

How to Ask for a Wonderful Life, *Part 2*

A Study of 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Characteristic of Completeness: Discipleship

Big Idea: Use me.

Related Scriptures: Joshua 13:1; Isaiah 6:8; Acts 1:8; Matthew 22:37-39; 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-47; Romans 10:14-15; 2 Timothy 2:2

Introduction:

A. Last Sunday we began to investigate ► how to ask for a wonderful life. We're trying to find out how to seek an extraordinary life from God. We want to know what it takes to live in a marvelous, even miraculous way.

B. We began to learn about a guy named Jabez who asked for and received a wonderful life. All we know about Jabez is provided in just two verses of the Bible in ► 1 Chronicles 4:9-10.

1. We know that Jabez lived an extraordinary life because in the midst of a very long, tedious family tree, listing over 600 names in the first 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles, Jabez is the only person who warrants a description of his character. In the boring list of who was begetting who, Jabez stands out head and shoulders above the rest. Chapter 4, Verse 9 ► tells us,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:9 Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers,
...

2. We also know that Jabez wasn't born with any special advantages. In fact, we learned that the Hebrew name, "Jabez" literally means "he causes pain." In fact, ► Verse 9 says,

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

I gave a number of reasons why I believe Jabez had a history of causing pain for people, not only at birth, but also for the first part of his life. He didn't start well. He had a bad habit of making wrong turns in life that harmed other people.

In order to become honorable, he had to overcome this sinful cycle. This is actually encouraging because if Jabez turned things around after a really bad start, we can, too.

3. How did he do it? ► Verse 10 says,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel . . .

Jabez prayed. He prayed in a way that God honored. He asked for a wonderful life and God gave it to him. We know because later in ► Verse 10, it says,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . So God granted him what he requested.

4. What was in that prayer that made it so good? What's the recipe? What are the ingredients for asking for a wonderful life? The prayer of Jabez goes like this, as recorded in ► Verse 10,

^{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!” . . .

5. There are four basic parts to this simple prayer. We covered the first one last week.

I. The first part of Jabez's prayer is ► this:

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . “Oh, that You would bless me indeed, . . .”

- A. Although this may sound a little selfish, I gave a number of reasons why I believe Jabez must have prayed this with an attitude of complete surrender and obedience. One commentator writes on this as it applies to us. He says,

When we ask for God's blessing, we're not asking for more of what we could get for ourselves. We're crying for the wonderful, unlimited goodness that only God has the power to know about or give to us . . . When we seek God's blessing as the ultimate value in life, we are throwing ourselves entirely into the river of His will and power and purposes for us.¹

- B. We used the metaphor of a river to show what it means to ask God to bless us. ► Here's a photo of a powerful river. The river represents God. Imagine yourself standing on the bank of the river.

I suspect that the most common idea of asking God to bless you would be like asking God to grant you a drink when you're thirsty, when you want a little bit of refreshment from Him, just enough to help you out. That way you remain in control. You don't want to get carried away with God. But, staying on the riverbank is a dry existence. You'll never experience the wonderful life there. You'll never feel the power of His current carrying you. You'll never be immersed in His goodness. That's not the prayer of Jabez.

¹ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 23-24.

When Jabez cries “Oh, that you would bless me indeed” a modern paraphrase which captures his attitude might go something like ► this:

*I'm diving in
I'm going deep
In over my head I want to be
Caught in the rush
Lost in the flow
In over my head I want to go
The River's deep, the River's wide
The River's water is alive
So sink or swim
I'm diving in²*

That's what “bless me” means. It means I'm diving in. I'm surrendering myself to whatever God wants. I'm jumping into whatever blessings God has planned for me as I surrender to the current of his will. The current may be swift, scary, even dangerous. But, I'm going in, Lord. Bless me. Take me. I'm yours. All of me. I'm yours.

That's the first part of the prayer of Jabez.

- II. Now, ► here's the second part of the prayer that we're going to study this morning. It's just three simple words. Jabez says to the Lord in ► Verse 10,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . “. . . enlarge my territory . . .”

- A. What does that mean? Was Jabez a commissioned salesman trying to make more money by enlarging his territory? Did Jabez want a little more land so he could add a room on his house? Was he in real estate? Did he want more rental properties?
- B. We need to consider the context. Remember, Jabez was surrendering to what God wanted for Him in asking God to bless him. So, here it would seem that the request to enlarge his territory must likewise be a surrendered, unselfish request. How else could Jabez be called honorable? How else would God have answered Jabez? God is not in the habit of granting purely selfish requests.
- C. And, yet how could Jabez's request for more territory be unselfish? Well, it would be unselfish if Jabez were asking for more territory so he could do ► more for God. It would be unselfish if Jabez were asking for ► greater influence, and ► more opportunities, and ► increased responsibility in working for God. I believe that's exactly what Jabez was doing. So, after he jumps into the river of God, to say, “enlarge my territory” means in essence, ► “I want to do more for You, Lord.”

² Stephen Curtis Chapman, “Dive,” *Speechless* album, Sparrow Records, 1999.

D. This second request of Jabez goes hand in hand with the first. They don't function independently. In fact, they are two parts of one prayerful idea. Let me illustrate this.

1. The first request, ► “bless me,” essentially means ► “take me.” Jabez was jumping into the river of God's will and blessing.
2. The second request, ► “enlarge my territory,” essentially means ► “use me.” Jabez was inviting God to give him greater influence, to enlarge his impact on his world, in the advancement of God's will. And so, the ► big idea of this sermon is, “Use me.” It's a prayer to God. “Use me.”
3. Jabez couldn't say “use me” without first saying, “take me.” And, it wouldn't have made sense to say “take me” but not say, “use me.”

The ► third and fourth parts, which we'll cover later this month, round out Jabez's whole prayerful idea. And, what is the prayerful idea? In a word, it's ► surrender. He was relinquishing control of his life to God. He was abandoning himself to the will of God. ► Asking God to enlarge his territory was simply one aspect of surrendering to God.

E. ► Let me provide some historical background that I hope will make this clear.

1. In the time of Jabez, the recent history of the Jewish people would have included the conquest of Canaan, the Promised Land. ► Here's a map of the modern middle east. Now ► here's the Promised Land represented by the white border. It included modern Israel, and significant parts of modern Syria and Lebanon.

The conquest of the Promised Land was in fact commanded by God back in Deuteronomy 7:1-4. There, Moses ► said,

^{NKJ} Deuteronomy 7:1 “When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites [and the Samsonites and the cellulites and the Bud Lights], seven nations greater and mightier than you, ► 2 and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them *and* utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. 3 Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. ► 4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.

So, it was God's command for His people, the Jews to take the Promised Land, to enlarge their territory to the full extent of God's will. They were to go in, take the land, and clean house. God was very clear about that, and He even provided a reason. God didn't want the inhabitants who believed in false gods to turn the hearts of the Jews away from Him. He warned that if that happened, He'd have to take the people of Israel to the woodshed for their disobedience.

- 2 ▶ The biblical record shows that the Jews, under the leadership of Joshua, started out pretty well. They entered the land and crippled the major military powers that were there. Then, Joshua divided up the land among the various tribes of his people. ▶ Here's another map of the middle east, this time with no country boundaries on it at all. ▶ Now, here's how Joshua divided up the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel.

Joshua charged tribes of Israel to go into the conquered territories for a clean-up operation to finish the job. They were to gradually, but completely eliminate the inhabitants and occupy the land fully. By God's command, they were to enlarge their territory, step by step until the entire territory was taken as shown on the map.

3. The tribes went into their respective regions allotted to them and occupied some of the land. But, then they stopped short of enlarging their territory to the full extent of God's will. One Bible commentator observes, "The . . . tribes suddenly displayed a surprising lack of interest in receiving their portions. . ."³

Joshua 13:1 ▶ records,

^{NKJ} Joshua 13:1 Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the LORD said to him: "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed."

Indeed, the Israelites never enlarged their territories to their full extent.

4. ▶ Why did the Israelites stop enlarging their territories?
- a. For one thing, it was ▶ difficult. Some of the inhabitants like the Philistines were very tough, aggressive, and stubbornly resistant. Nobody really wanted to pick a fight with them.
 - b. And, I suspect the Israelites also ▶ lost sight of their purpose somewhere along the line.

³ Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 155.

- (1) If you'll allow me to speculate, I think the Israelites started out thinking right. They believed that God commanded them to enlarge their territory for the purpose of accomplishing God's work in the world.
- (2) Somewhere along the line, that thinking changed. When the Israelites experienced initial success and some satisfaction in the conquest, they began to think that the Promised Land was something God gave them just for their own benefit. And they became complacent. "We've already got enough land to satisfy us. We're in control here. Enlarging our territory more will be difficult; it will be scary; it'll take us way out of our comfort zone; it could be dangerous; it might not make us happy, and we just don't know what we're going to encounter out there. We don't really need to enlarge our territory."

So, it seems that the Israelites began with conviction and then lapsed into complacency. They began by serving God. They slipped into serving themselves.

5. ► One of the most problematic failures occurred in ► the tribe of Judah to the south, represented by the region in red. There, the people of Judah failed to ► displace the Philistines who lived along the coast of the Mediterranean. As a result, the Philistines and their worship of false gods caused trouble for Israel for many years, just as God had warned.
6. But, then there was Jabez, the extraordinary one. To which tribe do you suppose Jabez belonged? If you trace back from our text to Verse 1 of 1 Chronicles 4 you'll see that Jabez is mentioned in the ► midst of . . .

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:1 The sons of Judah . . .

Jabez was of the tribe of Judah. So, in the midst of Judah's collective refusal to enlarge their territory, our man Jabez stands out like a lighthouse. Against the backdrop of the complacency of his fellow countrymen who said, "we've done enough," Jabez says to God, ► "enlarge my territory." "I'm going for it! I want every square inch of turf You have set aside for me! I'll will not settle for less than all You have for me to do, all You have for me to receive, and all You have for me to be!"

So you see, to pray to God, "enlarge my territory" is not selfish at all. It's simply saying, "I want to do Your work. Give me more. Give me all that You have for me. I'm at Your disposal. Use me!"

F. How does this relate to you and me? We aren't the Israelites. God hasn't commanded us to take the Promised Land. What should we be thinking about when we ask God to enlarge our territory?

1. Well, let me ask you some questions.
 - a. Does God love you? Most certainly He does.
 - b. Does God want you to be in His presence? Yes, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ to die on the cross so that those who believe in Him could be with Him forever.
 - c. Does God know that heaven will be a better place for you than earth? Of course He does. Heaven will be infinitely better than earth.
 - d. Well, then, here's the big question: Why are you still on earth? Why? Here's the answer: God's got a job for you. He's got some territory for you to take.

What's the job? What's the territory?

2. Well, what has God commanded us as believers in the church? The territory for believers and the church has been mapped out for us by the commands of Jesus Christ Himself.

- a. In ► Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 22:37 . . . “You shall ► love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is *the* first and great commandment. 39 And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall ► love your neighbor as yourself.’”

This passage contains two aspects of our territory. Loving our God. And loving our neighbors. These two aspects of our territory are reflected our mission statement at Moon Valley. Our mission is to love God in a way that reaches another generation. In short, we say “one generation to another.”

- b. Another aspect of our territory is in Matthew 28:19-20, where Jesus ► says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 28:19 “Go therefore and ► make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

Making disciples of all nations is also part of our territory. That includes helping people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. And so, our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is discipleship. And discipleship is reflected in our vision at Moon Valley. Our vision is that more and more people would become more and more complete in Christ.

That’s our territory. That’s what we’re about: Loving God in a way that reaches another generation, and becoming more complete in Christ. If we are not surrendered to God and actively seeking to enlarge our territory in these areas, you and I are missing out on a wonderful life. If we’re not doing these things, we might as well be picking lint from our belly-buttons in the lunchroom of life. We’re out of commission. We’re not doing our job. And we cannot expect to experience the rush and spray of God’s love and power carrying us where God wants us to go.

3. Do you want a wonderful life? Ask God to enlarge your territory in each of these areas. See what He does.

“Lord, I want to do more for You. Please give me greater influence, increased responsibility, and more opportunities to love You, to love somebody else, to help people follow You. Enlarge my territory. I want to do more for You, Lord.”

When you do that, you’re opening yourself up to a wonderful life.

4. As a church family, we’re in a potentially dangerous spot right now. Why? Because in many ways, God has prospered us. We’ve taken some of the territory God has for us—enough to be tempted to be satisfied—enough to be tempted to stop seeking to enlarge our territory. We’re relatively comfortable. Things are cruising along. ► Why would we stop enlarging our territory now? The answers are not new.
 - a. It would be easy to conclude that enlarging our territory would be ► too difficult. It was for the Israelites, too. Remember?
 - b. And, it would be easy to ► forget our purpose in life and our purpose in this church. It would be easy to slip from conviction to complacency.

And especially now. Summer is here, and it's a time when many of us are spent. In the rhythm of the year, we're winding down, not gearing up. I'm tired. A part of me wants to say, "snooze me," not "use me."

So I've got an idea. I'm going to set aside some time this summer—I'm going to plan right now to seek God's face, to ask Him for some answers, to find out how He wants to use me in the days and years ahead. I'm setting aside some time in July to rest, to reflect, and to ask God how He wants to ► enlarge my territory. If I don't proactively plan it and protect it, it won't happen.

Maybe you could set aside some time, too. I'm not talking about going to a monastery for a month. Few would have that luxury or inclination. I'm talking about carving out whatever time you can—a string of mornings, or evenings, or a weekend, or a half day, or a part of your already scheduled vacation. If you're going to vacation at a cabin in the mountains where it's cooler, maybe you could decide to get up an hour earlier than anybody else every day, or stay up later, just to pray like Jabez. Maybe a long list of 600 other people will just mindlessly mark time in another unremarkable summer. But you could stand out. You could be asking for a wonderful life.

I'm going to be asking the Lord some questions. Maybe you could use them for yourself. Lord, what role do you want me to play in your church? How specifically do you want me to help Your church take more territory for You? Help me to see Your purposes for my life. What is the highest and best use of my time given how you've wired me?

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory . . ."