

FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES

STUDY ELEVEN

Jabez: The Unknown Who Became Well Known

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Jabez is like a meteor in the scriptural sky that's very dark at this time of Hebrew history.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll



To deepen your study, scan to listen.

As a young fourteen-year-old, Homer Hickam Jr. melded seamlessly into his mining community of Coalwood, West Virginia. His father worked for the coal-mining company, his mother maintained the company-owned home, and his brother played football for the company-constructed high school. On Sundays, Homer attended the company-church worship services, served by a company-hired minister.

Like Homer, each of us was born into circumstances outside our choosing. Economic or social standing, family, race, and geography all influence our life-station and our choices.

Few young people in that little town expected dreams beyond Coalwood to be realized. Homer was content to live in Coalwood and, like his peers, was destined to follow in his father's footsteps mining and hauling coal from the mountain. But then, one night, everything changed for Homer when the sky lit up with hope for a future he never imagined possible.

On October 5, 1957, the Soviet Union-launched satellite, *Sputnik*, crossed over West Virginia, and, as Homer gazed into the night sky, a bold dream was born. Suddenly, coal mining no longer appealed to him. Homer grew up to become a NASA engineer, serving in spacecraft design and crew training. His life story also became the subject of the inspirational movie, *October Sky*. A bold vision fulfilled by a bold accomplishment.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study unearths an Old Testament character named Jabez. Because of his God-sized vision and bold prayer, Jabez, like Homer, was an unknown who became well known.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jabez's life reminds us that under God's all-seeing eye, obscurity need not hinder any person in fulfilling God's purpose for his or her life. Begin your study by asking God to reveal His vision and plan for your life through the lens of Jabez's example.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When Jabez was born, Israel's kings were weak, times were difficult, and the nation lived under the continual threat of war and captivity. The nation plodded along indifferently despite Jeremiah's warning that the Babylonian captivity loomed darkly on the horizon.

First Chronicles 1:1–9:1 is a genealogical record of those who lived during these times. It contains a series of epitaphs. Reading these verses is like taking a stroll through a cemetery, looking at one gravestone after another.

Suddenly, our eyes rest upon an epitaph that draws a sharp contrast within its immediate context. These verses are like rays of sunshine in the wilderness of names and spiritual darkness.

There was a man named Jabez who was more honorable than any of his brothers. His mother named him Jabez because his birth had been so painful. He was the one who prayed to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and expand my territory! Please be with me in all that I do, and keep me from all trouble and pain!" And God granted him his request. (1 Chronicles 4:9–10)

Jabez was neither a king nor a prophet, but his epitaph speaks boldly and bears recognition. In two short verses, the chronicler captures Jabez's extraordinary life of prayer, faith, and hope. Let's examine them closer.

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Observation: From Painful Past to Potent Vision

In observation, we take time to observe all that the biblical writers have addressed in the passage, noting key words, phrases, people, and events before moving to interpretation.¹

A Hebrew-speaking Israelite reading the phrase, “There was a man named Jabez,” (1 Chronicles 4:9) would have paused at this unusual name. Check the *footnote* in the NLT Bible. What word does Jabez’s name sound like? Drawing only from his name, what might a Jewish reader conclude about Jabez’s character?

Despite his gloomy moniker, Jabez “was more honorable than any of his brothers” (4:9), which prompts two questions. First, how did Jabez get his name, according to the last phrase of *1 Chronicles 4:9*? Second, how did Jabez rise above his name’s connotation, according to the first phrase of *4:10*?

Identify the four components of Jabez’s prayer in 4:10. Record them in the lines below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Jabez’s heartfelt prayer touched the Lord’s heart. “God granted him his request” (4:10). By answering Jabez’s prayer, God elevated him as an honorable and faithful light of hope in Israel’s spiritually dark landscape.

However large his family, there was something about Jabez that changed him from the sorrow and anguish of his birth to the greatness of his influence. What was it? It was his prayer which God honored. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Rising Above a Negative Self-Image

First and Second Chronicles trace the history of Israel from the reign of David through the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the Babylonian exile. Second Chronicles concludes with Cyrus' edict allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple.

The chronicler wrote this history to encourage those returning exiles. Under God's discipline for their rebellion, the Jews had endured a lengthy and difficult exile in Babylon. Those returning refugees could identify with a man named "Jabez," because they, too, bore the pain of their past.

The text doesn't provide details of Jabez's naming, beyond "his birth had been so painful" (1 Chronicles 4:9). *Painful* may refer to the birth itself or to the circumstances surrounding the birth.

Similarly, an equally dark cloud hung over the returning Jews who were born in *painful* exile. Put yourself in their place, and in the spaces below, record the principles that each of the four requests in Jabez's prayer might communicate to them. Reflect on how the original audience would have interpreted Jabez's petitions.

Request for Divine Ennoblement

"Oh, that you would bless me" (1 Chronicles 4:10).

Request for Divine Enlargement

"Expand my territory!" (1 Chronicles 4:10).

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Request for Divine Empowerment

“Please be with me in all that I do” (1 Chronicles 4:10).

Request for Divine Enablement

“Keep me from all trouble and pain!” (1 Chronicles 4:10).

While we don't know the particulars, we can safely assume that each mention of Jabez's name was a reminder that his existence brought pain. He might have grown up with a damaged and negative self-image. Jabez's prayer encourages all of us to reach out to our God of compassion for His blessing and a new beginning.

Jabez was praying, “Long enough have I lived under these limitations and restrictions. Long enough have I operated in this tight radius of pessimism. Long enough have I filled this little space and survived as I have lived out my life. Lord, I pray that You will expand the tent pegs of my life.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A God Who Blesses

Jabez's request isn't limited to Old Testament history. We serve the same God today, and requesting God's blessing needn't be construed as self-serving. Such ambition is not wrong—it simply requires context and focus.

Jabez's primary request was, “Oh, that you would bless me” (1 Chronicles 4:10). His following three requests detail how Jabez hoped God would bless him. Let's consider four New Testament texts which describe who, when, and how God blesses.

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God's Past Blessing—Ephesians 1:3–4

God's blessing isn't bound by time. According to *Ephesians 1:3–4*, who has God blessed, what type of blessing is mentioned, and when were those blessings bestowed?

God's Heart of Blessing—Luke 11:10–13

God's heart is one of love and grace. According to *Luke 11:10–13*, what comparison is made to illustrate the depth of God's love?

God's Condition for Blessing—John 15:7–8

God has established certain conditions for people to receive some of His blessings. In *John 15:7–8*, what condition is required, and who receives glory?

God's Purpose in Blessing—2 Corinthians 9:8–10

As God's people, we benefit from His blessing. But, according to *2 Corinthians 9:8–10*, God has a greater purpose in mind for the blessing we receive, something which reflects His character. What is God's purpose?

Our God is a good God who loves to bless abundantly. If we abide in Him and if we serve as conduits of His generosity to others, we may boldly ask for His blessing in our lives!

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Over and over in the Scriptures, those whom God uses the most mightily are those who walk under His authority and for His glory. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Three Lessons and a Question

Let's wrap up our study with three practical lessons Jabez's life poses and one question.

First, *a struggling start doesn't necessitate a limited life*. Satan and our critics will try to convince you that your future will be no different than your often painful past. But God assures us that we can overcome our limitations through Him.

Second, *no measure of success is safe without God's presence*. We must be ever mindful of and reliant upon God's protective hand to shield us at every turn.

Third, *when God blesses a life, there is no place for guilt*. The Lord granted Jabez's request to broaden and deepen his impact. When Jabez occupied a place of honor as a result, he had no reason to feel false guilt. If God is glorified in our successes, we need not feel guilt nor shame.

Now, here's the question. *What large things are you asking of God?* Apply to yourself the following outline from Jabez's prayer, as you ask the Lord to remove the pain of your past and replace it with His plan for your future.

My request for divine ennoblement:

My request for divine enlargement:

My request for divine empowerment:

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My request for divine enablement:

Who knows what blessings are stored in heaven, abundantly available when requested? Lift your eyes to the night sky and dream of the future God has for you. Maybe some blessings are waiting for you beyond what you imagined possible. You'll never know unless you ask!



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I think of One whose life was also marked by pain. In contrast to all the rest of us who come to this earth to live, He came to this earth to die. His future was a cross. In fulfilling His work on the cross, He reached the pinnacle of God's plan for His life. His name is Jesus, whose mother bore Him in pain. But how wanted He was and how needed He is in our lives! I thank Him and pray in His great name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1990, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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