability of the words of Samuel. This was what constituted him an honourable man in the sight of God and in the sight of the people of Israel. His words could be relied upon, his words came from God and through him God was able to communicate them to the people.

Now if we apply this to ourselves today, are our words reliable? Are we honourable in this sense? Do we say one thing to one person and the opposite to another

person just for partiality or for popularity or for any other reason? Can people rest upon what we say? Are our words reliable? Samuel was a man whose word could be relied upon, and this constituted him honourable. If he gave his word it was his bond. There were no side issues to what he said, no double meanings to what he said. He was perfectly straightforward, giving the mind of God as a true prophet should.

Then we find at the time of David's flight from Saul that Ahimelech the priest fed David and his followers, and the priest spoke up on David's behalf. He said to Saul, "And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house?" (1 Sam.

22:14). It seems to me that in David's faithfulness was a mark that showed that he was honourable. David was faithful to Saul. Saul could not point a finger at him as to any misdemeanour in his life, any failure in responsibility, for he had always done all that was required of him; it was Saul's enmity and envy that had chased him from the court. So David's friend spoke up for him and said, 'He is a faithful man'.

Yes, that is what it means to be honourable, to be faithful to God, to be faithful to the saints in relation to the truth, to be faithful to what you know.

Then we come to the New Testament, and we find there was a company of people in Berea, and Scripture says they were "more noble (or 'honourable') than those of Thessalonica" (Acts 17:11). When they heard the message from Paul they accepted it without question, they accepted it as the word of God, and knowing that it was the word of God they searched the Scriptures daily for confirmation, not for rejection. They realized that it was the word of God and they searched the Old Testament to prove that what they had heard was correct. What an honourable thing to do.

It seems to me that this is honourable in the sight of God, and is the great test of all ministry. It is not what brother so-and-so says, or what he writes (however important those things might be), it is a question of, 'What does the word of God say?' All ministry, whether past or present, should be tested on the basis of the word of God without any juggling with the Scriptures to prove one's point of view.

So the pure truth of God should have its weight upon our conscience and when it is accepted as such, that constitutes honourable persons.

You will agree that if we have these qualities our prayers are going to have some power. We are not going to pray for ourselves just for some simple aggrandisement or even some great aggrandisement. If we are honourable people we will pray in an honourable way and we will think about God's interests, we will think about the

interests of the saints. We will think about our own interests in an upright and straightforward way with no ulterior motive whatsoever, having a clear conscience, a transparent view of matters and as we shall find, with earnestness. Jabez was an honourable man; and honourable men and women are precious in the sight of heaven and are an asset in any company of believers. What tremendous power can flow from persons who are honourable.

## 2. The Necessity of Knowing our God When we Pray

“And Jabez called on the God of Israel...”

This might seem a simple statement, but what a tremendous amount is involved in this. I do not know when Jabez lived, it may have been some time in the days of Joshua. And if that is so, it means that Jabez was in full possession of the history of his nation from the time that God went into Egypt and took the people out, carried them through the desert, brought them over the Jordan and planted them in the land flowing with milk and honey.

Jabez prayed to a God who was well known, a God who had done the most wonderful things for His people, taking them out of the hands of a powerful enemy in Egypt, Pharaoh with all his might, providing for them day by day for forty years in the wilderness — the manna never ceasing, food and water supplied for them, their shoes and clothing never wearing, their enemies defeated. The care of God was displayed at every step of the way, and then He took them over the Jordan and put them into the land flowing with milk and honey. What a God He proved to be!

A man who possessed this knowledge in his soul, in his heart, rather than in his head, knowing not so much a collection of historical facts, great though they were; but being a man who had the knowledge of God in his soul, he was going to pray with tremendous energy. It was a known God that he called upon, a God who was possessed with illimitable power, with tremendous wisdom, grace, kindness and care; that was the kind of God that Jabez called upon.

I am sure that God heard that prayer sympathetically. ‘Here is one person’, God said, ‘who knows Me, who is calling upon Me, who knows that I can do what he is asking and so he is asking Me in this simple way’. He called upon the God of Israel.

My dear Christian friends, surely this is the attitude for us when we pray. How often have we prayed for certain things and lurking at the back of our minds is the

thought, 'It will never be answered. It is too difficult'? The doubt is in our minds instead of faith. We doubt the ability of God to do the thing that we are asking. It really is an insult to God. If we pray to God we should pray to a known God competent to do far exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

If God is God these matters are very, very small for Him to accomplish. Why, He has done the most wonderful things — creation is the evidence of His extreme wisdom, power, strength, measurement, balance and all the things we like to think of. Creation stands as a standing witness to the greatness and majesty of God. The whole history of the Bible is one succeeding revelation of the greatness of God upon another, and the way He answers prayers.

Yet we bow our knees with simple matters that worry us and we never seem to get clear of the worry. And we pray to the God who can do these wonderful things thinking, 'No, He cannot do such things for me, it is too complicated, too difficult'! Is it not a shame? We all feel like this at times, that we rise up from our knees and we still carry our cares with us. The Bible tells us to, "Cast all your care upon Him; for He careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Think of the mighty God and all His care and His concern for us that we might make progress in the knowledge of His love and the knowledge of His things. This is the kind of God that Jabez called upon, the God of Israel.

All through the Old Testament we find men and women calling upon God. Look at Hannah. She could not do anything about the matter, it was beyond her naturally, but God could deal with it and He did (1 Sam. 1). Jehoshaphat had a small pitiable army in Jerusalem with a huge army surrounding the city, what was he going to do? He went into the presence of God and cried aloud to the God who was able to do things that he could not do (2 Chr. 20), and God delivered the nation.

Hezekiah was in the same position (2 Chr. 32). And he bowed before the God "who sitteth between the cherubim, the Same" (2 Ki. 19:15), that is, the Almighty, the Unchanging One; and what was that army all around Israel compared to the God of Israel? Why in one night it vanished away under the power of the destroying angel. Again I say to you, as I say to myself, how pitiful our faith. The Lord chided the disciples again and again, "Oh ye of little faith" (Matt. 6:30;8:26;14:31;16:8).

But Jabez was not this kind of man. He called on the God of Israel as a known God, a God who could do things, who could change things, a God who could answer his prayer.

### 3. Jabez's Prayer: (a) The Earnestness of the Prayer

"... saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed..."

I want to refer to this little word 'Oh'. It speaks volumes to my soul. We find it often in Scripture, and it seems to me to indicate the zeal, the energy and the earnestness that marked this man when he prayed. It was not a callous, calculated prayer; it was not something that he read from a prayer book or had written down. It came straight out from his heart, right out from his inmost being. 'Oh,' he said, 'that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!'

It is not so apparent in the Authorised Version, but read Mr. Darby's version of the story of the two men who went up to Jerusalem to pray (Luke 18:9-14). First we have the Pharisee who stood in a very cold and aloof manner saying, "God..." .

What a way for the creature to address God! "God, I thank Thee that I am not as the rest of men", and so he went on to extol his own virtues. And then we find the sinner, "O God, have compassion on me, the sinner". There was an outpouring of the heart in tremendous earnestness before God. This man knew his need and he expressed it in such a way that indicated how real his prayer was, his earnest desire to find forgiveness, to find peace with God. We find this in many instances in Scripture, the earnestness of faith that cries aloud to God for help in certain situations.

Mr Darby has another peculiar expression in James 5:17 when he refers to Elijah praying. The Authorised version says, "he prayed earnestly", but Mr Darby renders it, "he prayed with prayer". This seems to me to add emphasis to Elijah's prayer in relation to his call for rain after the long period of drought. "He prayed with prayer", or, if you like, "he prayed earnestly". There again we see this kind of prayer. It was not a cold, calculated, technical kind of prayer, the right things said, the right words used, the right technical expressions, but as cold as ice and as dry as a bone. No, that was not the kind of a prayer that Elijah had, it was not the kind of prayer that Jabez had. You could imagine Elijah pouring out his soul to God, crying earnestly that He would send rain to end this terrible drought that was affecting everyone.

So this is the kind of prayer that Jabez prayed. Do we pray like this? Do we cry aloud to God with earnestness, or do we feel that if we have spent a few moments on our knees we have appeased our conscience, we have done what is right? Let us have

this earnestness, this real desire to pray earnestly in relation to the things we desire.

We have a man mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians, Epaphras, and he laboured earnestly for these Christians in prayer (Col. 4:12). Here was a man who spent time in prayer in relation to the need of the believers. This is a very wonderful thing when a brother or a sister can commit themselves to a service of this kind. Oh, how important! Some brothers are gifted to preach the gospel, some are gifted to expound the word of God, others are gifted in other ways in relation to the Christian company, but what a service to render to the saints, to labour earnestly for them in prayer.

You can think of Epaphras naming all the Colossian believers one by one and remembering the new convert Onesimus, the runaway slave who had been converted through Paul while in prison — but mentioning each one and knowing each one intimately, praying for the things that they required, praying for help for them in every way, perhaps material, perhaps physical, but above all, spiritual, that they might grow in the knowledge of God. What a service!

Nobody pats on the back those who labour earnestly in prayer for the spiritual well-being of the saints. They are not generally seen publicly, their knees are worn with bending down before God, their tears are not seen and their groans are not heard. I am sure that many elderly saints render this service for the saints of God, and what a reward will be theirs when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

My dear friend, what examples for us. I believe this word 'Oh' that Jabez uttered indicated the earnestness that was in his heart in relation to his personal need.

Then lastly, and the greatest of all, is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself when we see Him in the garden of Gethsemane. In Luke's gospel it says, " He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). What earnestness! What agony of spirit! Oh, what it meant to Him personally as He prayed in that way. In the gospel by Matthew we have this same expression, " O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt" (26:3).

This is the supreme example for us of earnestness in relation to prayer, and of course it goes without saying the Lord anticipated the cross that was before Him. Oh, the need for prayer in such a situation! My dear friends, if this was the way the Lord of glory took, if this was the way the Master prayed, oh how we too should be marked by this earnest spirit. It may be that those who observe the prayers in heaven that ascend from the saints, might often say to themselves, 'What callous

prayers, what cold prayers. Do they really come from their hearts? Do they really deserve to be answered? Is there any indication that there is real earnest desire on their part when they pray in this way? What a small amount of time they spend in prayer!’ Perhaps this is one reason why so few of our prayers are answered.

There was no question at all of an answer coming to Jabez, he was so sincere, so earnest — it was a pleasure for God to answer a prayer of this kind. The man was real, earnest, he was asking for what he wanted and what he wanted was worthwhile God giving to him. God desires and delights to bless such people.

I wonder how much we really desire blessing and for what reason we desire it. We find a man like Jacob when he was alone with God and wrestling with the angel, and when the angel said it was time to go Jacob said, ‘No, I will not let you go until you bless me. I want this blessing’ (Gen. 32:26). He craved the blessing and he got it. His name was changed to indicate that he was a prince with God; and although he limped the rest of his life, the power of nature was broken in Jacob, and he carried with him that dignified name.

And Jabez was here praying to this God, “ the God of Israel” , the God who had looked after Jacob, the God who had changed his name and made him a ‘prince with God’. This was the God to whom Jabez prayed, and this was the kind of blessing he desired. In the same way that Jacob strove mightily with the angel until he acquired the blessing, so Jabez prayed earnestly that he too might be blessed. And we know the kind of blessing he wanted, he wanted to be enlarged (see the next chapter).

#### 4. Jabez’s Prayer: (b) The Desire to Possess and Enjoy our Possessions

“... and enlarge my coast...”

There is a very interesting story in the book of Joshua when Caleb’ s nephew Othniel went to war and captured a city and acquired a bride, Achsah. She asked her father for a blessing, and she asked it in no uncertain terms. She said, ‘You have given me the south land, oh, give me a blessing, give me the upper springs and the nether springs. What good is land if we have not water? We need the water for the land, and for refreshment’ (Josh. 15:16-19); and so she asked him and she got what she asked. There is a great deal of encouragement in this.

In the book of Joshua we find the nation moving into the land in power. God was with them, their enemies were overcome. They did not possess all the land because of their failure, but it was a royal day in their history, a day of power and glory. Then the scene changed, and we come to the book of Judges, a decadent day, a weak day, a time of failure and departure. But right at the start of that book we find the wonderful story of Achsah and Othniel again (1:11-15).

It seems to me that the Spirit of God has deliberately inspired this at the beginning of this book of failure to indicate that there will always be blessing for those who desire it, and for those who are prepared to pay the price that is involved in acquiring it. Just as Othniel fought and overcame the city and Achsah desired a blessing, even in weak and failing days if enemies are to be overcome and we desire the blessing it is there for the taking. I wonder if we are anxious to acquire blessing.

Every Christian soul should desire to expand in the knowledge of God's will, to know more of it, to be blessed indeed and to walk in the enjoyment of that blessing. Objectively we have every blessing that is obtainable in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

There are people who make a great claim today about having a 'second blessing'. Well, you can say humbly to them they are making progress if they have had a second blessing, because God has blessed us with every blessing. So every believer in Christ can claim that they have all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. We have not just one or two, but every blessing that is obtainable in Christ Jesus.

Whether they or we have it experimentally, or whether they or we have the enjoyment of it, is another matter! But God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, that is what He has done sovereignly. But then there are other blessings which we acquire through exercise, through faithfulness, through applying ourselves to the things of God when these things that are ours in possession are really enjoyed, really known and really acted upon.

This is where the prayer of Jabez comes in, that not only do we know that these things are available for us, but we acquire them and we hold on to them and we enjoy them. "Oh, that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" I would that that was our prayer continually all the time, desiring to receive blessing from God. Why? Just for our own personal aggrandisement? No, firstly for our encouragement and strengthening so that we can then be of help to others, because if we have blessing in our souls it will be bound to flow out to others.

See for example the well of water that springs up unto eternal life and the well of water that flows out in blessing to others (John 4 and 7). This is always the way. The love and the life that came down from God and met us in our need flows out towards man in blessing. That is the kind of blessing that we desire in the power of the Spirit, to consequently be made available for others.

Jabez desired the enlargement of his coast, his territory. Again, this is connected with the book of Joshua — because that was the time of taking possession, that was the time of enlargement for the people of God. It was one thing to enter into the land, it was another thing to possess it. God told Joshua to take courage (1:6,7,9) and to go in and to possess the land, and that “every place that the sole of your feet tread upon, that have I given unto you” (1:3). It was their land, God had given it to them, but enemies had to be overcome and destroyed, and then the land would be theirs to enjoy for themselves. But there was something behind that, they were to tithe, and there was to be a return for God. The first fruits were to be offered to God in response to Him.

So you see in the possession of the land God was not only thinking of the blessing of Israel, although that was true. He was also thinking of a return from them for Himself, a return that indicated they had really possessed the land and were glad. So we find in Deuteronomy 26 the Israelite comes with his basket of first fruits and he is a worshipper. He bows before God with the evidence in his basket that he had possessed, had tilled and had obtained the fruits of the land — and he acknowledged that God was the Giver of it all and he returned it to Him in response.

This is what Jabez was asking for, ‘Enlarge my coasts, increase my dominions, fill me with Thy blessing’. And I am perfectly sure after that was acquired then there was a response to God.

This matter of possession is a very real thing. Caleb was given a certain piece of the land and God said he would possess it because he had wholly followed Him (Num. 14:24). He was a man who never deviated, never stopped for one moment in his faith, and kept going on for God. And think what it meant to that devoted man, a man who had the faith, the strength and the courage to enter into the land and to possess it — and yet he had to turn away from the Promised Land and for forty years march through the wilderness with a faithless generation until they were all destroyed and a new generation grew up who were to enter into the land with him. Think of the sorrow in the heart of that dear man, but he never deviated, he kept going on and then came the time when he said, “I am as strong this day as I was [forty years ago]” (Josh. 14:11).

What a test for us as we grow older. If it is service that dominates our lives there will come a time when we will be unable to serve because of increasing age

— and we will be disappointed because we cannot do the thing that is nearest to our hearts. But if God is the One who fills our hearts whether we are serving or not, He is the One who will support us and sustain us. So it was with Caleb. He marched through the wilderness, he marched with the truth of God in his soul and the conscious sense that he was supported by Him. And when the moment came to take possession he said, 'I am just as able to do it today as I was forty years ago'.

What a man of faith! But he took possession in his courage, in his faith, he was enlarged because he wholly followed the Lord.

Moses in that record of blessing in Deuteronomy 33 says of Naphtali,

“ Possess the west and the south” (v. 23). Naphtali’s name means ‘exercise’ or ‘struggling’ — he was a man who was always in the forefront of Israel’s battles, a man who was noted for his courage and strength, and the tribe was always seen in this way. Here was a man who was going to take possession of the territory that belonged to him, and he was going to do it on the basis of exercise. You hear that word ‘exercise’ over and over again in our meetings. In the New Testament this word ‘exercise’ is derived from a Greek word from which we get our English word ‘gymnasium’ or ‘gymnast’, and that indicates the physical kind of exercise that is involved in those spheres. So a person who is exercised according to New Testament language is not one who is only using his limbs or his body in movement. He is exercising his affections, he is exercising his mind, he is exercising his soul and his conscience, and they are all in action to acquire the things of God and to maintain them as He wants them to be maintained.

Naphtali was such a person, a struggler, an exercised person, a person who was concerned about possessing. Well, that was Jabez’s desire, to possess, to be enlarged, to be increased.

In Acts 9 there is one verse which is very, very full, “ the assemblies ... had peace, being edified and walking in the fear of the Lord, and were increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (v. 31). They increased, they did not decrease. We read on three occasions in the Acts of the Apostles that the word of God increased (6:7;12:24;19:20).

Where there are companies of believers in which the word of God is followed and obeyed there will be increase. Where the word of God has its way individually and collectively then there is bound to follow increase. So that verse is often a challenge to me, why is there not increase? Why should it be decrease? The fault cannot be

on God's side (that would be blasphemy), the fault is not on the truths that we have learnt because these truths have been well hammered out on the anvil of concern and inquiry. The truths are correct, we have no doubt at all about that.

Well, then, the difficulty must be on our side. That must be the reason why the increase is being held back. The fear of the Lord perhaps is not being practised, and the comfort or exercise of the Holy Spirit is not taking place through us because of our folly, and so we have to examine ourselves about this matter of spiritual increase, both individually and collectively. This need not necessarily be numerically (although we would like to see that), that is not always a sign that there is increase according to the mind of the Lord. But it would be a healthy sign if we did see an increase in souls being saved and being added to our companies as directed by the Lord according to the truth.

Let us pray earnestly like Jabez, that we might be increased individually and that our companies might be increased spiritually. And of course, only as we are increased individually will we be increased collectively. I am sure that is being done, but let us stimulate it a little further with a more earnest desire and prayer for increase spiritually, not to acquiesce in the weak conditions, not to acquiesce in the declension, but to desire earnestly that there might be increase according to God.

## 5. Jabez's Prayer: (c) The Desire for God to be with him

"... and that Thine hand might be with me..."

There are many references to the hand of God in Scripture. We read for instance in the book of Ezra of "the good hand of his God upon him" (7:9) — keeping at bay the enemies, giving direction to the Lord's servants, helping, controlling and guiding them. That seems to me to indicate that things were never allowed to get out of control. The hand of God was there in all its power and directing influence.

We find in Isaiah that wonderful portion where God speaks of upholding Israel by "the right hand of His righteousness" (41:10). That tremendous hand of power is available for His people at all times, and we have all experienced that in one way or another.

We could not do better than quote John 10:28-29, where we have the hand of the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the hand of the Father. The believer is safe there, nothing can pluck him from the hand of the Good Shepherd or from the hand of the Father. Almighty and illimitable power is there, and the sheep are perfectly safe in that double security.

Then we think of that wonderful statement in Revelation 1 when John sees a vision of the Lord in His judicial character amongst the saints. It terrifies him when he sees the Lord in this way. He is not this time leaning in the bosom of the Son as we find in John's gospel (13:23). The apostle is in the presence of the Lord as the One who walks in the midst of the assemblies and with His scrutinising gaze He can detect and point out what is wrong and encourage what is good. When he sees this vision of the Lord he is terrified and he falls as one dead, but the Lord lays His right hand upon him and says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:17-18).

Everything is in His hands. He will deal with the evil at the right time. It is impossible that it can overcome or succeed, He will deal with it. What comfort to John to find that hand that he knew so well placed upon him and raising him up. And how often that hand encourages us, too, in moments of weakness and failure and depression (and we all feel these things at one time or another). The Lord comes in His own inimitable way by which He can encourage our hearts and raise up our spirits and give us fresh courage to go on — this is seen in the right hand of power and encouragement.

## 6. Jabez's Prayer: (d) The Desire to be kept from evil

"... and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"

We find many men in Scripture who were grieved about evil. Nehemiah was tremendously upset when he found that a priest was using a compartment in the temple for the benefit of his relative — and this relative was an ungodly person who had no right to be there. This grieved Nehemiah, that after all God had done in the way of blessing this unfaithfulness should be among the people (Neh. 13:4-9). And it was not long before he took steps to eradicate the evil.

The same with Ezra, after all that God had done for His people in bringing them out of Babylon, some came to him with the news, 'Why, the very priests, the persons who should have known better, have made unlawful marriages!' And so Ezra bowed down and cried and wept; this sin grieved him to his heart (Ezra 9:1-4). This is a very real experience. Jabez did not want to be grieved because of sin.

Now we come to Psalm 51 and we find David grieved not because of somebody else's sin, but because of his own. I think this is where the test comes. How easy it is to point the finger at somebody else and be grieved because they have said or done something wrong, and to forget about our own failures. Are we grieved when

we sin, when we fail? It is an indication of a tender conscience, a good conscience before God, a conscience enlightened by the truth that the moment there is any deviation from the will of God it causes grief and concern.

Jabez said as it were, “ I do not want to be grieved by sin. Keep me, O Lord, from sin. Enable me to avoid sin” . And praise God for that preserving power. It is a sad thing when people yield to evil, and thus pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10). The Lord shall protect us from that, when we walk with Him.

## 7. God’s Answer to the Prayer of Jabez

“And God granted him that which he requested”.

We sometimes hear about the problem of unanswered prayer. There are several of such prayers in Scripture, but we should realize that if God answers ‘No’, He has given an answer all the same. And He does so in His infinite wisdom, and He has the right to do so. Moreover, He does not leave us without help then, as is clearly seen in the case of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. The infinite resources of God’s grace and mercy ever remain at our disposal, although His answer may be ‘No’. God did give a clear answer to Paul, but He also offered him the way of escape: “ And He said to me, ‘ My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9 NKJV). And Paul gladly accepted God’ s answer, for He wanted to experience the wonderful power of Christ — the power of His resurrection — in his life.

Jabez’ prayer that still has so much to say to us has been answered in a positive way. For verse 10 concludes, “ And God granted him that which he requested” . God hears our prayers, let us be convinced of that, especially in relation to spiritual blessing and growth in grace. That is the happy message that resounds in these final words and encourages us to follow Jabez’ example.

May the Lord help us then to follow this kind of prayer, to have the same sentiments, the same desires, the same motives, that we too might get our requests granted — and especially in relation to blessing and in relation to being kept free from the things that grieve God, grieve us and grieve the Holy Spirit. May it be so for His name’ s sake.

