

The Jabez Story

Text: I Chronicles 4:9, 10

I'll be perfectly honest with you, when in the course of my Bible reading plans, I come to the first nine chapters of I Chronicles, I have a tendency to not approach my task with extraordinary anticipation. To my embarrassment as a pastor, I have almost had a dread, because these first chapters list who was born to whom and on and on. Now, as I have hopefully become a student of the Bible, I see very clearly how important the study of genealogy is because it verifies the inerrancy of the Word of God and the historical accuracy of the Bible. Any honest skeptic who searches out the veracity of the Bible can examine these details of the Bible and can actually find empirical evidence that there is absolutely nothing made up in this grand and glorious Book about the places, the people and the events.

Every now and then in these nine chapters there is a slight flourish of information beyond their genealogy, but nothing like the details of an otherwise unknown descendent of Judah by the name of Jabez. His life, and especially his prayer, stands out like none other in these nine chapters, which should cause us to pause, consider and find out why God wanted us to pay attention to this man. Around the turn of the millennium Bruce Wilkerson, previously known for his "Walk Thru the Bible," a popular teaching among evangelicals, wrote a book entitled, "The Prayer of Jabez." The widespread circulation of this book far exceeded his earlier and later teachings and books. At first it was received very well, then many major Bible teachers saw a danger of this prayer becoming a "magic wand" of prosperity for any and all who claim his prayer to pull them out of all their trials. So then the book decreased in popularity among us Bible believers, lest we fall into the category of those who treat the prayer of Jabez like a mystical mantra that diminishes a reverent approach to God with humility that always places God's will above our own.

Although I had preached about this most unusual life of Jabez in years gone by, I deliberately steered away from making much of his prayer, lest our intention become misunderstood. However, this prayer and this man are very much part of the Bible and we need to say with the apostle Paul in Acts 20:27, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." In doing so, we find "...instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16c).

The name Jabez means "He causes pain." In the Hebrew culture, we see that names are symbolical and often map out the life of the one named. For instance, "And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel...(I Samuel 4:21). Another would be found in I Samuel 1:20: "Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD." When we come to Jabez, we see a man who rose above his name. Let's talk about it.

I. JABEZ ROSE ABOVE HIS PLIGHT.

I Chronicles 4:9a: "And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren...."

Plight speaks of a dangerous, difficult, or otherwise unfortunate situation. The Bible teaches us to choose wisely our environment and close friendships. Proverbs 13:20: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." What does one do that is born into a situation where your family influence is not conducive to holiness or that which pleases God? According to the Bible we cannot abdicate our responsibilities as children. Ephesians 6:1,2: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)." We cannot abdicate our responsibility in marriage, even if our spouse turns out to be unconverted. I Corinthians 7:13: "And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him."

We do not know the details of Jabez's situation, but this much we know: he was in a family where he stood alone in his virtue. What a great lesson for all of us! God is very willing to help us rise above our circumstances.

II. JABEZ ROSE ABOVE HIS PAST.

I Chronicles 4:9b: "...and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow." There was sorrow surrounding the birth of Jabez. Genesis 3:16a: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children...." According to this verse the sorrow spoken of reflects the sadness that we are all born with a sinful nature, which would require the new birth to become part of the family of God. But this also means that a woman will be going through intense labor in the process of natural birth. The statement surrounding Jabez's birth goes beyond what a woman would expect. She is speaking of a sorrow, perhaps of a heartbreak, deep poverty or even a sin.

In the book of Judges we see a man who not only rose above his birth but also became one of the famed Judges in the history of Israel! Judges 11:1: "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman."

Exodus 34:7: "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Before God gave the warning of iniquity being repeated generationally, He reminded us in the first part of this verse that He keeps His abundant mercy for thousands. We see this truth illustrated in Ezekiel 18:1-3; 19-22.

III. JABEZ ROSE ABOVE HIS PERIMETERS.

I Chronicles 4:10a: "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...." Time would fail to give case after case of people who rose above man's restrictions and designations. One such person is John Jasper, pastor of

the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia. I have two biographies of John Jasper; the one entitled *Rhapsody in Black* was a life-changing book for me, having read it in my youth. John Jasper was born a slave in the county of Fluvanna, Virginia, on July 4, 1812. Interestingly enough, his biographer recorded, "While walking through the Capitol Square, on the Fourth day of July, in the year 1839, in the midst of the great crowds of white people, while they were celebrating this memorable and historic day, Mr. Jasper was deeply convicted of his sins; and his distress of soul greatly increased from that day until the 25th day of the same month, when he felt that it was his duty to make a confession of his faith in Christ and to unite himself with the church." Jasper fell in love with Elvy Weaden, a slave, of the city of Williamsburg and married her. Upon discovery by her "master" on their wedding night, they were separated, never to see each other again. The cruelty that Jasper endured did not make him bitter, but he rose far above his circumstances and became Virginia's most famous preacher. He could pack out any venue in which he was to preach. Souls were saved and lives were changed before, during and beyond the Civil War of both black and white. It only seems fitting that the man who was born on the fourth of July and became convicted to be born again on another the fourth of July truly epitomizes the freedom that Brother John had in Jesus even when his country did not always appreciate his freedom that was guaranteed him by the Declaration of Independence, but denied him for the first fifty-one years of his life. Romans 2:11: "For there is no respect of persons with God."

IV. JABEZ ROSE ABOVE HIS PROBLEMS.

I Chronicles 4:10b: "...and that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." Jabez was not defined by the problems that beset him, but rose above his designation given to him by his name. He allowed the stumbling stones to become the stumbling blocks of his blessed life.

It appears from our text, that Jabez allowed his setbacks to become set ups for future growth. This statement in the closing story of our hero reminds us of the closing statement in the model prayer that Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:13: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Conclusion:

Let us be challenged by this brief, but powerful biography to claim nothing short of the best that God has for us, our family and His Church!

-Pastor Pope-