

The Prayer of Jabez

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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 Chronicles 4:10)

Introduction

Some of the best prayers are little prayers.

ILLUS - At a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee second baseman, offered a prayer that is a classic in brevity and poignancy: "Dear God, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen."

Of course, the Lord's prayer, found in *Luke 11:2-4, Matthew 6:9-13* is the most important example.

Jabez' prayer is only 1 verse long; 33 words in our English translation. It contains only 4 simple requests. And yet there is much here to help us in our personal prayer lives.

Notice that this prayer is one of only 2 reasons we know anything at all about Jabez. There must be something here that the Author of the Bible wants us to consider. Notice also, that Jabez' character is mentioned. "He was more honorable than his brethren." A strong case can be made that the reason for his being singularly blessed by God had more to do with this fact, than with the content of his little prayer. The Bible does link the character of the pray-er with the success of the prayer, "*The effectual, fervent prayer of a RIGHTEOUS MAN availeth much.*" (*James 5:16*)

QUESTION - Let's begin, as we often do in this class, with some general brainstorming and discussion. When you read this verse, what jumps out at you?

QUESTION - Is this prayer similar to other prayers? In what way?

QUESTION - Is this prayer different from other prayers? In what way?

QUESTION - Specifically, let's compare this prayer to the prayer often called "The Lord's Prayer."

READ - *Matthew 6:9-13*

QUESTION - What are the main similarities between the 2 prayers? What are the main differences?

QUESTION - Let's look at the four things Jabez prayed for. Can someone tell me the 4 specific requests Jabez made?

QUOTE (Rev. Adrian Dieleman, pastor of Trinity Reformed Church, from a meditation for the National Day of Prayer, 1991 - "In his prayer, Jabez makes four requests of God. First, 'Oh, that you would bless me.' 'To bless' means to ask for God's favor. We need God's favor or blessing upon all that we do and say and think. And, if we don't have His blessing then we are spinning our wheels and wasting our time. Second, Jabez prays, 'Enlarge my territory.' In that time and place he was asking for riches - having more lands and flocks and herds. Third, Jabez prays, 'Let your hand be with me.' God's hand represents His power and His strength. He is asking for God's power to be made real in him and through him. Fourth, Jabez prays, 'Keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' He is asking for safety and protection.

Let's examine these 4 requests in order:

Bless me indeed

One interpretation has already been mentioned, that this request is for the blessings and favor of God on our lives.

QUESTION - Do you agree with that interpretation? Is there something else meant here?

I would suggest that there are two things that jump out at me from this request:

1. It is a request for the blessings of God, but not just a little bit of them. It is a request for a lot of what God has to offer. "... bless me INDEED."
2. It is a PERSONAL request. Jabez is being very selfish here. Lord bless ME.

DISCUSSION - Consider the following thoughts, and comment on them: Often, in our prayer request times, we see a major bias in the types of requests. There is a plethora of pleas for those who are sick, and those who are out of work, and those who are injured. There is a dearth of requests for spiritual blessings, though.

DISCUSSION - Consider the following real life personal example, and comment: While Beth and I were in England this past October, we attended a little Baptist church several times. On a couple of occasions, prayer requests were received. Contrary to the types of requests mentioned above, which are the norm here, the majority of requests there were for various individuals who were lost, as well as those who were witnessing to them. They prayed for souls. They prayed for soul winners. They prayed for spiritual growth for people who were away from God. They prayed for members of their church who were backslidden and in spiritual decline. I can remember no requests for physical needs.

I would suggest that we can learn a couple of things from Jabez's request:

1. We need to pray for spiritual blessings. While it is natural to pray for help with physical things, and Jesus even encourages it in the Lord's prayer, we should temper those requests with the spiritual side of things, as well.
2. We need to pray selfishly, sometimes. We need to pray for ourselves first, and then for others. If we do not have the blessings of God in our own lives, we are hindered in our effectiveness for others, anyway.

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. (1 Timothy 4:16, KJV)

Enlarge my coast

DISCUSSION - What do you think this means?

One interpretation is that this was a prayer for physical blessings - riches and increased land and possessions.

Another interpretation is that this was a request for an enlarged sphere of influence - greater opportunities to influence others for God.

QUESTION - Is it right or wrong to pray for increased physical wealth and possessions?

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:31-33)

QUESTION - Is it right or wrong to pray for an increased sphere of influence, or increasing ministry opportunities?

QUESTION - Is it possible that praying for an increase in your sphere of influence, greater ministry opportunities, is also a request for greater wealth and physical blessing? Is that prayer, in effect saying, give me more money land possessions and things, so that I might better serve you and minister to others? If so, should we not pray this?

ILLUS - I was recently speaking with a friend of mine who had taken one of the early retirement options that some companies are offering. Since I was jealous of his situation, and my own retirement seems centuries away, I asked him if he was still happy with his decision. His response intrigued me. He is happy to be retired, but because he retired early, he took a considerably lower monthly pension than if he had waited until his normal retirement. "I wish I had more money to give to charities," he said. I was convicted, for I realized that I often wish for more money for a lot of reasons, but not very often do I wish for more so I can give more.

I believe we should, indeed, pray for continual increase, in order that we might better serve God. I believe we should, indeed, pray for greater opportunities and greater influence over others for God.

Thine hand might be with me

QUESTION - What do you think Jabez was requesting here? Put it into your own words.

One interpretation is that Jabez is asking for demonstrations of God's power in and through him. God's hand is representative of his strength.

Another interpretation might be that Jabez is asking for God's protection.

QUESTION - Why might he need such protection?

Mark it down, Christian. If you pray the first two parts of this prayer of Jabez, then you will need to pray this one!

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (II Timothy 3:12, KJV)

Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. (I John 3:13, KJV)

ILLUS - The following article from a recent "Voice of the Martyrs" newsletter demonstrates the danger Christians face when they step out for God: "When 34-year old Jiang Zongxiu went to her neighboring market last June in Guizhou Province, China. Along with her mother-in-law, Jiang went through the marketplace, taking opportunities to hand out Bibles and Christian literature and telling people about Jesus. Only this day they had an encounter with the Chinese police. The two Christian women were handcuffed together and brought to the police station. They were interrogated throughout the evening of the 17th. The next morning they were sentenced by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) to 15 days incarceration for "suspected spreading of rumor and disturbing the social order." Jiang and her mother-in-law knew the risk of spreading Christian literature in communist China. Both had been active in their church for more than 10 years and dared to go forth. Even when they were arrested, interrogated and sentenced to serve 15 days, they were willing to accept the consequences of their actions - all from a government that claims to have "freedom of religion." But it was not enough for the PSB to arrest and beat these two Christian women for the crime of passing our Christian literature. In the afternoon of June 18th, Mrs. Jiang Zongziu was pronounced dead by the PSB office of Tongzi County. They claimed she died of "natural causes." The fact is she was beaten to death."

Of course, we have nothing to fear in serving our great God, do we? "*Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.*"

ILLUS - I've been reading the "Left Behind" series of books, which brother Brad loaned me. Two characters in those books (and in the book of Revelation) are quite intriguing - the 2 witnesses who will preach in the streets of Jerusalem during the tribulation. The book goes into great lengths to illustrate the truth that the Bible makes clear, not only about these two, but about all who live for God - nobody can touch God's man or woman unless He so wills it. He is in control, even when circumstances and external evidences seem to indicate otherwise.

So, we need to pray for His blessings, and for greater opportunities to serve Him, and for protection from the inevitable attacks from the enemy that will result.

Keep me from evil

QUESTION - Is this different from how many people pray? How?

Many people fall into evil situations, and then pray for help in getting out.

Many people fall into evil situations, and then pray for forgiveness after the fact.

Jabez prayed for protection before the fact. Help me to not get in an evil situation. Protect me from sin and temptation before I get there. Is this not a better way?

ILLUS - Solomon tells us one of the best ways to avoid sin - STAY AWAY FROM IT BEFORE YOU GET ANYWHERE NEAR IT. READ - *Proverbs 4:14-15*

QUESTION - Jesus taught the same type of prayer in the Lord's Prayer did He not? What did He teach that was similar?

Especially in our world today, where sin has been forgotten and is so rampant around us, we need to ever and always pray for deliverance from it, "that it might not grieve us."

Conclusion

Certainly, it is dangerous to build too much of our theology on just a single verse. We need to consider this prayer of Jabez in the greater context of the entire Bible.

However, just as it is valuable to study any of the prayers in the Bible, it is valuable to study this one. I encourage you to consider these 4 requests this week, and every week. Work the thought processes into your own prayer lives, and see what God does as a result.

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