

[jabez]

:: 1 chronicles 4.9-10 ::

Every decade has its share of one-hit wonders.

Who Let The Dogs Out?, *The Macarena*, *Whip It*, *It's Raining Men*. All songs we know all too well by bands whose names **NO-ONE** knows!

There is a sort of one-hit wonder in the Bible as well. There are people mentioned to us only once, never to be referenced again, yet recorded so that we can learn and apply spiritual principles to our own lives. Their one verse or one passage can replay in our minds again and again as we discover truths in their relationships with the Lord.

So this morning we begin a new series that we're calling "One Verse Wonders," where we take a look at a few of these characters and glean out insight from what we find.

Now, most of these folks actually have more than 1 verse devoted to their story, so the rules are that the people we study can only be mentioned once in the Bible, having one particular story or situation or circumstance mentioned.

10 years ago the idea of these one-verse wonders was brought to our attention when Bruce Wilkinson published his book *The Prayer Of Jabez*. That little devotional sold millions of copies and suddenly everyone thought about this guy, Jabez, who only had 2 verses in the Bible and was never referenced again.

For us, there's no better place to start than here with Jabez. He's the poster-boy for these characters. We read about him in 1 Chronicles chapter 4, starting in verse 9.

1 Chronicles 4.9-10 - Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So God granted him what he requested.

As we talk about this guy this morning and work through his prayer, it's very important that we have the correct mindset. Because if we come at these verses with an **earthly** mindset we're going to draw out something very different than if we approach them with a **heavenly** mindset.

Obviously, God's desire is that we think with a heavenly, biblical perspective. Philippians 4.8, Romans 12.2, 1 Peter 1.13, Colossians 3.2. We are to think with a perspective that is Spirit-filled and submitted to God, thinking about heavenly things, not temporal things.

So if we read these verses and think that it's all about our material possessions and receiving physical blessings from God, then we need to pause and realize that that sort of thinking isn't really consistent with the life of a Christian we see revealed in the Bible. In fact it is in opposition to what we read in the Scriptures.

Instead, we will find that Jabez examples for us a heart that is focused on service, on holiness and on submission to Christ.

1 Chronicles 4.9a - Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.

We only have a few words describing Jabez and so the things that **are** said about him are important.

This is one of those passages where language is so interesting. Because the different translations each have a slightly different slant on these verses. The Hebrew words themselves here have a great depth and range as we look at their possible meanings.

The word 'honorable', according to Strongs' Concordance, can be used either in the good sense or the bad sense. In the good sense, this word means 'rich' or 'honorable' in the same way that we use it today. But in the bad sense, this word can mean 'to be heavy,' or 'burdensome' or 'severe'. Depending on the usage, we get a very different picture of this man Jabez.

It reminds us that in this life there are roughly two categories we find ourselves in: honorable or heavy-laden. Paul used the terms 'abounding' and 'abased'. He explained that sometimes we're experiencing a time of blessing and other times we're experiencing times of struggle.

Philippians 4.11b-13 -I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

No matter what state we are in, whichever type of Jabez we may be, honored or heavy-laden, our source of strength is Jesus Christ. We **can** find contentment and fulfillment in Him, no matter our circumstances. Christ is always available for us to call to in prayer, just as Jabez did.

1 Chronicles 4.9b - And his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain."

The name Jabez means "He will cause pain."

Here I find the healthy reminder that at my core, strip everything away and I am simply a sinful man in need of a Savior, a sinner in need of a solution to the pain that I cause. God has provided that solution in Jesus Christ. Not through my merit. Not through my excellence. Not through my self at all.

Romans 12.3 - For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

A proper understanding of ourselves and our circumstances will magnify God's power and grace as we move out of the way and just see that Christ is the center, He's the focus, He's the provision, He's the solution to every part of our life.

1 Chronicles 4.10a - And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"

Again, if we're immediately seeing dollar signs and physical prosperity in this prayer, we're missing the real point.

Let's break this down piece by piece.

First, he asks the Lord to bless him indeed.

We most often understand blessing to be the absence of suffering and struggle. While that is true in one sense, there is a lot more to the Biblical blessings of God.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:

Matthew 5.11 - Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Luke 6.22 - Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake.

He said, "blessed are the poor," "blessed are you who weep," and "if you know these things [speaking of His example and teachings] blessed are you if you do them." That's how God describes blessing in the Bible.

So, the idea that 'blessing' just means a full tank of gas and a slice of cheesecake after dinner focuses only on the earthly and not on the heavenly.

Jesus said that we are blessed when we're serving Him, when we're following His example, when we're applying His word. That is the blessing He desires to give us. The blessings of God are wisdom and purpose and a calling to go into the world and do what Jesus did.

When we ask for blessing, that's what we're asking for. Not a diversified portfolio. While that's not a bad thing to have, it's temporal. It's earthly. It's just vapor. When we ask for blessing, we are asking for God's purpose and calling in our lives.

Jabez went on and said, "enlarge my territory." Again, not about wealth. Not about largess. Another translation renders this phrase: "expand my borders."

This reminds me of that great passage in Joshua chapter 14 where Caleb comes to Joshua and says, "Give me my mountain. I want it. I want my inheritance so I can go and conquer it and fulfill that which the Lord wants me to do."

In this ancient time having larger territory was a lot of effort. It was tons of responsibility. It meant more vigilance, more activity, more planning, more devotion to your work. Asking for a larger territory meant becoming more invested, not more distracted or relaxed. Jabez wanted more of God's promised land, more of the duty that was given to each Jew, the inheritance of God's people.

He said, "that Your hand would be with me and that You would keep me from evil, that I might not cause pain!" Your translation might change that last part to say, "that it might not cause **me** pain."

Jabez understood that evil was all around him and was also within him. He was mindful of evil because it had the potential to destroy his life and his work.

We need to be mindful of evil. That means that we recognize those things which could cause us to stumble into sin. That we watch for those weak areas in our lives where we're prone to wickedness. That we guard against evil by staying near the Lord, so that sin is not coming **on** us or **from** us.

Evil, sin, stumbling will destroy our witness, it will destroy our work, it will destroy our lives. We must be mindful of evil so that we don't wake up one day having drifted away from the hands of God and into the destruction of carnality or sensuality or all of the other things that seek to ensnare us.

1 Chronicles 4.10b - So God granted him what he requested.

Some have taken this passage to show that when we pray with faith God must grant our requests. It's been used by the name it and claim it folks to show that God really just wants you to be healthy and wealthy and full of material blessings. But they are completely missing the heavenly in his prayer.

The reason God granted Jabez his request was because God is gracious, He is generous, and Jabez' request was full of heavenly value. He was asking for more holiness, more opportunities to serve the Lord and more vision in his life.

When we pray like Jabez, God will be happy to answer our request. Not for temporal things, but for the spiritual blessings of more responsibility, more ministry, more purity, and more of God's hand in our life.

That's what Jabez wanted, that's what we want, that's what God gives.

And if we *don't* want more of those things, then it's time for us to figure out what's important in our lives. What do we value? What do we want for our future? Temporal or spiritual? Earthly or heavenly?

God's blessings are offered to us today. Let's take hold of those things; that service, that power, that calling, and live a life full of Jesus Christ.