

Hugo Bouter

The Prayer of Jabez

Jabez And His Prayer To The God Of Israel

“And Jabez called on the God of Israel”.

1 Chronicles 4:10 NKJV

His Origins

Is Jabez just an otherwise unknown person who appears 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: 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. These verses, along with the rest of Scripture, have not lost their value. In fact, they 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 Chr. 2:55). Initially, Jabez did not belong to the people of God. To use Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:12, Jabez 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.”

We find the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4, in which he praised his newfound God. Jabez called on the God of Israel. This confirms the thought that as a stranger he joined the people of God and took refuge with the God of Israel – just like Rahab and Ruth had done in former times (Josh. 6; Ruth 4). He realized that he would be safe under the protection of this God – the living and true God. Therefore he committed himself fully to Him. His prayer testifies to his very great faith.

His Name

The recorded story of Jabez begins with pain and sorrow. The word “pain” is used twice in these verses. His mother had given him the name Jabez, meaning “causing pain,” because she had given birth to him in pain (v. 9). Much later, Jabez prayed that no harm or evil might pain or grieve him (v. 10).

Although a son born in pain, he was prominent among his brothers. He was “more honorable than his brothers” (v. 9). Therefore Jabez reminds us of Jacob’s youngest son, called Benoni, meaning “son of my sorrow” by Rachel, but named Benjamin, or “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 and the glory at God’s right hand that is now real to faith. This held true for Benjamin as well as for Jabez. Most of all it is applicable to our Lord Jesus Christ and to us as Christians. 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 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 (1 Chr. 4:10). It comprises five parts:

1. “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). Conscious of this, Jabez had great faith and 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 gives 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. “Enlarge my territory.”

Christ became poor that we might “become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). In Him, the Man at God’s right hand, we have received a heavenly inheritance. We possess a rich domain of spiritual, 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 will tread upon I have given you” (Josh. 1:3). Step by step we should conquer our spiritual 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: “Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land” (Gen. 26:22).

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 springs of water (Josh. 15:18-19; Jud. 1:14-15). Achsah was given what she had requested. The same is recorded about Jabez: “So God granted him what he requested” (1 Chr. 4:10). God is willing to bless us; that is His desire because in Christ He looks upon us with favor.

3. “That Your hand would be with me.”

Jabez 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 hand into God’s hand.

Jabez was aware of the miracles of God’s mighty hand. With “a high hand,” Israel had been delivered out of Egypt and brought into the land of Canaan (Num. 33:3; Ex. 14:8 KJV). Could the arm of the LORD ever be shortened (Num. 11:23)? “The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him” (Ezra 8:22 NKJV). Have we put our hand in God’s hand? Do we realize that He is for us and therefore all hostile powers must retreat (Rom. 8:31)?

4. “And that You would keep me from evil.”

This can be understood in two ways:

- Evil in the sense of sin, or
- Something that is otherwise harmful to us, like a disaster or disease.

We will not always be kept from harm. To the Israelites, however, earthly prosperity was clear evidence of God’s favor. 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. Yet, as disciples of Christ we can also ask to be kept from evil and to be delivered from the evil one (consider 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 (see Job 1:1).

5. "That I may not cause pain."

This is also translated: "... that it may not grieve me" (KJV) and, "... that it may not pain me" (NASB 95). It is sad when people yield to evil and thus pierce "themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10 NKJV). The Lord will protect us from this danger when we walk with Him. However, we live in a creation which is subject to futility, a valley of tears and sorrows. Sooner or later, suffering and sorrow will come our way. But, when we commit ourselves to Him, the harm will not pain us anymore.

God's answer

Jabez' prayer, which has so much to say to us today, was answered positively. First Chronicles 4:10 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 Jabez' example!
