TITLE SLIDE

This is my first time preaching from the book of 1 Chronicles. It is in the Old Testament. In the Christian Bible, the book is placed after 1 and 2 Kings. It is often skipped over because much of the material is similar to Ezra, Nehemiah and Zechariah. It is not a text read in the Revised Common Lectionary or the Narrative Lectionary. However, in the Jewish Bible, let’s remember these are Jewish texts, 1 and 2 Chronicles is placed at the end of the Bible, because they are their own work. 1 and 2 Chronicles is written much later than the other books and has a different intent, so should be read differently.

Another reason it is often skipped over is that the first 9 chapters of the 29-chapter book are genealogies. Boring! Who wants to read genealogies? 9 chapters worth? But, they’re significant. They track the families from Adam to Abraham, Abraham to Jacob, Jacob through the tribe of Judah, King David and King Solomon and their sons, descendants of the 12 tribes, the Priestly families and the Levitical families and the family of King Saul. These were families before the Exile of Israel to the empires that conquered them. Chapter 9 is the important chapter. Chapter 9 accounts for the families that lived in Jerusalem AFTER the Exile, AFTER the Israelites returned to their homeland.

SLIDE #2

Tucked in those 9 chapters are 2 verses about a man named Jabez. I’d normally like to read a verse in context, as I said is important last week; however, reading several verses of a chapter that these 2 verses are nestled in would require me to read roughly 35 Hebrew names. I would either dazzle you with my skill at speaking Hebrew or butcher those names, so I’ll just read the 2 verses about Jabez.

SLIDE #3

 **9**Jabez was honored more than his brothers; and his mother named him Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” **10**Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!” And God granted what he asked.

Verse 9 is about Jabez and verse 10 is his prayer. When I read this, I wondered first who is Jabez that he would get this mention amidst 9 chapters of names. It says that Jabez was honored. To be honored means to be shown respect. One translation says that Jabez was honorable. I think to be honored and to be honorable are 2 things. Someone may seem to be honorable and therefore honored, but is not in fact honorable. I think many of us could say we have seen in our days politicians who were honored but were not honorable. One who is honorable is honest, moral, ethical, principled and righteous according to the dictionary ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) – synonyms for honorable). I’d say that Jabez was honorable if God were to grant him his request in prayer so, let’s look at Jabez’s prayer.

Jabez makes 4 requests in his prayer: to be blessed, to receive territory, to have God’s hand and to not be harmed. Let’s look at each of these requests individually.

SLIDE #4

First, Jabez asks God to bless him. Jesus said just ask and it will be given to you. It’s pretty simple. Ask and you will receive. We have to ask for what we want and God will give it to us abundantly. Asking of God is recognizing that we rely on God alone for all good things. We can be specific about what we think we need or we can generally ask for a blessing, as Jabez did, and leave it up to God. God is going to give us what we need and often what we want – if it will actually be a blessing. Though, I say be careful what you ask for because you just might get it.

Not only should we ask God to bless us, we should expect God to bless us. If you don’t ask AND believe, you’ll miss out on the blessing when it comes. Or, you’ll try to work it out yourself. If you work it out yourself or don’t believe it’ll come, you may block the blessing, especially if you believe you are unworthy of God’s blessing or that He’s too busy with more important things.

Jabez’s second request was for God to increase or enlarge his territory. More territory back in the day of Jabez was for land that people returning from Exile would have wanted to claim as their own, to have a plot of land in their homeland. Today, this isn’t about real estate. I don’t think it was really about real estate in the day of Jabez either.

Territory was about opportunities. I’m going to tie this back to Jabez’s request for a blessing. God’s promise to Abraham was that he would be blessed to be a blessing and that God would give him a homeland with many descendants. These 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles shows that God has fulfilled his promise to give Abraham many descendants. In this time, God is fulfilling His promise of a homeland because the people are returning to their homeland after exile.

The third part of God’s promise to Abraham was that he would be blessed to be a blessing. Descendants and homeland were fulfilled. I think Jabez’s prayer to be blessed was that he could be blessed with territory that would somehow allow him to bless others. Territory is about increasing your influence for the kingdom of God. It was about opportunities to bless others.

This opportunity comes with responsibility and requires humility. As I said, this is about increasing your influence FOR the kingdom of God. This isn’t about being more honored, or getting more Twitter followers. More influence requires you to be honorable.

We were talking Tuesday evening at Bible study about King David and his abuse of power. We might remember that the people of Israel wanted a king so they could be like other countries. God was hesitant but finally gave the people what they wanted. He said, this isn’t going to go well. King David is the most honored king, but, at times, he was less than honorable. King David had many wives and much wealth and power. One evening, he decided to take Bathsheba in a manner that was likely against her will. It ended in King David murdering her husband. This was likely what God had in mind that would happen with a king. The beloved King David misused his power to take what was not his. In the end, God said, had you just asked, I would have given you more, but you took what you wanted without asking. Increased influence requires responsibility and humility so that we don’t misuse the power.

I’m going to treat the 3rd and 4th request together, because the requests may vary depending on how you interpret the text. I’m going to start with the 4th request. I’m going to read them in a couple different translations.

SLIDE #5

The NRSV: that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!

I’d like to read it in another translation to show you how much interpretation is done during translation from the Hebrew text.

SLIDE #6

The Common English Bible translation which is the newest translation and with the latest scholarship in the work: May your power go with me to keep me from trouble, so as not to cause me pain.

SLIDE #7

And, for John Heinkel, the King James Version: that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!

SLIDE #8

NIV: Let your power protect me. Keep me from harm. Then I won’t have any pain.

SLIDE #9

The Message: And provide your personal protection—don’t let evil hurt me.

SLIDE #10

You can see that they all seem to have the same intent. Here’s the one that doesn’t seem to agree with the others, but, provides a very different perspective. The New King James Version: that You would keep me from evil, that *I may not cause pain*!

So, all these versions have similar thoughts that Jabez is praying for God’s power, hand or such would keep Jabez from evil or trouble so that he would not be caused harm or pain.

I pray a prayer every night that began with me praying the prayer of Jabez 14 or 15 years ago. It has evolved over time. It still has the words “keep me from harm and pain.” When I started praying about this text, I found this NKJV translation. I tried for a couple nights to pray that God would help me not cause harm to others. I have to admit – it was hard to shift the focus. I felt great comfort is asking God to protect me. I lost that sense of protection when I started praying that I wouldn’t hurt others. I haven’t resolved how to change my prayer to reflect that I both want God’s protection and don’t want to harm others.

Jabez’s name means something like pain or causes pain or will cause pain. His prayer is that he will not have any pain. But, what if, the NKJV gets the translation right above all the others. What if Jabez’s prayer is that he acknowledges that he has caused pain and prays for God’s help to not cause another pain again?

What if, instead of asking God to protect us, we began praying for God to protect others from us?

So, that third request for God’s hand to be with him really depends on what Jabez was praying in his fourth request. Did Jabez what God’s hand to protect him or did Jabez want God’s hand to guide him so that he doesn’t hurt others? Why do we need God’s hand or power to be with us? Do we need His protection or do we need his help not harming others?

I want to think that Jabez was an honorable man, because of the humility I read in his prayer. I want to think that Jabez’s prayer is the prayer of a humble man who wants to do good for, not bring harm to, others. I want to read this as Jabez’s request as this:

And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, “Oh, that You would bless me abundantly that I may bless others, and increase my influence that I may witness of you to others, that Your hand would be with me to keep me from evil, so that I do not cause others pain!”

I think that kind of humble prayer is one that God grants indeed. Amen.