

The Prayer of Jabez

by: Hugo Bouter

1 Chronicles 4:9-10

His origins

Is Jabez just an otherwise unknown person who occurs for some obscure reason in the records of the Chronicles? It would be wrong to think so, for the Spirit of God devotes two important verses to this man-verses which have not lost their value and which make the list of names that we find here very interesting reading material indeed. Who was this Jabez? He seems to be a descendant of the Kenites who were later incorporated within the tribe of Judah (Judg. 1:16, 4:11; 1 Sam. 15:6; 1 Chron. 2:55). Initially, he did not belong to the people of God. To use Paul's words in Ephesians 2:12, he was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger from the covenants of promise. Yet, through God's goodness, he received a place within that nation, namely within the tribe of Judah, which means 'Praise'.

In these verses in 1 Chronicles 4 we find Jabez' prayer in which he praised his new-found God. He called on the God of Israel, it says here. This confirms the thought that as a stranger he joined the nation of God and took refuge with the God of Israel-just as Rahab and Ruth did in former times. He realized that he would be safe under the protection of this God, the living and true God, and he committed himself fully to Him. His prayer testifies to his very great faith.

His name

The story of Jabez begins with pain and sorrow. The word 'pain' is used here twice. His mother had given him the name Jabez (= causing pain), because she had given birth to him in pain (v. 9b). Jabez prayed that no harm or evil might pain or grieve him (v. 10b). Although a son born in pain, he was prominent among his brothers. He was more honourable than his brothers (v. 9a). Therefore, Jabez reminds us of Benjamin who was called 'Son of My Sorrow' by Rachel, but 'Son of the Right Hand' by Jacob (Gen. 35:18). Suffering and sorrow are the consequences of man's sin ('in pain you shall bring forth children', Gen. 3:16).

But these sufferings are followed by glory: the glory of God which is to be revealed in all the earth, the glory

that is now real to faith at God's right hand. This held true for Benjamin, as well as for Jabez. But most of all it is applicable to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to us as Christians too. The sufferings of the cross were followed by Christ's exaltation to God's right hand in heaven. As believers we are called to partake of Christ's sufferings, since the Spirit of glory rests upon us and we know that one day we will be glorified with Him (1 Pet. 4:13,14).

His prayer

Let us now look in some detail at Jabez' prayer. It comprises five parts.

(1) The first part is: 'Oh, that Thou wouldest bless me indeed'. Jabez recognized that the God of Israel, upon Whom he called, was the Source of all blessing. Just as James tells us: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights' (Jas. 1:17). Jabez, conscious of this, had great faith. And so he prayed for abundant blessing. No doubt, his faith was not confounded. The same applies to us. Our Lord, in His grace, grants us life, and He grants it more abundantly (John 10:10). As Christians we know that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

(2) This brings us to the second part. Jabez prayed also for enlargement of his territory. Christ became poor, that we might become rich. In Him, the Man at God's right hand, we have a heavenly inheritance. We possess a rich domain of spiritual and eternal blessings in the heavenly places, a better home than the land of Canaan. In that sense, all believers are 'landowners', who may hope for enlargement of their territory. A beautiful example of this in the Old Testament is found in Joshua who received the promise: 'Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, have I given unto you' (Josh. 1:3). Step by step we should conquer the Promised Land and claim the inheritance that has been given to us in Christ. When He gives us the victory over our enemies we can say with Isaac: 'For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land' (Gen. 26:22). So Jabez desired to enlarge his territory in the land of Canaan. A similar desire was

found in Achsah, Caleb's daughter. She asked for a field, and also for springs of water (Josh. 15:18,19; Judg. 1:14,15). And she was given what she had asked for. The same is recorded here of Jabez: 'And God granted him that which he requested'. God is willing to bless us; that is His desire because, in Christ, He looks upon us with favour.

(3) In the third place, Jabez prayed that God's hand would be with him. He did not lean on his own strength and understanding, but relied on God's help and guidance. He wanted to be led by God's hand, since he had put-so to speak-his own hand into God's hand. He was aware of the miracles of that mighty hand. With 'a high hand', Israel had been delivered out of Egypt and brought into the land of Canaan (Ex. 6:1; 14:8). Could the arm of the Lord ever be shortened? (Num. 11:23). 'The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him' (Ezra 8:22). Have we put our hand in God's hand? Do we realize that He is for us and that therefore all hostile powers must retreat? (Rom. 8:31).

(4) 'And that Thou wouldest keep me from evil', is the fourth part of Jabez' prayer. This can be understood in two ways: evil in the sense of sin, or something that is harmful to us, e.g. a disaster. We will not always be kept from harm. To the Israelites, however, earthly prosperity was clear evidence of God's favour. When an Israelite was kept from harm, it was a sign that

God's hand was with him. For us as Christians things are different because our blessings are on another level. They have a more specific spiritual and heavenly character. However, as disciples of Christ we can also say this prayer and ask to be kept from evil, and to be delivered from the evil one (cf. Matt. 6:13). If it concerns evil in the sense of sinful acts or deeds we also have our own responsibility to flee from evil (cf. Job 1:1).

(5) These remarks can also be applied to the fifth part of the prayer: 'that it may not grieve me!' (KJV), 'that it may not pain me' (NASB). It is sad when people yield to evil, and thus pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10). The Lord wants to protect us from that, when we walk with Him. However, we do live in a creation that is subjected to futility, a valley of tears and sorrows, so that, sooner or later, suffering and sorrow will come our way. But when we commit ourselves to Him, the harm will not 'pain' us anymore.

Jabez' prayer, that has so much to say to us today, was answered. Verse 10 concludes, 'And God granted him that which he requested'. God hears our prayers. Let us be convinced of that. It is the happy message that resounds in these final words and encourages us to follow Jabez' example!

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