



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

6th October, 2023

Continuing the theme of 'background' characters in the Bible.....

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request.

1 Chronicles 4:10

Apart from a place name (1 Chronicles 2:55), Jabez is a man of whom we know virtually nothing. Let's start firstly with his name. Would you think of naming your child 'pain'? His mum said it was a deliberate choice (1 Chronicles 4:9), -Jabez apparently sounds like the Hebrew word for pain. (I met a lady called 'Calamity' once.... why would you?!)

Secondly the record of Jabez is just a two-verse interruption in a list of names four chapters long. Why? He's like a historical 'add-on' as well as a Biblical 'walk-on'! He's not even named in the lists, so we don't know what family he was in. All we know is (1) *"he was more honourable (most translations) than his brothers"* (v. 9), and (2) *"God granted his request"* (v.10).

I'm sure one reason he comes through to us is his prayer. Why do you think God *"granted his request"*? Was it because he was *"more honourable than his brothers"*? That seems unlikely when we consider other examples of pray-ers, -and prayers answered.... or not!

A Christian conference delegate walked past the door of the main speaker and overheard him praying before his presentation. *"Oh, that you would bless me..."* The eavesdropper felt he should be praying for his audience, for people to respond, for his talk to have impact. It seemed self-centred. How would we pray in such situations?

Jabez teaches a fundamental lesson: it is as we ask God to bless us, as we open ourselves to receive from Him *first*, that we can more effectively be His servant for others. Jesus said to Peter *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"* (John 13:8). How often do we (*do !!*) start by praying that God will bless what we do, those we meet and so on. That's fine, but the *primary* thing is neglected: we need to ask God to bless (love, cleanse, forgive, comfort) us *first*, only then will we serve effectively. It's like the instruction in the 'plane to put your oxygen mask on first, to avoid passing out before you can help others! Perhaps we have known -or been- someone who was continually doing 'good works' to the point of spiritual and physical self-neglect... is that God's way?

It is sometimes said that churches have too many pipes and not enough tanks. Pipes rush things through without holding onto anything; tanks fill up and overflow. So let's pray 'the Jabez prayer'!

I don't know what Jabez meant by *"enlarge my territory"*... that can mean in our prayers what best fits our situation. We can understand *"Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm"*, and we all want to *"be free from pain"*...

But I wonder whether that last request is something to do with the meaning of his name, -like, *"so that I will not be a pain"*... There's a thought!