

The Prayer Of Jabez

Introduction. Who was Jabez? Probably no one here could tell me anything about him. Yet he is mentioned in the scriptures and identified as a man "more honorable than his brethren." We come across Jabez for the only time in the Bible in the middle of a sea of names in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9. He is hiding in the least-read section of one of the least-read books of the Bible, much like an oasis in the desert.

Jabez does not stand astride the Old Testament like a Moses or a David or light up the book of Acts like those early Christians who turned the world upside down. But one thing is sure: The little difference in his life made all the difference. He is a man remembered not for what he did, but for what he prayed -- and what happened next.

Why was Jabez honorable (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)? Something about this man made the historian pause in the middle of 500 names and interject the wonderful statements about Jabez. Abraham Lincoln said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day." The prayer of Jabez is a sufficient revelation of the character of this man.

I. **"Bless Me Indeed"**

- A. Are we willing to ask for blessings for others but not for ourselves?
 - 1. Perhaps we are shocked at the bold and earnest request of Jabez, but he was called "honorable" for his boldness.
 - 2. The man who rushes into life may discover no need for prayer, only intending to do the best he can under the various circumstances that may arise. But he who looks thoughtfully over the duties and cares of life, will know the importance of prayer.
- B. God wants us to ask Him for blessings.
 - 1. It is the nature of God to bless (James 1:17; Matthew 5:44-45). When we seek God's blessings as the ultimate value in life, instead of possessions or wealth, we are giving ourselves over fully to the will of God (Luke 12:15; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:13). All other needs are secondary.
 - 2. Those who seek God's blessings are in good company:
 - a) Jacob asked for blessings (Genesis 32:24-26, 29).
 - b) Solomon asked for blessings (1 Kings 3:5-14).
- C. By our requests, we acknowledge and recognize that all blessings come from God (Matthew 6:8-11; Philippians 4:19).
 - 1. We have all physical blessings provided to us by our heavenly Father (Luke 12:24; John 6:31; Acts 14:17).

2. We have all spiritual blessings provided by the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus His Son (Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 3:9).
3. But it may be that we do not have these blessings because we have failed to ask for blessings (James 4:2; Matthew 7:7-11). God's bounty is limited only by us, not by His willingness to give.

II. **"Enlarge My Coast"**

- A. Too often we want the Lord to bless us, but we do not want the extra influence, responsibilities, and opportunities that go with the blessings.
 1. Jabez's request was not selfish; he was asking for more work and more responsibility. He looked at his present circumstances and concluded, "Surely I was born for more than this."
 2. An example might be someone praying for a new car, but when you get it are you willing to use it to carry the gospel to a friend across town? Or what about the Christian who claimed that if the Lord blessed him with 100 cows, he would give 10 to the Lord? He has 10 cows now, how about giving one to the Lord?
- B. Most of us think our lives are too full already, but Jabez prayed that his might be added to. Our abilities and opportunities directly relate to the responsibility we share. Whatever your talents, education, or vocation might be, your calling is to do God's work here on this earth. Here is what we need:
 1. We need to "enlarge our coast" in our giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).
 2. We need to "enlarge our coast" in our benevolence (Galatians 6:10).
 3. We need to "enlarge our coast" in our teaching (Acts 8:4)
 4. We need to "enlarge our coast" in our work in the church (Ephesians 4:16)
 5. We need to "enlarge our coast" in righteous living (Philippians 1:9-11; Titus 2:11-12; 1 John 2:3-6).
 6. Saul had great zeal in persecuting the church.
 - a) He sought to "enlarge his coast" in wickedness (Acts 9:1-2).
 - b) Is it any wonder that when he became a Christian, he sought to "enlarge his coast" by taking the gospel to Asia Minor, Cyprus, Greece, and Rome?
 - c) When you start asking in earnest for more influence and responsibility with which to glorify God, He will bring opportunities and people into your path.

III. **"Be With Me"**

- A. We should not only pray for blessings and responsibilities, but for the presence of God to abide constantly with us (John 15:4-7). The devout will always want God to be a partner in their business.

- B. Jabez recognized he could not succeed without the Lord -- he could not do it alone. Do we realize that we are in the same state?
 - 1. We are told to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Peter 5:6-7).
 - 2. We can be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 3:16).
 - 3. We are to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might (Ephesians 6:10-11).
- C. The "hand of the Lord" is a term for God's power and presence in the lives of His children (Joshua 4:24; Isaiah 59:1). In Acts, the phenomenal success of the early church was attributed to the "hand of the Lord" being with them (Acts 11:21).
- D. With this prayer, we need to realize that with God, we can do things that we never thought possible (Philippians 4:13). God's eyes run to and fro to show Himself strong toward those whose hearts are completely His (2 Chronicles 16:9).

IV. **"Keep Me From Evil"**

- A. Jabez had three positive requests and one negative request. Do not forget the Lord when you get all you ask for -- that is when you need Him the most.
 - 1. The children of Israel would forget God (Deuteronomy 31:19-22; 32:15).
 - 2. Gehazi made the right decision to refuse remuneration from Naaman, but he turned back and did evil (2 Kings 5:15-16, 20-27).
 - 3. Agur wanted neither riches nor poverty, so that he might not turn away from God (Proverbs 30:7-9).
- B. We were redeemed and commissioned for the front lines. That is why praying to be kept from evil is such a vital part of trying to live as a Christian. With all the legions of heaven at His disposal, even Jesus prayed for deliverance (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).
- C. In the same way that God wants you to ask Him for more blessings, more territory, and more presence, He longs to hear you plead for safekeeping from evil (Matthew 6:13). Someone has rightfully said, "Your danger is not in being on the edge of a precipice, but in being careless there."
- D. God does not tempt us with evil (James 1:12-13).
 - 1. We can overcome temptation because God will protect us from being tempted beyond what we can endure (1 Corinthians 10:13).
 - 2. Noah and Lot are fine examples of being delivered from evil (2 Peter 2:4-8). The Lord will deliver us from evil as well (2 Peter 2:9).
 - 3. In the words, "that it may not grieve me," which might be more literally rendered, "that I may have no more sorrow," there is an allu-

sion to the meaning of his name, Jabez, which signified "grief." The significance of this statement is a play on words wherein he prays not to experience the grief which his name implies, and which his sins may well produce. Always remember that our sins may very well grieve us.

Conclusion. How suitable a petition for us all! This obscure man teaches us an outstanding lesson in God's willingness to hear and answer the supplications of His people. He had grand faith that God ruled in people's lives. The text says, "And God granted him that which he requested." Should we be surprised? Evidently, what Jabez prayed for pleased the Lord (1 Kings 3:10, 12). God favors those who ask according to His will (1 John 5:14). Remember that "more honorable" describes what God thinks; not the credit we take for ourselves.

You can go home today and hang the prayer of Jabez on your refrigerator or on the wall and it will do you no good. It is only what you believe will happen and therefore do next that will let you walk by faith and let the Lord bless and help you (2 Corinthians 5:7). Being "more honorable" means striving to increase more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:10). You need to make the prayer of Jabez a habit. Pray for the Lord to bless you, to enlarge your coasts, to be with you, and to keep you from evil. Thomas Watson said, "Christ went more readily to the cross than we do to the throne of grace." Do not let this be said of you.