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The Prayer of Jabez

1 Chronicles 4:9-10

His origins

Is Jabez just an otherwise unknown person who occurs for some unknown 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 have been 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 two verses in 1 Chronicles 4 we find the prayer of Jabez, in which he praised his new-found God. He called on the God of Israel, it says here. This confirms the thought that he joined the people of God as a stranger; he 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 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 ^[1]_[SEP]Jabez (that is, '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 honorable 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 the sufferings of mankind are followed by glory: the glory of God that 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 his prayer. It comprises five parts.

- (1) The first part is: 'Oh, that You would 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 comes down from the Father of lights' (Jas. 1:17). Jabez, conscious of God's grace, 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 have been 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 the *enlargement* of his territory. Christ became poor, that we might become rich. In Him, the Man at God's right hand, we have received a heavenly inheritance. We possess a rich domain of spiritual 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 Scripture 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 heavenly 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 has 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 the heart of 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: 'So God granted him what he requested'. God is willing to bless us, it 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 he 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 You would keep me from evil', is the fourth part of his 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 in this world. But to the Israelites, earthly prosperity was clear evidence of God's favor. When an Israelite was kept from harm, it proved 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 the Lord Jesus 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, we also have a 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), or '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, by walking 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.

This prayer, that has so much to say to us today, was answered. Verse 10 concludes, 'So God granted him what 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 the example of Jabez!

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