

The prayer of Jabez

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IN THE MIDST of the genealogies of Chronicles, which most of us will admit we find rather tedious to read, though we recognise that they are part of God's Word recorded for our learning, are to be found two verses about Jabez and his prayer (1 Chron. 4:9,10). The reference to "the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez" (2:55) suggests he was the founder of a school of scribes who named the place where they lived after him. We are told that these scribes were Kenites, who were descendants of Moses' father-in-law Jethro (Judg. 1:16). We conclude, therefore, that Jabez was a Gentile who "called on the God of Israel [why say Israel if he were not a Gentile?]" (1 Chron. 4:10), and was adopted into the tribe of Judah, like Caleb, mentioned a few verses later (v. 15). Thus he is mentioned within the genealogies of the tribe of Judah, but no descent from a member of that tribe is given.

This calling upon God is what the line of Seth did, and later Abraham when he entered the land (Gen. 4:26; 12:8). In the opening words of his prayer, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed", Jabez is surely requesting that he might have a part in the promises God made to Abraham when commanding him to leave his native land and go to an unknown country that turned out to be Canaan. Note the emphasis on blessing in these first promises: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will *bless* thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a *blessing*: and I will *bless* them that *bless* thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be *blessed*" (12:2,3). Here was a Gentile with a strong desire to be associated with the God of Israel, and with the blessings promised to the nation's ancestor, which would ultimately be worldwide in their scope.

We can perhaps put an emphasis on one word in this first element of his prayer, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless *me*", expressing his desire that he should have *his* part in the blessings. Perhaps this prayer was evoked by his witnessing of the goodness of the land which God gave the nation of Israel, in contrast to the desert which was the native land of this Kenite. The next phrase of his prayer, "and enlarge my border" (RV), indicates

that he primarily had land in mind. And since "God granted him that which he requested" we know that he must have received a goodly heritage somewhere in the land of promise, just as Caleb did.

The remainder of Jabez's prayer is, "and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it be not to my sorrow" (RV). Having prayed initially in terms of the promises to Abraham, Jabez now continues in words which are reminiscent of those of Jacob, who, when resting at Bethel in his flight from the wrath of Esau, "vowed a vow, saying, *If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way . . . then shall the LORD be my God*" (Gen. 28:20,21), and, at the end of his life, acknowledged that God had indeed been with him, referring to "the Angel which *redeemed me from all evil*" (48:16).

In the final words of his prayer, "that it be not to my sorrow" (RV), Jabez makes reference to the meaning of his name: "his mother called his name Jabez [mg. sorrowful], saying, Because I bare him with sorrow", words which reflect the curse upon Eve when she sinned (Gen. 3:16). He prays that the meaning of his name might not be fulfilled in his life. And, since God granted his prayer, this must have been fulfilled. Though he was born in much sorrow, he escaped from this background by choosing to associate himself with the promises of God.

And so it can be for us. We live in a world of much sorrow and suffering, a world in which the curses placed upon the first man and woman because of their sin still have their outworking. But, however bad our background, we can escape from it by placing our trust in the promises of God, Who provides blessing instead of curse upon the world through the promises to Abraham fulfilled in his seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, we must show our desire to be associated with the promises by calling upon the Name of the Lord. And if we have this earnest desire to be associated with the promises of God, then we can call upon Him to be with us in our lives and keep us from evil, saving us ultimately from the greatest evil of all, eternal death.