

WALKING WITH INTEGRITY IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY

STUDY SEVEN

The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Jabez prayed for a bold vision despite the fact that he came from obscurity. He is a classic example that obscurity need not overshadow any life.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE books of 1 and 2 Chronicles trace God's faithfulness to the Jews as He brought His people through times of adversity when enemies, like the Babylonians, threatened the small nation.

Israel's heroes, like David and Hezekiah, take centerstage in the Chronicles, but the author didn't forget the lesser-knowns. In the middle of a nine-chapter-long genealogy that seems to go on like rows of tombstones in a cemetery, he paused by the grave of one man who never was a king or a prophet but whose epitaph bears recognition.

So, in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we will pause to admire an obscure man named Jabez who, although long dead, has etched a momentary, meteoric streak across the dark sky of Israel's history.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jabez's life reminds us that under God's all-seeing eye, obscurity need not impede any life. Begin this study in prayer, asking God to reveal His vision for your life through the lens of Jabez's example. Open your heart to the possibilities that a bold vision might unveil.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In just two verses, the chronicler captures Jabez's remarkable life of faith and hope.

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)



Observation: Painful Past to Bold Vision

The first step of observation is to break the text into manageable parts. Each sentence, phrase, or even word may contain key ideas worth hovering over before moving on. For an explanation of the four steps of *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—visit "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

A Hebrew-speaking Jew reading, "There was a man named Jabez," (1 Chronicles 4:9) would have immediately paused at Jabez's unusual name. What word does the footnote in the *New Living Translation* indicate Jabez's name sounds like? Drawing only from his name, what might the Jewish reader conclude about Jabez's character?

Despite his negative moniker, Jabez "was more honorable than any of his brothers" (4:9), which begs two questions. First, how did Jabez get his name? Write down the answer from the last phrase in 4:9.



The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Second, how did Jabez rise above his name? The chronicler’s answer is in the first phrase of 1 Chronicles 4:10, Jabez “prayed to the God of Israel.” By calling on God, Jabez found freedom from the chokehold his name and its implications had on his life.

Identify the four components of Jabez’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 4:10, and write them in the lines below.

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

Jabez’s heartfelt prayer moved the Lord’s hand of mercy on Jabez: “God granted him his request” (4:10). By answering Jabez’s prayer, the Lord elevated him as an honorable, distinguished, and respected man in Israel.

We greatly admire people who come out of nothing and emerge into greatness. We’re drawn with admiration to a boy named, “Pain,” who distinguished himself among his brothers. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Rising Above a Negative Self-Image

Shedding light on the historical context helps unlock the meaning of the text. The chronicler was writing to Jews who had come back to Jerusalem many decades after the city was destroyed in 586 BC. Under God’s discipline for their rebellion, the Jews had endured a lengthy and difficult exile in Babylon. These returning refugees could identify with a man named “Jabez,” because they, too, bore the pain of their past.

We’re not told the details of Jabez’s naming, other than “his birth had been so painful” (1 Chronicles 4:9). *Painful* may refer to the birth itself or the circumstances surrounding the birth. We don’t exactly know the situation, but we can assume that each mention of Jabez’s name was a reminder that his existence brought pain. He must have grown up with a devastating and negative self-image.

Similarly, an equally dark cloud hung over the heads of the returning Jews who had been born in painful exile. Put yourself in their place and in the space below, write down the principles that each of the four requests in Jabez’s model prayer might communicate to them. Try to keep in the forefront of your thinking how the original audience would have interpreted Jabez’s statements.



The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Request for Divine Engagement

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

Request for Divine Enlargement

“Expand my territory!” (4:10).

Request for Divine Empowerment

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



The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Request for Divine Enablement

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

Jabez rose above his pain in his prayer to God. He said, “Oh, that You would come to my rescue. Engage Yourself in my life. I long for You to break through the cloud that has covered me and the pain and the shame that has surrounded me since birth. You can do that, God. I call out to You! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A Boy’s Cry to the God Who Hears

Like Jabez’s birth, the circumstances surrounding Ishmael’s birth was full of strife and pain. Because Sarai had not been able to bear a child, Abram slept with Sarai’s handmaiden, Hagar, and she got pregnant. In response, jealous Sarai mistreated Hagar until finally Hagar ran away. Read how “the angel of the LORD” comforted Hagar beside a spring in [Genesis 16:7–12](#). What did the messenger from God say to Hagar about her son? What does *Ishmael* mean?



The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, and years later, she and the boy were sent away into the wilderness. Abandoned and with no hope of survival, she put the boy under a shady bush while she walked a little further and collapsed. Both of them on the edge of death. Both of them crying.

What did God say to Hagar regarding Ishmael, whose name means “God hears,” according to Genesis 21:17–21? How did God rescue them?

Hagar could have named her son, “pain,” because of all the mistreatment that she and her son suffered. But she named him Ishmael because God hears the crying of every child born in pain. He heard the *crying* of Ishmael and the *crying out* of Jabez. He also hears our prayers forged in the crucible of our pain.

Jabez prayed to God, “I’ve been called Pain all my life, but I pray that You will be such a guiding presence and protective power, Lord, that I will outlive my name.” And God granted his request. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Three Lessons and a Question

If the painful patterns of Jabez’s past match yours, then consider the following three lessons his life models and one question it poses of us.

First, *a struggling start doesn’t necessitate a limited life*. Our critics might convince us that we should expect our future to be no different than our past. But God says to us, “You can live beyond your limitations through Me.”

Second, *no measure of success is safe without God’s presence*. We need to continually recognize and rely upon God’s protective hand to shield us each step of the way.

Third, *when God blesses a life, there is no reason for guilt*. God granted Jabez’s request to broaden his vision and enlarge his world. When Jabez occupied a place of honor as a result, Jabez had no need to feel false guilt. As long as God is glorified in our successes, we need not feel ashamed.



The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Now, here's the question: *What large thing are you asking of God?* Personally apply the following outline from Jabez's prayer as you ask the Lord to remove the pain of your past and replace it with a bold vision for the future.

My prayer for divine engagement:

My prayer for divine enlargement:

My prayer for divine empowerment:



The Integrity of a Bold Vision

1 Chronicles 4:9–10

My prayer for divine enablement:

Remember, limitations need not limit us when we serve a limitless God. Ask Him to bless you, extend the borders of your influence, be with you, and protect you. Who knows what blessings God may have in store for you!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, bless me, indeed! Enlarge my world. Broaden my vision. Help me move past the abuses of my past. Give me the courage to act in faith and go beyond the expected, so that I might serve You in a way that is only possible because of You. May Your hand be with me and protect me. In Your Son's name, amen.

