

The Secret and Power of the Prayer of Jabez

A short, powerful and mysterious prayer is mentioned in the first book of Chronicles. The story is an inspiring one, and the example of Jabez teaches us much about how to pray, and get results – the secret of answered prayer!

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The prayer of Jabez, a man of God, is found in I Chronicles 4:10. Jabez prayed, calling on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory [border], that Your hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain.” The Scripture says, “So God granted him what he requested” (NKJV).

Who was Jabez? Why did he pray this way? What is the real story behind this short, powerful prayer?

Jabez, in Hebrew, means “he makes sorrow.” His childbirth was very difficult for his mother, hence she called him “Jabez.” Jabez is also the name of a place where the family of the scribes dwelt, taking its name from him, the leading scribe who founded the school or academy of scribes, those who preserved the writings and holy Scriptures.

The story of Jabez, in the Bible, amounts to a very brief but significant passage, which occurs in the genealogy of Judah, inserted as a brief but cogent and powerful comment on the man’s actions and character – hidden as if a marginal reading or commentary, of remarkable detail, in a genealogy connected with Bethlehem.

As Christ the Messiah said we are to live by every word of God, this short passage takes on whole momentous significance (Matt.4:4; Luke 4:4). No doubt the story of Jabez is intended by God to inspire each reader to greater heights, spiritually, to attain divine blessing and success in life, no matter how insignificant, painful, or problematical his beginning in life. No matter how inauspicious or lowly one’s beginning, one can accomplish great things through prayer and devotion to serving God with faithfulness, integrity, and earnest, fervent desire.

The School of Scribes

Jabez, the Adam Clarke Commentary points out, was also called “Othniel, the son of Kenaz. And he was called Jabez, because in his council he instituted a school of

disciples; they were called Tirathim, because in their hymns their voice was like trumpets; and Shimaathim, because in hearing they lifted up their faces, i.e., in prayer; and Suchathim, because they were overshadowed by the Spirit of prophecy. These Salmaei were the children of Zipporah, who were numbered among the Levites who came from the stock of Moses, the master of Israel, whose righteousness profited them more than chariots and horses” (Targum, quoted by Adam Clarke Commentary on I Chron.2:55).

The book of First Chronicles says, “And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, O 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” (I Chron.4:9-10).

The Septuagint has this passage, “And *Igabes* was more glorious than his brethren . . . And *Igabes* invoked the God of Israel, saying, If in blessing thou wilt bless me, and enlarge my borders, and thy hand be with me, and wilt give me understanding not to depress me: and God brought about all that he requested.”

The Syriac has it – “And on4e of these was dear to his father and to his mother; and he called his name *ainei*, MY EYE. And he said to him, In blessing may the Lord bless thee, and enlarge thy boundary; and may his hand be with thee; and may he preserve thee from evil, that it may not rule over thee; and may he give to thee whatsoever thou shalt request of him!”

The Arabic version declares– “And this one (*Hastahar* or *Harum*) was beloved of his father and his mother: and they called his name *aina*, MY EYE; and they said unto him, May the Lord bless thee, and multiply thy people, and may his hand be present with thee, because thou wast born in Beth-lehem!”

The Chaldee has the passage this way – “And *Jabets* also, he is Othniel, honourable and skilled in the law beyond his brethren, whose mother called his name *Jabets*, because she had borne him with sorrow. And *Jabets* prayed to the God of Israel, saying, O that in blessing thou wouldest bless me with children, and enlarge my borders with disciples; and that thy hand may be with me in business, that thou mayest make me like to my companions, that evil concupiscence may the less grieve me! And the Lord granted that which he prayed for.”

The Character of Jabez

Adam Clarke has a wonderful section in his commentary discussing the prayer of Jabez and its implications. What an example of fervent prayer for us, today! It contains the secret of powerful, persuasive, answered prayer – prayer which moves God, and has serious spiritual and physical impact!

Adam Clarke says of him: “There are several things in the account of Jabez that are very instructive:

“1. He appears to have been a child brought into the world with great difficulty, at the risk of his own life and that of his mother. So much seems to be implied in, *she bare him with sorrow*, i.e., with peculiar sorrow and danger.

“2. To perpetuate the merciful interposition of God in her own and her son’s behalf, she gave him a name that must have recalled to her and his remembrance the danger to which both their lives were exposed, and from which they could not have been extricated but by the especial help of God. *She called name Jabez, etc.*

“3. He was brought up in the fear of God; he was no idolater; he worshipped the God of Israel, and he showed the sincerity of his faith by frequent and earnest prayer.

“4. His prayer at once was both enlightened and pious. He had piety towards God, and therefore he trusted in him: he knew that he was the fountain of all good, and therefore he sought all necessaries both for body and soul from him. *He prayed to the God of Israel.*

“5. Both the matter and manner of his prayer were excellent. His heart was deeply impressed with its wants, and therefore he was earnest and fervent; *O that thou wouldest bless me indeed*; ‘O that in blessing thou wouldest bless me!’ Let me live under thy benediction! Do thou diligently and frequently bless me!

“6. He prays for the things necessary for the body as well as for the soul: *And enlarge my coasts*—grant me as much territory as may support my family. Let the means of living be adequate to the demands of life; let me have the necessaries, conveniences, and, as far as they may be safely entrusted with me, the comforts of life! *O that thou wouldest enlarge my coasts!*

“7. He is conscious that without the continual support of God he must fail; and therefore he prays to be upheld by his power: *That thy hand might be with me!* May I ever walk with thee, and ever feel the hand of thy power to support and cover me in all the trials, dangers, and difficulties of life; and the hand of thy providence to supply all my wants in reference to both worlds!

“8. He dreads both *sin* and *suffering*, and therefore prays against both: *O that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!* *Sin* and *misery* are in every step of the journey of life; keep me from *sin*, that I *grieve thee* not; and keep me from *sin*, that I render not *myself miserable!* We can never *offend God* without *injuring ourselves*, he that *sins* must *suffer*. *Thorns* and *scorpions* are everywhere in the way to perdition; and he that walks in it must be *torn* and *stung*. He alone is *happy* who walks in the ways of God. *Keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.*

“9. Prayers that have a *right aim* will have a *right answer*—Jabez did not pray in vain, *for God granted him that which he requested*. He was continually blessed; his family was increased; the hand of God was upon him for good. He was saved from sin, and saved from the pangs and sufferings of a guilty conscience.

“10. If we take up the character and conduct of Jabez in the view given by the *Chaldee*, we shall not only see him as a *pious* and *careful* man, deeply interested in behalf of *himself* and his *family*, but we shall see him as a *benevolent* man, labouring for the welfare of others, and especially for the religious instruction of *youth*. He founded *schools*, in which the young and rising generation were taught useful knowledge, and especially the knowledge of God. He had *disciples*, which were divided into *three classes* who distinguished themselves by their *fervour* in the *worship of God*, by their *docility* in obediently hearing and treasuring up the advices and instructions of their teachers, and by their deep piety to God in bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit. The *spirit of prophecy*, that of *prayer* and *supplication*, *rested upon them*.

“11. He did not do these things merely as *duty* he owed to God and his fellows, but from the *abundance* of a *generous* and *loving heart*. *In his counsel he erected a school of disciples*. God had blessed him with temporal things, and he secures their continuance by devoting them to his service; he honours God with his substance, and God honours him with his especial blessing and approbation.

“12. On these accounts he was *more honourable than his brethren*. He was of the same stock and the same lineage; he had neither nobility of birth, nor was distinguished by earthly titles; in all these respects he was on a level with his brethren: but God tells us that he was *more honourable than them all*; and why? because he *prayed*, because he *served his Maker*, and because he *lived to do good among men*; therefore he received the honour that cometh from God. Reader, imitate the conduct of this worthy Israelite, that thou mayest be a partaker of his blessings.

“The things added by the Targumist might have been derived from authentic tradition.”

So declares Adam Clarke’s Commentary on this passage

A Time for Fervent Prayer.

It would surely behoove us all, during this end-time of woe and trouble, and tribulation, to emulate Jabez, and follow his excellent, fervent example, and pray his prayer, and many like it, for ourselves, our families, and all God’s true people in this fast-moving end-time, perilous age!

As the apostle James wrote, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). Moffatt says, “has much impact.”

It is high time we re-energize our prayer life! The example of Jabez ought to spur us to action. If we follow his example, we, too, can meet with unfailing success, be protected from evil, and achieve outstanding accomplishments and do a great work for and through the Lord our God, the God of Israel!

Another Look at Jabez

The *Critical-Experimental Commentary*, by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, declares on the passage dealing with Jabez, as follows:

“Jabez . . . was, as many think, the son of Coz, or Kenaz, and is here eulogized for his sincere and fervent piety, as well, perhaps, as for some public and patriotic works which he performed.. The Jewish writers affirm that he was an eminent doctor in the Law, whose reputation drew so many scribes around him that a town was called by his name I Chron.2:55); and to the piety of his character this passage bears ample testimony. The memory of the critical circumstances which marked his birth was perpetuated in his name (cf. Gen.24:15); and yet, in the development of his high talents, or distinguished worth in after-life, his mother must have found a satisfaction and delight that amply compensated for all her early trials.

“The prayer of his which is here recorded, and which, like Jacob’s, is in the form of a vow (Gen.28:20), seems to have been uttered when he was entering on an important or critical service, for the successful execution of which he placed confidence neither on his own nor his people’s prowess but looked anxiously for the aid and blessing of God.

“10. **thou wouldest keep me from evil**—thou wouldest do so as abstain; i.e., thou wouldest abstain from evil. Others, says *Gesenius*.render less well ‘thou wouldest do me from evil—i.e., keep me from harm.’ The enterprise was in all probability the expulsion of the Canaanites from the territory he occupied; and as this was a war of extermination, which God himself had commanded,

“His blessing could be the more reasonably asked and expected in preserving them from all the evils to which the undertaking might expose him. In the words ‘that it may not grieve me,’ and which might be more literally rendered, ‘that I may have no more sorrow,’ there is an allusion to the meaning of his name, Jabez, signifying grief; and the import of this petition is, let me not experience the grief which my name implies, and which my sins may well produce. God granted him that which he requested.

“Whatever was the kind of undertaking which roused his anxieties, Jabez enjoyed a remarkable degree of prosperity, and God, in his instance, proved that He was not only the hearer, but the answerer of prayer.”

What can we learn from the intriguing story of Jabez and his prayer? Certainly, God does answer the fervent, believing, earnest prayers of His people – wonderfully, marvelously, and aw4esomelly! Why don’t you study and consistently pray like Jabez?