

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

“WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?”

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, “Because I bore him with pain.” 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 4:9-10

It has taken the Christian world by storm. It has sold to date over 9,000,000 copies. Its popularity has reached the climax on the Bestseller lists: #1 New York Times and #1 USA Today Bestseller. It is the Winner, 2001 Book of the Year, receiving the ECPA Gold Medallion Award. It is the Winner of the Nonfiction Book of the Year 2000 Retailers Choice Awards. They have worked to produce it in Afrikaans, Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, Canadian French, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese (Brazilian and Portugal), Spanish, Swedish.

You can read it in a book, take a 4-week training class, download drama presentations, and listen to countless testimonies of how reciting this prayer can produce life change. There is a Prayer of Jabez Gospel tract, telling you that you can be saved if you recite another simple prayer, which makes a life of Jabez blessings become yours.

There are approximately 90 gift items and accessories that you can buy to remind you to pray this prayer. A sampling includes the following: You can purchase Prayer of Jabez coffee mugs, Prayer of Jabez ties, Prayer of Jabez plaques, Prayer of Jabez wall crosses, Prayer of Jabez journal, Prayer of Jabez picture book, Prayer of Jabez leatherbound edition, Prayer of Jabez Hebrew prayer shawl (with the words stitched in Hebrew), Prayer of Jabez framed art, Prayer of Jabez lace wall hanging, Prayer of Jabez Bible cover, Prayer of Jabez lapel pin, Prayer of Jabez carrying pack sportsbag, Prayer of Jabez T-shirts, Prayer of Jabez audiobook for worship, Prayer of Jabez candles, Prayer of Jabez folio (large leather zipper folder), and even a Prayer of Jabez shield (metallic with the prayer inscribed on the front). My personal favorite is the 365 day Prayer of Jabez desk calendar, which has the Prayer of Jabez recited everyday, with a quote from the book in the corner.

There is the Prayer of Jabez for men, Prayer of Jabez for women, Prayer of Jabez for teens, Prayer of Jabez for kids, Prayer of Jabez for Little Ones, Prayer of Jabez devotional guide, Prayer of Jabez for Young Hearts, Prayer of Jabez leader’s manual, Prayer of Jabez audio-series, and a Prayer of Jabez music CD.

Why has it had such influence? What can cause the Christian and non-Christian world to grovel after this book with such frenzy? The answer I believe comes in the fact that much of religion today is sensationalism. Few people are interested in a message that is hard, requiring discipline and work. Invite people to an event that requires them to give themselves away and a handful of the faithful come. People seem to move from fad to fascination, always looking for the next trend or spiritual “buzz.” Religion is mysterious if it is enjoyable to most. The more mystical, the better.

Much of Christianity has become infected with this thinking. The heretics of the prosperity Gospel, who teach that God wants you to be happy, rich, and healthy. They appeal to

the carnal lusts of people who want God to condone their covetousness and indulge their sinful appetites. Usually this is to pad their pockets or gratify their sinful hunger. The Scripture warns about false teachers who would come and manipulate people for selfish ends, as Peter said in **2 Peter 2:1-3 and 18-19**, “**But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.... For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.**”

Not everyone who reads this book by Bruce Wilkerson is attempting to use God as a mystical genie for their self-indulgence, for many statements in the book are true about God and prayer. Neither is Bruce Wilkerson a heretical false teacher with destructive motives – I do believe however he is severely wrong. Furthermore, The prayer of Jabez in itself is a noble petition and should be esteemed. Wilkerson however has spiritualized and misused this portion of Scripture, and the fanatical Christian world has caught hold and found license for asking God to fulfill their evil desires. Against this mindset of prayer James warns us by his letter in **4:3**, “**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.**”

Wilkerson’s book has obscured the real meaning of the prayer and made it the most prominent prayer in the Bible. In his book he also mentions that next to his prayer for salvation, it is the most important prayer he has ever and continues to pray. It has become for him and those who follow him, a mantra, which if you recite enough, you will receive innumerable blessings, which he refused to define.¹ In his book, he declares that God is hindered in dumping his blessings on us because of our failure to pray this prayer, and when we get to heaven we will be shocked at all of the missed blessings that God wanted to give us, but by our prayerlessness, we thwarted – something Jabez never dreamed he would be accused of believing.

Because this prayer has been ravaged by sloppy and spiritualized handling, it is imperative to clarify what Jabez was praying. It is not the main intent of this study to demean or critique this book, there are reviews enough available to read that accomplish this purpose; rather it is the intent of this paper to allow Jabez to speak and pray for himself, so that we might follow the example God intended for us, having inspired it and enclosed it in the canon of Scripture.

In order to recover the intended meaning, we are going to have to rely on Biblical principles of proper interpretation as we move through the narrative found in **1 Chronicles 4:9-10**. When these principles are applied, we will find the true meaning of the passage and can then implement its truth in our own lives. The principles of interpretation will serve as an outline for this study, as follows: Literal Meaning, Grammatical Structure, Historical Context, Word Studies, Context, Cross-Reference, and then Application. Then we will look at how we might pray the petitions of Jabez accurately.

Before we can uncover the meaning of the text, we need to evaluate what about the text that we do not understand. This process of observation raises some key questions that we will answer below. Take a moment and ask at least questions of this text:

¹ In an interview on his homepage, <http://www.prayerofjabez.com/BreakthroughPages/FAQpages.html>, he admits that he has no idea what the concept of blessing means for Jabez, so he leaves it for each individual to define.

1. LITERAL MEANING

At the start we must understand that as we read our Bibles, there is no mystical or hidden agenda by the author. He was writing to a real people in a real time to address real issues. When we write, as do Biblical authors, we strive to know what the author intended to convey to the original audience, and then afterwards make application to ourselves. The key to this principle of interpretation is: **unless there is some clear reason in the text to take what the author has to say is literal, take the author at his word.**

For example, Jesus said in **John 10:9**, **“I am the door.”** This does not mean that he is made of oak and has hinges. Clearly another meaning is intended, which He gives in the next phrase: **“if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved.”** Jesus is the only way to enter into heaven – you must come to God through Him! It is clear the literal meaning is not meant, but this figurative statement serves to represent a literal meaning.

In the text of **1 Chronicles 4:10** what features are literal and which are figurative? Underline all of the statements that are literal and circle all of the statements that are figurative below:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him

Jabez saying, “Because I bore him with pain.” 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.

2. GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

Any careful study of a passage considers the sentence structure and relationship of the words to one another. It is important to note if there are any parallels in the passage, repeated words, play on words, etc. Attention must be paid to the tense (past, present, future), voice (*active – doing the action, middle – causing the action to happen to your self, passive – the action happens to you*), and mood (*stating a fact, giving a command or suggestion, asking a question, etc.*) of certain words or phrases.

In the passage before us, do you see anything of worth to note?

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Because this book was written to a certain people in a certain time for a certain reason with specific events in mind, we must close the historical gaps that exist from the time it was written to the present day. We must guard against a premature interpretation that does not account for these factors.

For example if I said, “after we talked, he was blown away.” Do I mean that a large gust of wind carried him off at the end of our conversation? Did an explosive detonate near him and kill him? Did a drive-by shooting occur at the coffeehouse where we sat? Or was he just overwhelmed by what I said? Context must fill in the details of the situation if it is to make sense. The following questions must be answered:

Who was the author?

What was the date?

Why did he write this book?

What were the readers to understand about what was written?

What were the readers supposed to do with what was written?

4. WORD STUDIES

Careful analysis of the words that the original author chose to use must be understood to get his exact meaning. Because he spoke and wrote in Hebrew, and we do not, we must choose those words that we think will be the most profitable to look up and learn about, to see if they have any bearing on the meaning.

Jabez –

Honorable –

Pain -

Called on God –

God –

O –

Bless Indeed –

Enlarge -

Border –

Hand –

Harm –

Pain –

Granted –

5. CONTEXT

The text of Scripture presented is not to be understood without the surrounding verses. Each verse comes within the setting of a discussion or the flow of an argument. The context will shade the meaning of the author, because it helps to see how that verse connects with the whole argument.

For example, the Bible says “there is no God.” Psalm 14:1! But the whole verse reads, “the fool in his heart has said, there is no God”!! Context is king over all other principles of interpretation, being most important.

What is the context of **chapter 4:9-10**?

6. CROSS-REFERENCE

Scripture interprets Scripture. It is important to allow texts that are alike to help shed light on what the Bible teaches in a particular area. Sometimes, the Bible will allow one text to help make another more clear. Consider the following verses, and note anything that they might teach about **1 Chronicles 4:9-10**:

➤ **1 Chron. 5:20-22**

➤ **2 Chron. 20:6-12**

- Gen. 12:1-3
- Gen. 15:1-6
- Gen. 17:1-8
- Gen. 22:15-18
- 1 Chron. 2:55

A PRIMER ON THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God established His covenant with His people, starting with Abraham to save them and then use them to reach the rest of the world with His message of deliverance from sin and bondage. His promise is a promise that would never fail or renege because He is the faithful God. The Abrahamic covenant was unconditional, like a grant, not conditional like a contract. He wants His people to desire to belong to Him and one another.

Notice which components of the Abrahamic Promise are found in Jabez’ prayer?

PRAYER OF JABEZ	ABRAHAMIC PROMISES
“bless me indeed”	“I will bless you, you shall be a blessing; in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed [including Jabez]; your reward shall be very great” 12:2; 15:122:17
“enlarge my border”	“I will make you a great nation; count the stars...so shall your descendents be; to give you this land, to possess it; I will multiply you exceedingly; I will give to you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan” 12:2; 15:5, 18-20; 17:2, 6-8.
“Your hand might be with me”	“Walk before Me; I will be God to you...and I will be God to them” 17:1, 8
“keep me from harm that it might not pain me”	“the one who curses you I will curse; Do not fear Abram, I am a shield to you; your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies” 12:3; 22:17

PULLING IT TOGETHER

Ezra the scribe wrote to the nation of Israel following their return from captivity to comfort and encourage them to return to their great heritage as heirs of the great promises of God, which they had forgotten while under the enslavement to Babylon for their sins of apostasy. God wanted them to know where they came from, who they were, who He was, and what He had in store for them if they would walk in His ways. He writes to trace their history and prove that God is in their history, working to bring about the fulfillment of His plan and promises.

Of the many people that Ezra names, one stands out at the very center of the genealogy – a man named Jabez. He is in the line of Judah, one of the sons of Jacob, heir to the promises of God made to Abraham. As a man of character, he wanted more than anything else to seize upon those promises. He wanted all that a man could have in terms of blessing from God, which God had beforehand promised. Like Abraham, he believed God to fulfill these promises (Gen. 15:5-6), to which his prayer is a faithful witness. Each petition is something that God swore by Himself to Abraham that He and His people would receive. He humbly asks God to condescend to his fervent and excited prayer to grant what God has already promised.

Jabez was confident in the promises of God for him, such that He personalized them and wanted to apply them and live them. He likely lived in the time when the nation had gone into the land of Canaan, and was in the process of taking it over completely. It was not a selfish prayer for bigger crops, but a desire to personally see God's promised will fulfilled in His life, to the glory of God.

Jabez' name had a stigma that was something that he worked hard to erase. His name meant "pain" – which he inflicted his mother with at birth, something she decided to never let him forget! He wanted so badly to be the kind of man who brought the joys of these precious promises to people that he prayed that his life would not live up to its name. He wanted God's foreordained will to be fulfilled in his life. He prayed according to the will of God, and left us a model to follow.

7. APPLICATION

What do you learn about prayer from this text, which is taught in the rest of the Bible to take with you?