

## The Prayer of Jabez

*"Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!' And God granted him what he requested" (1 Chronicles 4:10).*

Some time ago, several writers wrote books about this prayer because of renewed interest in prayer. Rather than turning to the sample prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, or The Lord's Prayer in John 17, they turned to this prayer in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 because verse 10 concludes with, *"God granted him what he requested."* People believed if they prayed this prayer, God would grant their request also. The idea sounded good, but they missed the point.

Jabez lived under the Law of Moses, designed for a physical people in a physical land. We live in spirit and truth under the spiritual gospel of Christ. He prayed to the *"God of Israel" who identified Himself to Moses as "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... this is My memorial-name to all generations"* (Exodus 3:15). We pray to God the Father through The Christ. The things Jabez prayed for were commanded by the Old Covenant to maintain a pure people living on their inheritance in the land promised to them. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, just passing through this land to our inheritance in the house of God.

When Jabez' prayed *"You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border"* is in accord with the requirement to drive out the Canaanites from the family inheritance. Joshua did not conquer all the land. Many families continued driving off the inhabitants before they could take full position of their allotted portion. We are citizens of Christ's Kingdom. We have a place in the kingdom now, and a home prepared in eternity already won for us. *"But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us"* (Romans 8:37).

Jabez knows that he can do nothing without God, so he prays, *"that Your hand might be with me."* He recognized the power that God referred to when He told Isaiah, *"Even from eternity I am, and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?"* (Isaiah 43:13). James reminds us that we also should consider God when we make goals and plans. *"You ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that'"* (James 4:15). We must also keep in mind God's statement to Jeremiah, *"'I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'"* (Jeremiah 29:11). If God already has a plan, ours is of no lasting value.

The genealogy connected to Bethlehem explains the name Jabez by his mother's words *"because I bore him with pain"* (1 Chronicles 4:9). There is a slight play on words then by the request in his prayer. He requests *"keep me from harm that it may not pain me"* when his name means pain or sorrow. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil"* (Matthew 6:13). Jabez prayed for the safety of the physical body as we pray for the spiritual. See John's prayer in 3 John 1:2, *"Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers."* As we pray for each other to be free from the diseases that plague our physical bodies, we cannot forget the need to pray for our spiritual health and growth.

The attitude of Jabez toward God was the reason for his being *"more honorable than his brethren"* (1 Chronicles 4:9). By tradition, the city of Jabez, where many scribes copied the scriptures, is named for him. He may have been like the people of Berea in Paul's day, referred to as *"more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

This prayer is one of the shortest, yet complete, prayers in the Bible. It is not included in scripture for us to repeat as some do. It is provided for our study and learning as Paul reminds us. *"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* (Romans 15:4).