

Chronicles: Answered Prayer

Calling Upon the Lord

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Given 17-Oct-15; Sermon #1291

Among a few others, one particular book of the Old Testament is often overlooked and it is infrequently used, by those of us giving sermons and writing articles, and infrequently cited. It is not something that we go into a lot. We will get to the reason for that shortly, but it is one of those things that we just do not often turn there.

I call it this “one particular book” because in the Hebrew version of the Scriptures it is treated as a single book, having been separated into two by the Greeks. The Greeks did that a long time after the completion of the Old Testament. This book, in fact, in the Hebrew section of the Bible, closes the Old Testament, acting in a way, you could say, as a summary of all that went on in the Bible’s preceding pages.

We know this book as Chronicles—or, as we have it in our Bibles, I and II Chronicles. But the Jews just treat it as one long book.

Chronicles is not the name the Jews gave it (‘Chronicles’ is obviously not a Hebrew word). They call it ‘Divrei Hayamim.’ That long Hebrew word literally means ‘the events of the days.’ So ‘an annal,’ I guess, would be okay, or ‘a chronicle’ would be fine. But, of course, chronicle is not a Hebrew word so they called it this other name. So it is close enough to what we call it—a chronicle.

The Greeks, however, had a different name for it (they seem to have a different name for everything, do they not?). They called it something very different, indicating their interpretation of what this book was all about. They called it ‘Paraleipomena’ which means ‘things omitted’ or ‘omissions,’ suggesting that the historical events that are recorded in the Chronicles were left out of the books of Samuel and Kings.

Now I am sure that when we have gone through some of these historical books, and we have made comparisons between Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, we have noticed that there are similarities between them—they cover a lot of the same ground—although we probably noticed (if we have been paying attention), that Chronicles often brings out different details.

It does not approach the material, even though it is similar, in quite the same way. And we have probably also noticed (maybe not, but you may have) that when you go through the book of Kings, you find out that they go from the Judahite kings to the

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Israelite kings. So they go from Southern Kingdom to Northern Kingdom, back to Southern Kingdom, then the Northern Kingdom—all the way through the history of Israel until the Northern Kingdom ends, with the siege of Samaria and their deportation off to the land of the Medes.

But Chronicles hardly mentions any of the northern kings. It deals almost totally with Judah, confining itself to the Southern Kingdom. But if you look at it and you would make these comparisons, you find that its bread and butter is not the omissions like the Greeks thought it was, it just takes a slightly different perspective on those events. It is not giving you any new information necessarily (maybe a tidbit here and a tidbit there) but mostly the ideas or the stories—the events—that are found in Chronicles are also found in I & II Samuel and I & II Kings. There is just a different take on the subject matter.

So, to me, 'Omissions' (like the Greeks called it) is a misleading title. 'Chronicles' is better. It is a pretty good title to use because it is a chronological account of history but with one big difference, and that is: Chronicles looks at this same Israelite history from a very particular point of view.

To this point, what we can say is that Chronicles was written for a purpose beyond just setting down chronological history. The chronicler does not want to give you just the facts. He has a purpose for the facts that he gives you.

Now, by all accounts, Chronicles was written post exile, meaning that this was written at a time after the Jews came back from Babylon (they came back in the 5th century, so we are talking the 4th or 3rd century that it was written). If you go to the end of II Chronicles, you will find that it ends with the decree of Cyrus for them to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple that Nebuchadnezzar and his troops had destroyed. So it is at least after that that it was written. If you do some forensic work, looking at some of the genealogies (there is lots of them in Chronicles), you will find the genealogy of Jeconiah, one of the final kings of Judah, mentioned there (it is actually in I Chronicles 3:16-24), which takes the time of the writing of the book all the way six or seven generations after Zerubbabel.

So we are actually getting pretty deep into the post-exilic period, six or seven generations (at 25 years per generation), 150 or 175 years after they returned. This brings the time of the writing of Chronicles sometime into the late 4th century BC. We are talking somewhere around the time of Alexander the Great—the time he came through, maybe a little bit after that. So we are getting into the Greek period in intertestamental history.

We are a long way from the events that are described in the book (because, with the genealogies, it goes all the way back). But it essentially picks up in terms of the regular history that it gives—from the time of David and Saul, all the way down through the exile. We are talking of these particular events starting six or seven hundred years before the time of its writing.

The man who wrote it (whoever it was, we do not know; he does not put his name on it) was looking back at the whole gamut—the whole period—of Israelite history and contemplating the lessons of it. He was writing at a time and from a perspective that he could come to some conclusions about God's dealings with Israel over close to a millennia of time.

He had all the records there set before him that he could draw from. He had the books of Samuel and the books of Kings. He had the Pentateuch. He had other records that he mentions from time to time—that he took this from this particular author, this particular chronicle. He mentions Isaiah in there. He even quotes from Zechariah in one place.

So he has most, if not all, of what we consider to be the Old Testament. And here he is, sitting at the end of the period, pen in hand, trying to come up with some lessons, some conclusions, some things that he could draw from Israelite history (and Judean history, mostly) to give his contemporaries some help.

So, looking at this way, we are not really looking at a chronicle per se just as putting down the events of history (in the so-and-so year of so-and-so king, this happened). What we are actually looking at is an extended sermon that uses those texts—texts that he is drawing from—as a way to prove something to you. We could even call it a thesis paper where he has all of this history, like he is a Masters or doctorate student in history, and he is trying to give you his thesis on this great wide area of history to try to boil it down to just a few themes and a few lessons.

He is trying to make a point to his fellow Jews at the time, “Okay, we are here. We got here because of this history. We're not so unlike our forefathers that we're not going to make the same mistakes. So why don't we look at this history and draw some conclusions from it and come up with some lessons that will keep us from falling into the same pits as they did?”

So what was his real point?

Now it has been said before (I may have even said it myself) that it is clear from a quick reading of the books of I and II Chronicles that it is far more theological than Samuel

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and Kings. Obviously, Samuel and Kings bring out theological points, but the chronicler makes a point of pointing out these things. By that, I mean the chronicler cherry-picks the stories that he emphasizes, and then he draws certain lessons from them by the things that he brings out (these so-called 'omissions' or these things that he emphasizes more than the others do) in order for someone of his time (and our time even now) to understand and apply. Let me give you an example.

If you would go back to I Kings 14, which is the story of Judah under Rehoboam when Israel rebelled against the house of David. Now if we go through that story, we find that Rehoboam is portrayed as a pretty lousy king who listened not to the elders who had more wisdom than he, but listened to the young men whom he had grown up with, and he made a horrible decision by giving the people of Israel even more harder tasks, taxed them harder and more vigorously.

In Kings, he is made out to be a rather cruel king, and unthinking. However, we find something different in Chronicles (yes, that similar history is given to us there but it is not emphasized). In II Chronicles 12, what the chronicler tells us (that whoever wrote Kings did not) is that Rehoboam and the leaders of Israel humbled themselves before God.

Chronicles actually turns, not completely, our understanding of Rehoboam around a bit. He gives a more balanced viewpoint of the king who let ten tribes of Israel go. What had happened is, after Israel left, Shishak the king of Egypt came up against Rehoboam and Judah, and that is when Rehoboam and the elders of Israel humbled themselves before God. And so, God, seeing their humility, seeing that they were willing to turn to Him, allowed Shishak to come still but did not allow him to do as bad as he had planned to do. So Jerusalem was spared and Shishak only took the treasuries of the king's house and the treasuries of the house of the Lord. But just notice this in II Chronicles 12:

II Chronicles 12:6-7 So the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, "The Lord is righteous." Now when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, "They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak."

It goes on to say that they would be servants there, meaning they would have to give tribute to Shishak—and that is why the treasuries were emptied.

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But you can see what the difference is between Samuel and Kings versus Chronicles. Chronicles does not leave it with Rehoboam being such a horrible person. It goes on and gives us some understanding into the man, and into God and His willingness to forgive Rehoboam even for all that he had done. Now He has still punished Judah and Jerusalem, but not as severely.

So we can get a lesson from this that God is very merciful and gracious, and that He does not want to destroy His people, and He will do whatever it takes to get them to change. But when they do change, He responds. We will see this as we go further into this.

When it is all boiled down though, what it comes down to is that the chronicler contends that God has consistently dealt with Israel on the basis of His covenantal love, and that He has blessed them when they have obeyed Him, and He has punished them when they did not. In some ways, you can say that the books of Chronicles are an extended commentary on the blessings and curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Basically, what he is telling us is that when God says that He is going to do something, He does it. When God makes a promise, He fulfills it. So we have to put that into our thinking. He shows us that when those individuals who comply with what His covenant says and seek the Lord, they succeed, while those who do not (who disobey, who put the covenant down, who will not follow it), fail.

Like I said, in effect, what he is saying here is: God says what He will do and He does what He has said. The chronicler is there giving us example after example so we can take that principle to the bank. God has given us the blueprint. He has showed us the way. He has said, "If you will do this, I will do this." That is the covenant. That is what it is, a series of "If you will do this, I will do that" and that is it. That is all we really have to understand—that if we trust His Word, if we trust what He has said, then we can also trust the consequences of doing that or not doing that.

It is not really a simple cause and effect, but it does work out in a larger scope to that end. That if we *listen* to what God says, we *do* what He says, then He is going to *respond* as He says He will respond. We can trust that. That is how we have faith in Him because we know that when He says something He means it. When He promises something, He will do it.

If God worked any other way, we could not have faith in Him. We would not know how He was going to react. And we have to understand, in our situation now—in our circumstances—He works exactly the same way as He did with them, because He

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changes not. He is a God who, if He says, “I will do this if you do that,” well, that is what is going to happen. So we can trust that and then we can believe and we can have faith.

In essence, the chronicler is summarizing the lessons of Israelite history from his perspective as a Jew in the intertestamental period, looking back and seeing the time of the Old Testament and what it has come down to in terms of there being just a few Jews left in Israel. So to those of his contemporaries who might have asked him “Why are we in this situation we are in today? Why are we so powerless and poor? Why are we in the midst of these contending empires and always getting trampled on, first one way and then another? What are we to learn from all of this?” He replies, essentially, “Because we and our forefathers didn’t listen to God, didn’t obey God, didn’t seek God, and He did exactly what He said He would do.”

He goes on, basically saying, “If we want to avoid the downfall of Israel and Judah, seek the Lord, trust Him, do what He says.”

Now Chronicles is a big book. In fact, if you put the two books of Chronicles together and make it into one book, like the Jews did, it is actually the third largest book of the Bible behind Psalms and Isaiah. It is a lot of material. It contains too much to cover in just one sermon and I do not, by any means, mean to try to cover it at all.

But to give us a taste of this general theme, I have narrowed down my focus here to consider a handful of prayers that the chronicler mentions, prayers that God answers very definitely, and these answered prayers will give us examples of God’s willingness to help us and to bless us because they are prayers that are based upon things that He said He will do. He wants to do these things for us now just as much He wanted to do them for Israel and Judah. So we can take these examples as examples that we can apply to our lives and say that God will do this for us too.

Now a lot of times in these days, as He is working with His spiritual people, His blessings tend to be more spiritual than physical. Some of the blessings that we are going to be talking about here today are mostly physical. But you have to apply them to your own life. He is still willing to give you the physical blessings, but He really wants to give you the spiritual blessings to complete you as His son or daughter.

Let us go to one that we have probably all heard of. This is in I Chronicles 4. I want to start with the first verse. I am doing this because I want you to see somewhat of his style is, the way he puts these little vignettes in. Here we have nine chapters of sometimes very confusing genealogies—who was the son of whom. I cannot figure out how he connects to this guy and the other. And there is a story he pops into the middle

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of this, like some name in here jogged his memory and “Oh yeah, I better write this down in here because it fits” and you do not know how it fits but, to the chronicler, it fits. That is how this story is here.

I Chronicles 4:1-2 The sons of Judah were Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and Shobal. And Reaiah the son of Shobal begot Jahath, and Jahath begot Ahumai and Lahad. These were the families of the Zorathites.

This is really out there—who are these people? How did these names even connect?

I Chronicles 4:3-8 These were the sons of the father of Etam: Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash; and the name of their sister was Hazelelponi; and Penuel was the father of Gedor, and Ezer was the father of Hushah. These were the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah the father of Bethlehem. And Ashhur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah. Naarah bore him Ahuzzam, Hephher, Temeni, and Haahashtari. These were the sons of Naarah. The sons of Helah were Zereth, Zohar, and Ethnan; and Koz begot Anub, Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel the son of Harum.

Now you get through all this, your head is spinning “Who are these people? Why did they name their kids such funny names?” It must have made sense to these people who were reading this book that they needed to know all these names and get them written down, and they put them into Scripture.

I do not know what it was that made these people famous (obviously, they were Jews). Perhaps he is talking about people that were actually living at the time (he skipped many generations and got down to “the people who live in Tekoa come from Ashhur; the people who live in Bethlehem are mostly descendants of Hur” etc.). These people had come back to their ancestral lands and they had started living in these towns. So he tells you all about this family of Judah. And then, in verse 9, he says:

I Chronicles 4:9-11 Now Jabez [his name in Hebrew is ‘Yabitz’; but, no, we will just go with what normal Americans call him] 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. [And then, back into the

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genealogy—] Chelub the brother of Shuhah begot Mehir, who was the father of Eshton.

Why did he do it this way? He does not even tell us who Jabez's father was, or who he was connected to. He gets to the families of Aharhel the son of Harum, and then he says: "Oh, Jabez was more honorable than all of his brothers." I guess we could say that maybe Jabez was from the families of Aharhel. I do not know. I do not know how this guy really worked in terms of how he placed all this stuff one after the other. But here is this little vignette about Jabez being honorable, causing his mother a great deal of pain when he was born. Then, when he gets older, he says this prayer. The chronicler then goes right back in to the genealogy.

This man, Jabez, is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. If he were, maybe we could figure out how he fits in here but it is not anywhere else. The name is mentioned elsewhere but it is not the name of a person, it is the name of a town. Some people think that perhaps as he was going through these towns—Bethlehem and Tekoa—"Oh, there is Jabez near there. I'm going to talk about the town of Jabez and the founder of Jabez, which was Jabez." But he does not tell us that. We have no idea if the town named in I Chronicles 2:55 is the same as the person in I Chronicles 4:9. We do not know. But the story is here.

By the way, the town Jabez, in I Chronicles 2:55, is a place in Judah. But we do not know where it was. No scholar has figured out where Jabez was in Judah. But it is associated with the Kenites and the Rechabites. The Rechabites especially were known for their keeping of a vow for many generations, that they would not drink wine, and so God blessed them for that. So perhaps this is a people of the same sort who were able to make a vow to be righteous just by strength of will or whatever. I do not know. I am just guessing because you have got to guess with Jabez. There is not much written about him.

So here he just appears without preamble, without any clear connection to what was written in verse 8. Like I said, we may be able to assume that he was of the families of Aharhel. I do not know (known to them, not known to us), we cannot say. But, putting it all together, Jabez is pretty much a complete mystery—to us and to Bible scholars.

But we do know two things about Jabez that the chronicler was so kind to give us here in these two verses. One is that he was an honorable man, and then he falls on the job again and he does not tell us what he was honorable for. He just says that he was an honorable man. It could have been that he was an honest man. It could have been that

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he was a virtuous man of some sort. It could have been he was honorable because of his wealth, or maybe his influence.

Maybe he was a leader among the Jews at the time that he lived, or maybe he was one of those mighty men of valor, we do not know. He does not give us any of the details. He just tells us this: He was an honorable man and he was more honorable than his brothers. So that is really all we know of that.

The most probable assumption though—about why he was considered to be more honorable than his brothers—is because of the prayer we see in verse 10. The prayer he made to God showed that he was a man of a certain caliber to be held in honor, because it showed his faith in God, and people should respect and honor that about him. Evidently, his brothers had not quite the same character. They were not as faithful and did not say anything like this. So he was, as the chronicler says, more honorable than his brothers. That is one thing we know about him.

The second thing we know about Jabez is his name and it means, as his mother said about him, he will cause pain. Now you would think that his mother would have called him he 'did' cause pain. But that is not what she called him. She put it in the future tense—he 'will' cause pain—as if she were making a prophecy about her son (“Okay, you caused me pain; I am going to send you out in the world to cause pain to others.”). I do not know if that is what she thought, but she put it in the future tense (he will cause pain), like he started out causing pain and he is just going to keep causing pain. So, in a way, you could say, she cursed him with that name, saying that his life would cause others pain. What a thing to strap on a boy who knew what his name meant!

Obviously, everybody knew what his name meant because here it is written in the Chronicles as something that was common knowledge. It was written down somewhere. The chronicler got it from something. Imagine what it would do to the psyche of a boy or a young man with such a prophecy hanging over him—you have been named that you are going to be a curse to others, you are going to cause them pain or harm! This (his name), of course, provides the background for his prayer. Essentially, what it comes down to is that, thinking about this, he did not want to fulfill his name, and so he prays this prayer to God.

Now, in terms of the chronicler's theme that he is trying to bring out, the first and the last parts of Jabez's prayer (actually they are not even parts of the prayer, they are what are appended to the prayer) are the most important, and that is that the chronicler says Jabez called upon the God of Israel. That is the first thing. The phraseology here, that he called upon God or he called upon the Lord, is a theological beacon or a signal (it is

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a big hint, like a billboard is a big hint) that there is something important here. It gives you the essence of his character.

What it does is it tells us that this man—whoever he was, however far back in history he was, whatever he did otherwise—had turned his life toward God. At some point he called upon the God of Israel. Let us go to a few well-known scriptures where this phrase pops up—all the way back in Genesis 12, in the story of Abraham. We are going to go through a couple here in the story of Abraham and just see what this phrase implies.

Genesis 12:8 [Abraham] moved from there [wherever he was there; I think he is at Shechem] to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

So he worshipped Him there. He sought God there. He sought a relationship with God. He sought communion with God—fellowship with God—there between Bethel and Ai. Let us go just across the page in my Bible.

Genesis 13:3-4 And he went on his journey from the South [from the Negev] as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

Here it is repeated that he goes to the same place and he calls upon the name of the Lord again. He wants God's help. He wants God to be in his life. He wants God's response to him. Now we have to keep putting this back into the prayer of Jabez here because he did the same thing—he called upon the God of Israel. He wanted a relationship with God. He wanted God to respond to him. Okay, let us go a little further.

Genesis 21:33 Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.

So, here, he goes to another place and he makes a special place for himself to commune with God, to be with God, to hear God, to speak to God.

Let us go to Genesis chapter 26 just to see one of these in Isaac's life.

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Genesis 26:25 So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

This is again at Beersheba. It says that in verse 23. But notice, in verse 24, that God appeared to him. So it was not just a one-way thing.

Genesis 26:24 And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."

Interesting, is it not, that God said He would be with him, and then He blessed him! Now let us go back to I Chronicles 4 and see what Jabez asks for.

I Chronicles 4:10 "Oh, that You would bless me indeed [that was one of the things that God said He would do] and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me [the second thing that God said that He would do, in what He said to Isaac] and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"

What the chronicler is doing here is taking us, by the words Jabez used, back to the faith of Abraham and Isaac—and we could say 'Jacob' too because he mentions 'the God of Israel.' Israel (Jacob) had the same faith, ultimately, as Isaac and Abraham had. And so what he is doing is saying that this man, Jabez, as unknown as he is, at least went about in the right manner of having the same kind of relationship with God as the patriarchs had. In a way, he is telling his contemporaries (and us as well, reading it now) that we need to go back to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to have a relationship with God, to call upon Him and His name, and have the communion with God where we can speak to Him and He can respond to us and then we can respond to Him in faith.

So the intimation (if we want to give the very least of what the intimation is here that the chronicler is trying to get across) is that Jabez at least prayed to God in a manner like Abraham and Isaac—and Elijah too. I did not go to that one. Let us go back to I Kings 18. This is an important one. I did not want to skip over it. This is where Elijah is on Mount Carmel, and he has made this challenge to them about making fire come down from heaven and burn up the sacrifice and "I will do the same and we will see which God responds."

I Kings 18:24 “Then you call on the name of your gods [he is talking to the pagan priests here], and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.”

So there is also an intimation of God doing something miraculous, something big—that God is a God who responds when we call upon His name.

The intimation here is that Jabez at least prayed in the same manner as Abraham, Isaac, and Elijah; and he obviously got God’s attention, and He responded. It could go so far as to imply that Jabez, as unknown as he is to the rest of the Bible, was a truly righteous man. He is just one of the great unnamed, until this point. Could it be that it was only just this one time that he oriented his life toward God and God responded? We do not know. We are left with a lot of questions that go unanswered.

But what the chronicler is trying to show us here is the manner that it is done, and the depth of faith and fervency, and the desire to get close to God. It produces results. God hears and God responds. Because that is the second thing that is so important in this passage. This last part that was added, after he gave his prayer, is that God granted him what he requested.

So what we have here is this cause-and-effect principle coming up, that if we approach God (we are humble; we do it in the way Abraham, Isaac, and Elijah did it), then there is going to be a response from God. If one turns toward God—truly seeks Him—He will respond to us and answer our prayers and give us what we request.

Even if we are nobody like Jabez, God will look favorably upon us if we truly seek Him. We do not have to be a David, or an Abraham, or a Moses for God to answer us when we call upon Him. We could just be little old us, as long as we are humble and we truly seek His face.

God wants a relationship with us. He does not want to hold us at arm’s length. There are certain reasons why He does, and it is usually our fault—it is our sins that separate between Him and us. But He will grant our request, listen to us, if we draw near to Him—if we call upon Him and seek His favor.

Now the request that Jabez makes there, in verse 10, is kind of immaterial, all in all, especially the first part of it. Jabez could have asked for anything good and proper and God would have given it to him—as long as it aligned with His will and all that. But

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Jabez asked for a material blessing. He asked for his territory to be enlarged. It could have been that he wanted more land, or he wanted more authority, or he wanted greater influence or whatever; it does not really matter.

Most of all, just do not get the idea that the author of the book 'The Prayer of Jabez' took from this is that this is a formula or a proof text for the prosperity gospel—that whatever you ask in this particular form, you are going to get it because God is bound to give it to you. That is not at all what this means. It is absolutely the wrong take on it. What he is saying is that if we do draw near to God and we do have a real relationship with Him, God will be involved in our lives and respond to us.

Actually, there are two requests here. Maybe I should explain here that this is written in a kind of parallel way so that the first part ("that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory") is actually one request. It is going from the general blessing to the specific ("enlarge my territory"). The second request ("that Your hand would be with me") is the general request, and the specific request in that line is "that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"

So there are really just two requests here, but they are both put together, as a general and then a specific. But the second one here is definitely the more significant of the two and it denies the prosperity gospel meaning right on its face.

Jabez asks that God's hand be with him, and that God would keep him from evil so that he would not cause pain. Now, in short, what he did here was ask for a relationship with God—that He would be with him. He uses the word 'hand' here ("that Your hand would be with me"), but it is essentially the same thing as "that You will be with me" (the 'hand' stands for the whole).

The second thing that is part of this, not just that God would be with him, but that the course of his life would be changed. You can almost say that he is asking God to grant him repentance here. That, up to this point, he lived a life that caused pain, and he wanted to change from that. He wanted no more to do any kind of evil that would cause other people pain, and so he asks God's hand to be with him to strengthen him, to help him along the way. In a sense, what he does is he asks for God to guide him in a way of life that would be beneficial rather than harmful to his neighbors.

I do want to look at this idea of the hand of God just for a few minutes. Let us go back to Deuteronomy 33. This is the prologue to the blessings of Israel that Moses gives, and it talks about God Himself at the very beginning here. I just want this one verse so we get an idea of the basis for why Jabez asks for this particular thing, that the hand of God

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would be with him.

Deuteronomy 33:3 Yes, He loves the people; all His saints are in Your hand; they sit down at Your feet; everyone receives Your words.

This gives you an understanding here of how total a relationship he wanted with God. He wanted to have God's love. He wanted to be in God's hand as one of His saints (it says "they sit down at Your feet"). He wanted to learn—"everyone receives Your words" is essentially the same thing. He wanted to be receptive to God's commands and God's instructions. So this idea of "Your hand be with me" is a lot more encompassing than we might think.

Let us go on to Psalm 31. This is a famous one which Jesus used as He was dying on the stake.

Psalm 31:5 Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

Psalm 31:15 My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me [so he wanted the safety and security of being in God's hand].

Psalm 145:16 [says here, in terms of His providence] You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

He is acknowledging God's ability and willingness to give and to provide the things that he needs for his life.

And, finally, let us go back to I Chronicles 29.

I Chronicles 29:12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

So he is asking God to be the strength of his life—to give him the help that he would need throughout his life—among all those other things that we saw in there.

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It is very interesting that Deuteronomy 33:3 is the only time this metaphor of God's hand is used in the whole Pentateuch. But it is used elsewhere a lot, in the Psalms especially. But you want God's hand in your life because God is God, He can give you everything. And it is all there, if we sit in His hand as it were—protection, security, blessing, providence. As it is mentioned in Deuteronomy 33:3, He will give all these wonderful things in spiritual terms (being in terms of saints and receiving His Word and such). So it is an awesome thing that he asks for—for God's hand to be with him.

When you come down to it, this second request here (“that Your hand would be with me and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!”) is another way of phrasing the two great commandments, that he wanted to love God and love neighbor. He wanted that relationship with God and he wanted God's help in loving his neighbor, to keep him from evil.

So this vignette of Jabez relates the basic elements of a proper response to God. And God responded with blessing. This is how God works. The lesson here in this little two-verse vignette is for us to understand that He works the same way with us—that He wants always to give us especially these things.

Let us go on. We have spent probably more time on the prayer of Jabez than I intended to. There is one, right across the page in my Bible again, in chapter 5. Let us just read starting in verse 18.

I Chronicles 5:18-22 The sons of Reuben, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh had forty-four thousand seven hundred and sixty valiant men, men able to bear shield and sword, to shoot with the bow, and skillful in war, who went to war. They made war with the Hagarites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab [they are all Ishmaelitic tribes]. And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all who were with them, for they cried out to God in the battle. He heeded their prayer, because they put their trust in Him [there is the little theological addition there]. Then they took away their livestock—fifty thousand of their camels, two hundred and fifty thousand of their sheep, and two thousand of their donkeys—also one hundred thousand of their men; for many fell dead, because the war was God's. And they dwelt in their place until the captivity.

We are talking about the trans-Jordan tribes (those that stayed on the east side of Jordan rather than take any inheritance on the west side where the rest of the tribes went). There are a few lessons in this little vignette, little scene that we can take from.

First of all, it is difficult to say when this occurred. It could have occurred early-early, like in the time of Saul; or, it could have occurred later, in the time of the Israelite kings, at a time when they could not give them any help across the Jordan. Probably if it took place at that time, the kings were weak and they could not send aid from Samaria. So these tribes were on their own to fend off the Ishmaelites in the east.

Now these tribes, because of where they were (east of Jordan, in the plateaus where they had all their sheep and cattle and whatnot), were in a position where they were probably fighting border wars (little skirmishes) all the time with the Ishmaelites who were out further east in the desert.

The Ishmaelites wanted their pasture lands, and so they would fight the Israelites there on the east side of Jordan for them on a regular basis. The Ishmaelites were very aggressive and they were implacable enemies. God said that Israel will always have war with Amalek, and they seemed to always have war with the Ishmaelites too.

At any rate, it appears that the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh decided that they were going to try to put the Ishmaelites down for good—that they were going to try to solve this problem for good—and so, as it says, they went to war. The Israelites were the aggressors this time. However, it appears that the war did not go as planned. The Ishmaelites were stronger than they thought. It seems that they were on the brink of defeat when they decided to turn to God. So they cried out to God in their distress, and He responded and helped them because they put their trust in Him. Their faith was strong. They believed that He would come to their aid. And He does.

Notice something that Jesus said in Matthew 17. You will all recognize this. This in terms of casting out a demon, but it applies generally too.

Matthew 17:20 So Jesus said to them [the disciples had asked Him why they could not cast out the demon], “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

They believed in the power of God. They believed that God said that He would fight their battles for them. And so they trusted that word, and He responded because of their belief. There is a general principle that we find in Hebrews 11. You all know this one too, not going to tell you anything new here.

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Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

And we can say that the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the Manassites here were very motivated to seek Him. They diligently sought Him and they believed His Word, and they believed that He would reward them for their seeking Him. And He did.

We find out a little bit later in the story, which we read here in I Chronicles 5, that the war was God's, which adds another layer to this here. It means that He had *purposed* for this war to take place. He *wanted* it to take place. He had *moved* these three tribes to do this—to go to war with the Ishmaelites. He wanted the result of this war to reduce the Ishmaelites for some reason (whatever God's purpose was), and so He caused them to go to war. So they were actually in alignment with God's will. And then their minds and hearts became actually in alignment with God's will and everything worked out well.

The major lesson here is that God does indeed respond to those who seek Him and have faith in Him in their time of need. The second lesson is what I just said, that God responds and helps those who are in alignment with His will. And, as we see here, He rewarded them, as it says in Hebrews 11:6, with a great deal of wealth (all those sheep and camels and donkeys and such that He gave them) for their faith in Him. So He was a rewarder of those who diligently sought Him.

It also mentions here there was an additional benefit to all this, which is found in the last part of verse 22: "And they dwelt in their place until the captivity." It gives you the sense that they had security and peace (at least a modicum of peace) for a long time after they did God's will—that God gave them rest as it were, at least from any kind of incursion from the east from the Ishmaelites. So there were a lot of good things that came out of their diligent belief and seeking of God.

What we can take from it, overall, is that when we conform to God's will and we diligently seek Him—do what He wants us to do in times of trial, battle, what have you—He will accomplish a complete victory. It is not just that He gives us what we ask for. If we are doing it right—if we really believe Him, if we are really aligned with His will—He makes sure that when we win, we win. It is not temporary. It is something that actually is a solution that is about as close to perfect as it can be among human beings.

So if we go the way God wants us to go, and we really seek Him and we really want to do His will, then the problem gets solved—not just pushed down the road, but the

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problem gets solved.

Usually, if we see the same problem cropping up, there is something wrong with our approach—that we are not giving enough of ourselves, we are not really forgiving the other person, or we are not really doing what we need to do to make the problem go away. Maybe we are not giving ourselves to God enough. Maybe we really do not believe that He is going to help us. So that should cause us some introspection here if we have had some lingering problems.

Let us go to another one. I am just going to read this one because I think the narrative pretty much takes care of itself and explains what we need to get out of it. But it is a tremendous example of the power of seeking God and of prayer, and of faith, and of unity amongst a group (in this case, the nation of Judah). But this really shows you what can happen if everybody is on the same page with God.

II Chronicles 20:1-30 [This is in the reign of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah] It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat. Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, “A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea [the Dead Sea], from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar” (En Gedi). And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. Then Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said: “O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying, ‘If disaster comes upon us, such as the sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.’ And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir [Edom]—whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them—here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do

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we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You. Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the Lord. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the congregation; and he said, "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you." And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the Lord, worshiping the Lord. Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with voices loud and high. And they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper." And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever." Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there were their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped. When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead bodies, and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much. And on the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berachah, for there they blessed the Lord; therefore the name of that place was called The Valley of Berachah [the Valley of Blessing] until this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem

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with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

Just a tremendous story of faith in God and how a humble ruler can make such a difference in the lives of his people. I do want to highlight just one point though. And that is that in this story, in this event, God required them, despite their fear, to go out and meet the enemy, as it advanced toward them, and position themselves in ranks for battle. He did not say, "Oh, okay, just stay here in Jerusalem and I'll take care of it."

He made them go out and come to the very brink of fighting the battle for themselves, which gives you an indication of how He wants us to follow through in all these things. He wants us to be willing to go out there, in faith, to fight the battle ourselves, if we had to, but to trust in Him to do it. And you probably saw the reference to Exodus 14:5 where God told Israel as they were about to cross the Red Sea: "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." He was willing to do another great miracle of that nature for them there.

So the result of all this for Judah was not only wealth and great blessing (physical and material blessing), but joy. They came back with joy. And they had peace and quiet. And the fear of the Lord was on them and upon all the kingdoms around them, so that they had peace.

One of the lessons that the chronicler is trying to get across here is that if we follow God, if we do what He says—if we have faith—He gives us not only the blessings that we want, in terms of physical and material things, but He gives us the really satisfying blessings—of joy, of peace, of quiet, and of the fear of God. Nothing could be a greater blessing.

Let us just skip to the end and finish in I Chronicles 16, which is a psalm of David. This song that he gives here (called David's Song of Thanksgiving), when the ark came into the Temple, kind of summarizes the points I have been trying to make today about what the chronicler's themes were in writing this book, so that we can get the lessons that he was trying to bring out.

If you want to, you can write down II Chronicles 32:20-26. That is another example of

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the prayers of Hezekiah that were also answered. We will just finish here with I Chronicles 16. Just notice the points that he brings out at the beginning of this psalm.

I Chronicles 16:7-15 And on that day David first delivered this psalm into the hand of Asaph and his brethren, to thank the Lord: Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the Lord! Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore! Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth, O seed of Israel His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones [just think on that one personally]! He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth. Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations.

So what does he say here? If we can use this as a kind of a template for the themes that the chronicler wanted to get across, what is he telling us? Call upon the Lord; praise Him; seek Him, seek His strength; remember His works, remember His covenant. These are the themes of Chronicles and for us. They are our proper response to His gracious calling.