

How to Ask for a Wonderful Life, *Part 4* A Study of 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Characteristic of Completeness: Spiritual Warfare

Big Idea: Protect me.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 139:23-24; Matthew 6:13; Ephesians 6:11-18; 1 Peter 5:8

Introduction:

- A. A guy named Jabez prayed a simple prayer that changed his life. He asked for a wonderful life. And he got it. And you can get it, too.

For the past three Sundays, we've been studying the prayer of Jabez to gain insight into how we can ask for a wonderful life. We conclude our study today. Our text is 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. I invite you to turn there if you have a Bible with you. It's 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. As recorded in ► Verse 10, the prayer of Jabez goes like this:

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . "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!" . . .

- B. Let me briefly review the first three parts of this prayer before we move on to the fourth.
1. The first request, ► "bless me," essentially means "take me. I'm Yours."
 2. The second request, ► "enlarge my territory," essentially means "use me. I am willing."
 3. The third request, ► "that Your hand would be with me," essentially means, "help me. I can't do it without You."
 4. That brings us to the ► fourth and final part of the prayer of Jabez which we are going to cover this morning. It comes in the last part of ► Verse 10 where Jabez prays,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . "Oh, . . . that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"

Jabez is essentially asking God for protection. He rounds out his prayer by saying, "Lord, ► protect me." First, "Take me." Then, "Use me." Then, "Help me." Then finally, "Protect me." That's the ► Big Idea of my sermon: "Protect me." It's a prayer to God. "Protect me."

- I. What is the nature of this protection? What exactly is Jabez asking for here?

- A. Well, when you're studying a verse in the Bible and you're uncertain about what it means, it is usually a good idea to compare different versions of the Bible because different wording can sometimes help you understand the biblical idea that is being conveyed. Usually.

Sometimes, however, comparing different versions of the Bible doesn't clear things up at all. In very rare instances, different versions seem to have conflicting meanings. For example, the *New King James Version* that we're using this morning renders the last part of 1 Chronicles 4:10 ► this way:

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . "Oh, . . . that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"

This sort of sounds like Jabez doesn't want to mess up and hurt somebody. ► He doesn't want to be the *source* of pain for another person.

But, as one of you pointed out to me several weeks ago, the *New American Standard* translates it differently. It ► says:

^{NAU} 1 Chronicles 4:10 ". . . that You would keep *me* from harm that *it* may not pain me!"

Here, it looks like ► Jabez doesn't want to be the *object* of pain. He doesn't want to experience pain himself. That's a very different idea.

And, the *New International Version* sounds that way, too. ► It says,

^{NIV} 1 Chronicles 4:10 ". . . keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain."

Even, the original *King James Version*, which you would think would be pretty close to the *New King James*, is different. ► It says,

^{KJV} 1 Chronicles 4:10 ". . . that thou wouldst keep *me* from evil, that it may not grieve me!"

We've got pain going in different directions here. Why the discrepancy in translations? The *New King James* seems to indicate that Jabez doesn't want to be the creator of pain. The other translations seem to indicate that Jabez doesn't want to be the recipient of pain.

Well, in the few cases in which there are differences like this, it is usually a tip off that, in the original language in which this was written, more than one translation is possible. Sure enough, when you look at the ► original Hebrew rendering of this

verse, you see the problem right away. It can be translated either way. Either ► Jabez is asking that he be protected from becoming the giver of pain, or he is ► asking that he be protected from becoming the receiver of pain. Grammar alone doesn't tell you which direction is intended.¹

This kind of interpretive uncertainty happens in English, too. Suppose I say that ► Jeff Bauer is a fine example of the love of God. What does that mean? Am I saying that ► Jeff is good at giving love to God? Or, am I saying that ► God is good at loving people like Jeff? Am I commenting on Jeff as the giver or receiver of love? Which direction? The grammar alone doesn't tell you. It's ambiguous.

- B. Well, what do we do with Jabez in ► Verse 10? How should we take Jabez's request for protection? One approach would simply be to go with how the majority of English translations render it. This approach has some merit, but in Bible translation and life, the majority opinion is not necessarily correct.

So, I paid a visit to my former Hebrew professor, Dr. Dennis Wretlind, to get his opinion. Dr. Wretlind pointed out that the context of the verse provides strong clues as to the intended, primary meaning.

1. You may recall that the ► name Jabez means, "he causes pain." So, his name alone suggests that ► Jabez was the one who had a history of causing pain.
2. In addition, ► Verse 9 of our text corroborates this direction when it says,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:9 . . . and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore *him* in pain."

Here, once again, Jabez is presented as the source of pain.

3. There is also a corroborating Hebrew play on words here. The guy ► named, "He causes pain" was asking that he be kept from causing pain. Jabez was asking God to help him *not* live up to his name. He wanted to change.
4. Moreover, this fits very well with a primary meaning of the Hebrew word translated, ► "evil" in Verse 10. The Hebrew word is *ra*. Let me read you one of the most common ► definitions of the term from a Hebrew dictionary: "More often *ra* indicates moral deficiencies, moral qualities that injure oneself or others . . ."²

¹ The suffixed personal pronoun could be either a subjective genitive or an objective genitive. See Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2d. ed., (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1976, reprinted 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1992), #109-110.

² R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "רַעַה," (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), hereinafter referred to as TWOT.

So, Jabez was asking God to steer him clear of the temptation to moral failure. He was asking God to protect him from falling into sin because his sin hurts other people. I chose the *New King James Version* for our study of Jabez because it does a good job of capturing this primary idea of protection from stumbling into sin and harming other people.

5. Dr. Wretlind pointed out something else to me that I would have missed. He said that the ambiguity of the direction of pain in the Hebrew text is probably deliberate. As such, while Jabez as the source of pain is primarily in view, the text also intends to convey the echo of ► pain that comes right back to Jabez. Let me explain.

You see, when I give in to the temptation to sin, when I fall, it not only hurts other people, but it hurts me, too. The pain I cause other people is also a source of pain for me. It works both ways.

- a. If I am unfaithful to my wife, it will not only devastate her, but it will also grieve me. I will experience the guilt, the conflict, the loss of intimacy, the stigma.
- b. If I neglect my children, it will harm them emotionally. It will rob them of the love they need. But, it will pain me too as a father. It will pain me when I realize that I've failed to fulfill my responsibilities as a father. It will pain me when I see that I don't really have a good relationship with my children.
- c. If I cheat at my work, it will not only hurt my company, it will someday come back to bite me.

The pain of sin cuts both ways. Jabez was praying, "Lord, keep me from doing something foolish and sinful because it would hurt other people, and ultimately it would hurt me."

- C. ► Now, the prayer for protection is not some kind of ploy to make God responsible for my own sin. It's not a license to abandon self-discipline and self-control and then blame God when I fall.

The prayer for protection is offered in recognition that when ► I pray the first three parts of the prayer of Jabez, I place myself squarely on the front line of a spiritual battle where there is greater danger. When I pray, "Lord, enlarge my territory for You" guess whose territory I'm invading? I'm taking territory from Satan. And, I should expect to encounter heavy spiritual opposition from which I need protection.

If we are ► not praying like Jabez, if we're not surrendering ourselves to God, Satan is

not worried about us. We are out of commission spiritually. We pose no threat to take any territory for God. We're not pursuing the *real* wonderful life. We're buying the counterfeit wonderful life, the satanic smoke and mirrors—the wonderful rip-off. The wonderful rip-off is the frantic pursuit of happiness through things that will never satisfy or count for anything in the end—things like ► possessions and power and position and pleasure and prestige and performance. Nothing inherently wrong with these things, but they are not to be our highest pursuit. When they become our highest pursuit, we effectively put ourselves on the dry bank, out of the river and out of commission for God.

But when we ► surrender to God as Jabez did, when we pursue the real wonderful life, when we say, “Lord, take me, use me, help me!” we become a target for Satan and his demonic servants and we need God’s protection more than ever. And so, our Characteristic of Completeness for the week is ► Spiritual Warfare. Praying for God’s protection is a big part of spiritual warfare.

Ever wonder why spiritual highs tend to be followed by spiritual lows? Ever wonder why, just when you think you’re making some progress in your walk with God, you stumble? Ever wonder why after a great victory for God, you often experience opposition, distraction, or even oppression? It’s because you’re taking territory that Satan wants back.

The victorious Christian life is not about somehow getting up to speed, then engaging the cruise control. In fact, chances are, if you’re cruisin’, you’re losin’. The wonderful life is not a life without struggles. It’s about a life of surrender to and dependence on God, who sees us through the struggles as we do His work. As believers in Jesus, we’re not commissioned for a cake-walk; we’re called to spiritual combat for which we need God’s protection.

1. Jesus Himself asked for that kind of protection in the Lord’s prayer. He ► said,

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. . . .

That means, “Protect me.”

2. The apostle Paul explains our need for protection from Satan in Ephesians 6:11-12. He ► says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Paul is saying our struggles are spiritual. Life's battle is spiritual. And, the solution is spiritual. Paul points to a solution in ► Ephesians 6:18. The answer is . . .

^{NKJ} Ephesians 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, . . .

How do we pray? What do we pray? How ► about, "Take me. Use me. Help me. Protect me."

II. Do you want a wonderful life?

A. (Questions)

1. Do you want to make important contributions to your family, to your community, and to your world?
2. Do you want your life to count for something truly worthwhile?
3. Do you want to kick a dent in history?
4. Do you want be a part of something far bigger and better than myself?
5. Do you want to know that what you're doing is what God designed you to do?
6. Do you want God's favor?
7. Do you want to really experience God, not just know about Him?

- B. If you do, will you join me in stepping off the treadmill and getting on your knees? Would you be willing to pray the Jabez prayer every day for the month of July and see what happens? Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to make the Jabez prayer your own, praying it every day for the next month?

Remember, this is not mindless religious ritual. It is not a rote exercise. It is not a trivial pursuit. If you pray the Jabez prayer with your heart, it means you're not just sticking your toe in the water, it means you're divin' into whatever God wants to do with you.

If you're interested, at the end of the sermon transcript which is posted on the Moon Valley website, I've ► put a copy of the Jabez prayer along with the take-me-use-me-help-me-protect-me graphic. Maybe you could print it off and put it on the mirror in your bathroom, or on the dashboard of your car, or on the bulletin board by your desk, so that you can remember to pray.

- C. Shall we start now? Will you join me in prayer? Here's how you could do it.
1. Lord, would you please bless me? Take me. I'm surrendering myself to whatever You want, Lord. I'm jumping into whatever blessings You have planned for me as I surrender to the current of Your will. Take me.
 2. Lord, would you enlarge my territory? Use me. I want to do more for You. Please give me greater influence, increased responsibility, and more opportunities to love You, to love others, to help people follow You. Use me.
 3. Lord, would You give me Your hand? Help me. I can't do this alone. I'll be overwhelmed without You. I'm depending on You to give me what I need to do Your work. Let Your power show through my weakness. Help me.
 4. And, Lord would You keep me from evil? Protect me. Keep me from stumbling. Steer me away from moral failure. I don't want to mess things up and hurt people. I don't want to give people cause to doubt your goodness. Protect me. Amen.



. . . "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!" . . .

1 Chronicles 4:10

New King James Version