CHAPTER SEVEN

“THE PRAYER OF JABEZ”

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INTRODUCTION

Sara Japhet (1993: 110) noted concerning the now popular “Prayer of Jabez” in I Chron 4:9–10, that

The language of the prayer is difficult, a fact which is not brought out by the translation. The details are too technical for a full discussion here [i.e., in her commentary] but the point should be noted.

In this study many of the technical details alluded to by Japhet are fully noted in order to recover the original meaning of Jabez’s prayer. There are only thirty-five words in the Hebrew text of I Chron 4:9–10, including the name “Jabez” which occurs three times. Six other words appear twice; thus, the number of different words is but twenty-seven. Because the name “Israel” is a compound, there are actually twenty-eight Hebrew lexemes in these verses; and lexicographers have already recognized that twenty-four of these lexemes have Arabic cognates. A by-product of this study is an increase in the number of known Arabic cognates to the Hebrew lexemes in the Jabez pericope from twenty-four to twenty-six. In addition, corrections to the interpretation of three other Hebrew words are proposed in light of alternative cognates.

Modifying the derivation and interpretation of five of the twenty-eight Hebrew lexemes in these verses has support from interpretations found in the Aramaic Targum of Chronicles. But, at the same time, the alternative translations proposed in this study radically reshape the brief Jabez tradition from that found in the Targum, Talmud, and contemporary Christian exegesis. The differences between the Hebrew text
in of I Chron 4:9–10 and the Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions are quite conspicuous and require an explanation. My translation of the “Prayer of Jabez” follows the citation of the Hebrew text, versions, and the Targum—all of which is introductory to the critical exegesis presented here.

I Chronicles 4:9–10

New Revised Standard Version
Jabez was honored more than his brothers; and his mother named him Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” 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.

Septuagint
καὶ ἦν Ἰαβῆς ἐνδοξὸς ύπὲρ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰαβῆς λέγουσα έτέκον ὦς γαβῆς καὶ ἐπεκαλέσατο Ἰαβῆς τοῦ θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ λέγων ἐὰν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσῃς με καὶ πληθύνῃς τὰ οἰρία μου
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καὶ ἦ ἡ χείρ σου μετ’ ἐμοὶ
καὶ ποιήσεις γνώσιν τοῦ μὴ ταπεινώσαι με
καὶ ἐπήγαγεν ὁ θεὸς πάντα ὡσα ἤτήσατο

Thomson’s Septuagint
Igabes indeed was the most honourable of his brethren;
Now his mother had called his name Igabes, saying,
I have brought him forth Os-gabes [with sorrow].
And Igabes called on the God of Israel and said,
If thou wilt bless me with blessings, and enlarge my borders,
let Thy hand be with me,
and give me knowledge that I may not debase myself
Accordingly God gave him all that he asked.

Peshitta

And one of them was dear to his father and to his mother,
so they called his name My Eye. And they said to him,
The Lord shall surely bless you and enlarge your territory,
and his hand shall be with you and shall deliver you
from evil, that it may not have power over you, and he
shall grant you that which you request of him.

Vulgate

Fuit autem Iabes inclitus prae fratribus suis et mater eius vocavit nomen illius Iabes dicens quia peperi eum in dolore invocavit vero Iabes Deum Israhel dicens si
And Jabez was more honourable than any of his brethren, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying: Because I bore him with sorrow. And Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying: If blessing thou wilt bless me, and wilt enlarge my borders, and thy hand be with me, and thou save me from being oppressed by evil. And God granted him the things he prayed for.

Jabez, who was Othniel, was more honored and expert in the Law than his brothers; his mother had called his name Jabez, “for,” she said, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez prayed to the God of Israel saying: “O that you might indeed bless me with sons,” and extend my territory with disciples! O that your hand might be with me in debate, and that you might provide me with companions like myself, so that the evil inclination may not provoke me. And the Lord brought about what he had asked for.
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And Jabez was more afflicted than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez ("Preemie"), saying, “I indeed gave birth in sudden unexpected haste.”

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, “Ah, Please! would that you truly bless me, and increase my people, and your hand be with me, and that you keep (me) from sickness, to bring to naught my sorrow.”

And God granted him that which he requested.

THE DERIVATION OF “JABEZ”

The claim by Zuck (2002: 114) that the name Jabez is meaningless is erroneous—though he may well be citing one Hebrew lexicon (BDB: 716) which stated that the meaning of Jabez’s name was now “unknown.” But Zuck is correct in disagreeing with Wilkinson’s statement (2000: 20): “In Hebrew the word Jabez means ‘pain.’ A literal rendering could read, ‘he causes (or will cause) pain.’”

Everyone, however, is an agreement that the meaning of the Hebrew root יָבֵא, which appears in Jabez’s name, has been very problematic. Many commentators, not finding the root יָבֵא in their Hebrew lexicons, assumed that יָבֵא was (via a transposition of the ב and ג) a variant of גֶּבֶן “sorrow, pain, labor.” A wordplay seemed obvious once the initial asseverative קָנ “indeed,” spoken by Jabez’s mother, was read as the conjunction קָנָה “because.” This assumption was, unfortunately, widely circulated as a fact.
The translation of the name יְבֵאֵז (‘ayny) “My Eye”—rather than being transliterated as יְבֵאֵז (ya‘bes) as in 1Chron 2:55—appears also in the Arabic text of Brian Walton’s London Polyglot (1657: III: 637), which has عيني (‘aynay) “My Eye.” It is obvious that the translators of the Syriac and Arabic texts did not consider the stem יְבֵאֵז to be meaningless nor a wordplay with יָשָׁב “sorrow, pain” which appears twice in these two verses.

Jastrow (1903: 1038) cited the use of the Aramaic יְבֵאֵז (with יַבָּא as a variant) in the Targum of Num 31:22 and Ezek 27:12 for the Hebrew יָשָׁב “sin”; and Levy (1924: 609) cited the Aramaic יְבֵאֵז “erblassen, to blanche, to turn pale.” But neither of these definitions fits the context of I Chron 4:9; nor does the Ugaritic יבָּש “weapon” (Gordon 1965: 453; Driver 1971: 142). The definition cited in KBS (778) is more helpful for it links Hebrew יְבֵאֵז with the Arabic cognate يَبَذَّ “to hasten,” which appears in the Genesis Apocryphon spelled as يَبَذَّ (Fitzmyer 1966: 54, 113) and is related to the Old Aramaic יבָּש “hâte, aussitôt, haste, immediately” (Jean and Hoftijzer 1965: 202).

But the most helpful information for derivation of the יְבֵאֵז of “Jabez” comes from the Lexicon Heptaglotton of Edmund Castell (1669: 2644). He cited the Arabic عَبْص (‘abiṣa) which was omitted from the later Arabic lexicons of Lane (1883), Hava (1915), Dozy (1927), and Wehr (1979). Castell defined عَبْص (‘abiṣa) as
1. Lippitudo valde laboravit (“to be sick with very sore eyes”);
2. Quod fluit ex oculis (“what flows from the eyes”);
3. *Cùm vir plorare vult, sed occulus lachrymas denegat.*
   (“when a man wistfully begs but the tear drops do not come”);

4. *Adventus repentinus* (“a sudden, unexpected appearance”).

   With definitions 1, 2, and 3 in focus, the Syriac and Arabic translations of גֹּבְה (gvh) as “My Eye” become explicable though not defensible. But it is the fourth definition which really fits the context of I Chron 4: 9–10. When the rare גֹּבְה (gvh), meaning “sudden appearance” and “haste,” appears in a birth narrative, it most likely refers to a premature birth of a child. Therefore, the name “Jabez” would, in colloquial speech, actually mean “Speedy” or “Preemie”—an appropriate name for a premature baby. According to the Septuagint, what Jabez’s mother said was simply ἤτεκον ὡς γαβήςες, “I have born very quickly.” Therefore, perhaps with a chuckle, she called him “Gabēs”/“Jabez,” i.e., “Speedy/Preemie.” This interpretation has a ring of authenticity; whereas the alleged wordplay with גֹּבְה (gvh) “Jabez” and גֹּבָה (gvah) “sorrow”—which has no support from the versions—may reflect a late pseudo-correction in the Hebrew text once the meaning of the rare (dialectal) גֹּבְה (gvh) “a sudden, unexpected appearance” was lost. My translation, given above, follows the γαβήςες ( = גֹּבְה) of the Septuagint.

On the other hand, if the MT גֹּבְה (gvh) is retained as the most authoritative text, there is good reason to anticipate that a mother, having had a sudden premature delivery would use the multilayered word גֹּבְה (gvh) “labor, worry, pain, hardship, sorrow” when speaking about such a life threatening experience. Just as the name Jacob means “Heel,” and Naomi named her sons Chilon “Diseased” and Mahlon “Sickly,”
there is little reason to be suspicious about Jabez’s mother naming him “Speedy” or “Preemie.” But, far from being a pejorative, “Preemie” or “Speedy” could well have been a name of endearment, as well as a statement of fact.

JABEZ: HONORED OR AFFLICTED?

If means “Preemie,” then there are good reasons to challenge the traditions and translations which interpret the MT , a Niphal (passive) participle, to mean “honored or honorable.” Premature infants always—and many times their mothers also—must fight for their very lives and are constantly in great difficulty and distress, a burden to themselves and to others. Consequently, Jabez, as a preemie, would have experience greater affliction and distress than his siblings (assuming they went full term), and he would have been a burden to his mother. Thus, the MT in this context would surely mean “he had been more afflicted than his brothers” rather than his having been more “honored” or more “honorable” than his brothers.

The lexeme “heavy, weighty” permitted polarized meanings, with the nouns “honor, glory” and “heaviness, difficulty.” The verb , in all its various forms, could mean either “to be honored” or “to be burdensome.” In contrast, the Syriac and Arabic cognates of did not permit such polarized meanings. The Syriac (kabed) meant only “to move to wrath, to be angry” (Payne Smith 1903: 203); and the Arabic noun (kabad) always meant “difficulty, distress, affliction, trouble,” with the verb (kabada) meaning “he endured, struggled or contended
with (difficulties).” Lane (1885: 2584) cited as an example Sura 90: 4 of the Qur’an, “Verily, we have created man in difficulty (في كبد [fī kabadin]).”\(^\text{13}\)

Knoopers (2003: 339), aware of the polarized meanings of קבד noted,

“It is also possible to translate ‘Jabez was heavier than his brothers.’ If one follows the latter interpretation, the introduction to the tale explains why the birth of Jabez caused his mother so much suffering.

This interpretation well accounts for why Jabez’s mother used the term קבד “pain, labor” (4:9); but it does not explain why Jabez used קבד with reference to himself (4:10).\(^\text{14}\) Knoopers, following exegetical tradition, noted that קבד “plays on the name of Jabez,” but he makes no reference to the meaning of Jabez’s name itself. But the meaning of the name Jabez is the key for understanding why there was קבד “pain, labor” in the first place. Had Jabez been a big heavy (כבד) baby who caused pain for his mother, he could have been named something like Ithchabed (איחצ'ב) “Fatty/Hefty,”\(^\text{15}\) rather than #בַּי: “Speedy/Preemie.” Given the real meaning of Jabez’s name, as proposed here, it is much more likely that he was underweight at birth.

Traditions about Jabez in Talmudic literature indicate that in time Jabez became highly honored; but the #בַּי in I Chron 4:10, which compared him with his brothers, almost certainly spoke of his health problems as a child due to his premature birth. Jabez’s being afflicted in infancy preceded his being honored in maturity. Thus, a disability from birth may lie behind his request to be delivered from his פראות “sickness” and קבד “pain.”\(^\text{16}\)
FIRST WORD IN JABEZ’S PRAYER

The problem with the first word spoken by Jabez in his prayer is summarized by Japhet (1993: 110), who stated

The prayer’s opening ʾim (‘if’) is the most common conditional lexeme and could imply an oath or a vow: ‘if . . . then’. However, no apodosis follows. It is therefore an implied vow, or a case of the word ʾim serving as a wish: ‘Oh that . . .’ (so RSV). For this last usage Gesenius cites four more instances, but only two of these (Ps. 139.19; Prov. 24.11) seem convincing (Gesenius §151e).

Actually, the optative particle אָיִם (ʾaymu) and אָמ (ʾami) appearing in the expression אָיִם אלה (ʾaymu ʾlallahi) “I swear by God.” This expression is a variation of אָיִם אלה (ʾaymunu ʾlallahi). Along with the biblical examples of the optative אָיִם cited by Gesenius, these Arabic phrases provide additional commentary on Jabez’s first word.

The Arabic يتم (yumina) in form V means “he looked for a blessing,” being a synonym of تم (tabarraka) "he looked for a blessing, he was blessed.” 17 The MT וַיִּקְרָא אֲנִי (waykraʾ ani) “Ah, Please! Would that you truly bless me,” is a perfect match with the Arabic cognates يتم (ʾaymu) and تم (tabarraka), i.e., having the particle אָיִם initiate an entreaty or oath, which is then followed by the plea for a blessing (ברך).

JABEZ REQUESTED PEOPLE, NOT PROPERTY

At first glance Jabez’s request, "would that you increase/enlarge my territory/border,” appears to have gone unanswered—despite the closing statement that
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“God granted what he requested.” The only mention of a “territory” bearing Jabez’s name is in I Chron 2:55,

The families of the scribes that dwelt at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and the Sucathites. These are the Kenites who came from Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab.

Wherever the town or village of Jabez was located it certainly could not have been large or enlarged. Consequently, interpreters have taken the “my border/territory” to be symbolic or a metaphor, as Wilkinson (2000: 30) stated

From the context and the results of Jabez’s prayer, we can see that there was more to his request than a simple desire for more real estate. He wanted more influence, more responsibility, and more opportunity to make a mark for the God of Israel.

A clue to the precise meaning of the spoken by Jabez comes from the Targum, which reads,

O that you might indeed bless me with sons (בּוֹנִי), and extend my territory with disciples! (בַּחֲלַמְדֵּי) O that your hand might be with me in debate, and that you might provide me with companions (חָרָא) like myself.

Along with the “my borders,” the Targum delineated sons, disciples, and companions. A similar expansion of Jabez’s request appears in the Talmud (Teruma 16a) where Jabez prayed for an increase of borders, pupils, and friends.
In light of these expanded definitions of יִבְרָאוּל, it is obvious that the Targum translators and some of the rabbis who contributed to the Talmud were aware of a word יִבְרָאלוֹ which was the cognate to the Arabic جبيل (jibill / jubull), جبيل (jabil) “a company of men, a great company of men.”\(^{19}\) According to Lane (1875: 376) the feminine جبيلة (jibillat) signified the same as أمة (‘ummat) “a nation or people.”\(^{20}\) Thus, a very reasonable conclusion is that Jabez prayed for an increase of his people (יִבְרָאלוֹ), not his property (יִבְרָאלוֹ).\(^{21}\)

Support for this conclusion comes from the mention of the town/village of Jabez in I Chron 2:55, cited above. This verse needs to be read as an integral component of the Jabez pericope.\(^{22}\) I Chron 4:9–10, which interrupts the genealogical listing there, should probably be moved to follow I Chron 2:55, as the last verse of that chapter. Jabez prayed for a community of kindred souls, and God answered his prayer by creating in his hometown—which was named after him—a community of Kenite scribal families. And according to Jewish traditions, these quasi-Israelite\(^{23}\) scribes, along with Jabez, became honored for their devotion to Torah and its transmission. Knoppers (2003: 315) noted that “recent studies have made progress in understanding the importance of households and larger kinship groups in economic matters.” I Chron 4:9 highlights the importance Jabez gave to kinfolk, family, and community in religious matters. If Jabez’s use of יִבְרָאלוֹ had any overtone of “real estate” it was really secondary.

**A HINT OF JABEZ’S DIALECT**

Curtis (1910: 108) noted well that the יִבְרָאלוֹ of Jabez’s fourth request “is difficult to translate.” The verb
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“to do, to make” is translated a hundred different ways in the KJV, forty-three times by the verb “to keep,” which is the verb of choice for English translations here. The Vulgate has *feceris* “to do”; but the Septuagint has the noun γνῶσιν “knowledge,” indicating a *Vorlage* with an erroneous *Vorlage* for the MT מַרְפֵּא. It is the MT מַרְפֵּא which is ambiguous.

If the מַרְפֵּא is a noun with a preformative מ, it could be

- (1) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “pasture,”
- (2) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “one causing evil” (a feminine participle),
- (3) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “female friend” (like מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “a male friend”),
- (4) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “place of friendship.”

If the initial מ is the preposition “from,” then מַרְפֵּא could be

- (5) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא / מָרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “shepherd/shepherdess,”
- (6) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “female companion,”
- (7) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “desire” (an Aramaic loanword),
- (8) מַרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא “evil, misery, distress” (from the stem מָרְפֵּא מָרְפֵּא).

The Targum’s reading, “that you might provide me with companions like myself, so that the evil inclination may not provoke me,” is not a free paraphrase but a doublet for the MT מַרְפֵּא. The Targum’s מִלְבָּי “companions” is related to options (3) and (4) above, with מִלְבָּי מָרְפֵּא “friends, companions” having been read for the MT מִלְבָּי מָרְפֵּא. The Targum’s מִלְבָּי מָרְפֵּא “evil inclination” clearly reflects option (8).

But none of these obvious meanings would require the anomalous *dagesh* in the initial מ of מָרְפֵּא, found even in the Leningrad and Aleppo codices. The *dagesh* doubles the מ,
as if מַהֲרֶהַ were to be read as מַהֲרֶהַ, with one מ for the preposition “from” and the second מ being the first letter of the stem—not simply a nominal prefix on the stem. If so, the root מַהֲרֶהַ would be a variant of מַהֲרֶהַ “to be sick,” which is the cognate of Aramaic מַהֲרֶהַ, Syriac מַהֲרֶהַ, and Arabic مَرَض (marida)—all meaning “to be sick” (KBS: 637).

Jabez’s use of מַהֲרֶהַ instead of מַהֲרֶהַ may well reflect his Kenite dialect. Thus, this ninth definition must be added to the eight interpretations of מַהֲרֶהַ noted above. It is possible, given the ambiguity of מַהֲרֶהַ, to make Jabez pray for deliverance from (a) a troublesome woman, or (b) a female friend, or (c) desires in general, or (d) just evil in general. But his linking the מַהֲרֶהַ with יִבְיָכֵל “my suffering, pain” is sufficient reason for reading מַהֲרֶהַ as “sickness.” In so speaking, he provided the reader with another hint of his native dialect. (The first hint being his use of אֶזֶם “Ah! Please!”—analogous to the אֶזֶם [‘aymu] and אֶזֶם [‘ami] in Arabic, noted above.)

**SEVERAL SCRIBAL ERRORS**

The NKJ, surprisingly, has “that I may not cause pain” for מַהֲרֶהַ—as if the suffixed infinitive מַהֲרֶהַ were the Hiph‘il jussive מַהֲרֶהַ. The KJV has “that it may not grieve me,” and it remains preferable, along with those translations which make the מ suffix of מַהֲרֶהַ possessive or objective. More problematic, though, are the translations of the Peshitta and Vulgate. The Syriac has מַהֲרֶהַ.
(dēla’ neštalaṭ bak) “that it may not have power over you.”

But Syriac سلطان “Sultan”) cannot be a translation of لامض “to rule”; but it can be a translation of لامض “to be strong, to protect.” Thus, in the Vorlage used by the Syriac translators a لامض was misread or written as a لامض.

The Vulgate translated the לארשי as non opprimi “not to be oppressed,” which became in the Douay Rheims “from being oppressed.” But opprimo cannot be a translation of לארשי; but it can be a translation of לארשי “to press, squeeze, restrain, retain.” Thus, in the Vorlage used by the Latin translators a לארשי was misread or written as a לארשי.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The general consensus among modern commentators that the name ישיב (Jabez) is a variant of לארשי “sorrow, pain” does not have the support of the versions. In the Peshitta, the לארשי spoken by Jabez’s mother was translated as עמשי “My Eye,” but the לארשי spoken by Jabez himself was translated as עמשי “overpower.” In the Vulgate, the לארשי spoken by Jabez’s mother became dolor “pain,” but the לארשי spoken by Jabez became opprimi “oppression.” Similarly, in the Targum, the לארשי of Jabez’s mother became הער “pain, grief,” but from Jabez’s lips it became ריחונני “it may provoke me.” According to the transliteration used in the Septuagint, Jabez’s mother did not say לארשי “pain,” but עביו (= γαβης) —a word which was not meaningless to her or to the author of the Jabez vignette. But the לארשי spoken by Jabez became Ῥᾳπειλῳσαε “to humiliate.”
Thanks primarily to the lexicon of Edmund Castell, the meaning of the Septuagint’s γαβης and the Hebrew יִבְּשׁ ה has survived. The meaning of Jabez’s name and the source of his mother’s sorrow comes from the fact that he was born prematurely. A disability from birth may well account for the sickness and sorrow Jabez prayed about in his maturity.

As interpreted in this study, Jabez was no land-grabber or nascent imperialist who coveted someone else’s pasture land. The increase he desired was for יִבְּשׁ ה “a great company of people,” not יִבְּשׁ ש ה “borders” or “territory.” He was an outsider praying to become an insider; and what he sought for himself he sought for his extended family and clan. According to I Chron 2:55 and 4:10, God answered Jabez’s prayer, and as a result Jabez got a small town named after him where a lot of people from other clans congregated to perpetuate and propagate the Torah.

Along with יִבְּשׁ ה “people,” two other words were re-defined in light of alternative cognates, namely, כָּבָה “to be afflicted” and מַרְעָה (= מַרְעָה) “sickness.” The two Hebrew lexemes with Arabic cognates that need to be recognized in any new Hebrew lexicon are (1) אָבָה “Ah! Please!” the cognate of עֲבִי (‘aymu/‘ami), and (2) יֵבָשׁ ה the cognate of עֲבִי (‘abiṣa) “an unexpected sudden appearance.”

With twenty-six of the twenty-eight Hebrew lexemes in the Jabez pericope having Arabic cognates, the argument can well be made that Jabez and his mother spoke in a southern (desert) dialect which differed from the dialect of Judah and Jerusalem, which would not likely have such a high ratio of words with Arabic cognates.

It is important to note that Jabez prayed to the “God of Israel,” not to “Yahweh, my God.” He was not from the
family of Jacob nor of the household of Israel. Consequently, in the popular theology articulated, for example, in Deut 32:9,

כִּי חַלֵּם יְיָהוָה עַמּוֹ לֵעָכֵּב הַבָּלֶתָה

“Indeed, Yahweh’s portion is his people Jacob, Jacob is his allotted heritage,”

Jabez and his kinfolk were not a part of the blessed people of Yahweh. As a non-Israelite, though, Jabez prayed emphatically (1) that Yahweh would bless him (as though he were an Israelite), (2) that Yahweh would increase his family and clan (as Yahweh had promised his ancestors, Abraham and Ishmael), and (3) that the hand of Yahweh would be with him as it was with the Israelites coming out of Egypt (Deut 4:34, “by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm . . . as Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt”). Jabez was pleading to be included in the household of faith, a part of the blessed people of the covenant. And as noted, according to I Chron 4:10, God answered Jabez’s prayer; and as a result Jabez and his people became quasi-Israelites with a town of their own and the freedom to embrace the Torah and copy the sacred texts. With Jabez and his kinfolk the covenant God made with Abraham, “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3), was partially realized.

But Jabez’s sickness threatened his personal status as a quasi-Israelite. In Deuteronimic theology (Deut 28:20–22) sickness was a curse from God for violating the covenant. Jabez’s sickness threatened his acceptance and participation in Israel’s household of faith. In the Torah sickness was viewed as a punishment for sin. Death and destruction were the prescriptions written for sick sinners. This threat of death or expulsion from the blessed people of Yahweh was the
source of his לֶכְסָא, his suffering, anxiety, and worry” —not the physical pain and discomfort of the illness itself.

Lastly, Jabez’s nameless mother needs to be rehabilitated from being viewed as a nasty woman, who placed a curse of suffering and pain on her helpless newborn when she named him Jabez, to a lovely lady with a sense of humor even when giving birth prematurely. Commentators need to remember that, according to the Septuagint text, Jabez’s mother never spoke of her pain or sorrow. What she said was simply εξεκον ως γαβης, “I have born very quickly.” My translation on page 90 follows the γαβης (= יָבֶב) of the Septuagint, coupled with the definitions of this יָבֶב which survive in Castell’s lexicon of 1669 and the definition cited in the KBS lexicon of 1994.

APPENDIX

JABEZ IN RABBINIC TEXTS

Babylonian Talmud: Temurah 16a

A Tanna taught: Othniel is the same as Jabez. He was called Othinel because God answered him, and Jabez because he counselled and fostered Torah in Israel. An what was his real name? Judah the brother of Simeon. And whence do we derive that God answered him — Since it says: And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, Oh that thou woudst bless me and enlarge my border, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou woudst keep me from evil that it may not drive me! And God granted him that which he requested. ‘Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed’ with Torah; ‘and enlarge my border’ with pupils; ‘that thine hand might be with me’, that my studies may not be forgotten from my heart; ‘and that
that my studies may not be forgotten from my heart; ‘and that thou wouldst keep me from evil’, that I may meet friends like myself; ‘that it may not grieve me’, that the evil inclination may not have power over me so as to prevent me from studying: If thou doest so it is well, but if not, I shall go with ‘grief’ to the grave. Immediately, ‘God granted that which he requested.’ . . . This is the teaching of R. Nathan. R. Judah the Prince says: ‘If thou woudst bless me indeed’, by multiplying and increasing; ‘and enlarge my border’, with sons and daughters. (Soncino Edition, 110–112)

**Babylonian Talmud: Yoma 80a**

The minimum required for penalties is fixed by laws [communicated] to Moses on Sinai. It was also taught thus: The minimum required for penalties are fixed by laws [communicated] to Moses on Sinai. Others say: The Court of Jabez fixed them . . . . They were forgotten and then they [the Court of Jabez] commanded them anew. (Soncino Edition 390–391)

**Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrein 106a**

Jethro, who fled — his descendants were privileged to sit in the Hall of Hewn Stones, as it is written, And the families of the scribes which dwell at Jabez, the Tirathites, the Shemathites, and Suchathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab; whilst elsewhere it is written, And the children of the Kenite, Moses’ father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees. Jethro, who fled, merited that his descendants should sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, as it is said: And the families of scribes which dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Suchathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hammath, the
father of the house of Rechab; and it is written: And the children of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law etc. (Soncino Edition)

**Tosephtha Aboth of R. Nathan**

**Chapter V, Mishnah A**

Said R. Jehudah: At the time when it became known that the Temple would be built on the boundaries of Judah and Benjamin, they had improved and separated the suburb of Jericho. And who ate its products all these years? The children of the Kenite, the father-in-law of Moses, as it is written [Numb. x. 32]: “It shall be, that the same goodness which the Lord may do unto us will we do unto thee.” However, when the Temple was built, they vacated. And whence do we know that they were sustained by charity? They said: “When the Lord will reveal His Shekhina, He will reward Jethro and his children, as it is written [ibid. 29]: For the Lord hath spoken (to bring) good upon Israel.” Said R. Simeon: They were prominent men and were proprietors of houses, fields, and vineyards. However, because of the work of the Lord they left everything and went away, as it is written [I Chron. iv. 23]: “There were the potters, and those that dwelt in plantations,” etc. They dwelt with the king in his work. And where did they then go? To Jabez, to study the Torah, and thus have become a people of the Omnipotent. Jabez was a very good and righteous man: he was a truthful man and pious, and occupied himself with the study of the Law; therefore the pious went to a pious.
NOTES

1. Bruce Wilkinson’s small devotional bestseller, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2000) has sold over nine million copies in four years and has spun off multiple by-products. Reviews of this popular book have been mixed. This study does not focus on Wilkinson’s book. A few reviews of Wilkinson’s book are cited in the bibliography, including those of Clapp, Heath, Schultz, Zaleski, and Zuck.

2. The bracketed [with sorrow] is Thomson’s interpretation of the \( \omega \varsigma \gamma \alpha \beta \eta \varsigma \), which is meaningless in Greek, but an adequate transliteration of \( \text{נְבִי} \), for the \( \gamma \) was commonly used to transliterate the \( \text{נ} \). The intensifying \( \omega \varsigma \) is the translation of the Hebrew \( \text{נָבִי} \). The important thing to note is that \( \gamma \alpha \beta \eta \varsigma \) transliterates the stem \( \text{נְבִי} \), not \( \text{נְבָע} \) — suggesting that the Hebrew Vorlage used by the Septuagint translators had \( \text{נְבִי} \) rather than \( \text{נְבָע} \) “sorrow, pain.”

The meaning of \( \text{נְבִי} \) was apparently unknown to the translators, therefore they simply transliterated the word, similar to the transliteration of the enigmatic \( \text{מַרְוִי}, \text{מַרְוֹרָית}, \text{זֵלַמִּים} \), and in Judges 5:22–23 (see McDaniel 2000: 25–26, 199–201).

3. For the Aramaic text see Sperber (1968, Vol. IV), and for the English translation see McIvor (1994).

4. If \( \text{נְבִי} \) is parsed as a Hiph‘îl, it would have to be a jussive form expressing a wish, “would that he cause pain.” But the \( \text{א} \) vowel of the preformative \( \text{נ} \) probably reflects the influence of the \( \text{נ} \), which is almost always preceded by an \( \text{א} \) vowel.

5. Note that the Targum translated \( \text{נְבִי} \) as \( \text{אָרָהוֹם} \) “lo, behold.”
6. Another possible Arabic cognate of the Hebrew עصب (‘ašaba) “he bound, he drew (people) together,” which in form V means “they leagued, or collected themselves together,” with التعصب (‘ta‘āšṣubu) used in a religious context meaning a “zealot.” The feminine nouns of this stem are (1) עصة (‘ušbat) “a company of men who league together to defend one another . . . a company of devotees” and (2) עصة (‘ašabat) “a man’s people, or party, who league together for defense.” The adjective ע씨 (‘ašabi) indicates “one who aids his people or party . . . or one zealous in the cause of a party” (Lane 1874: 2058–2059). However, an לולא such with any of these meanings would not fit the context of I Chron 4:9–10.

7. Advocates for a wordplay involving לולא and need to consider also (1) the Arabic غفص (‘aflat) “he came suddenly, or unexpectedly” (Lane 1877: 2275; Hava 530), which would involve not only the transposition of the ב and ל, but the interchange of ב and ג as well; and (2) the Arabic עﺽ (‘aḏaba) “it rendered (him) weak or infirm: deprived him of the power of motion”; العﺽ (‘al‘ud‘n) “a state of the privation of the power of motion, and unsoundness, and lameness”; معوضوع (ma‘dūb‘n) “weak, infirm, crippled, or deprived of the power of motion, by disease, or by a protracted disease” (Lane 1874: 2071). The first of these two cognates suggests a premature birth, and the second one suggests a birth defect which could have done permanent damage. See the next section for a more direct indication of Jabez’s premature birth.

8. Compare Clapp and Wright (2002: 31) who proffered the name “Ouch!” for Jabez because, in their opinion, there was a wordplay with לולא, and Jabez must have been a “heavy” (‘alma‘) baby at birth who caused his mother great pain.
9. See above, note 7. *KBS* II: 864 cited the Ethiopic cognate ‘as(a)ba “to be in a bad way, to be in difficulties, to be in need.” For the trauma that a premature delivery can still cause consider the following death statistics for premature births in the USA in 2003, compiled from the National Vital Statistics Report, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (The bw in the chart below is the abbreviation for birthweight.):

- 856.8 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw under 500g
- 313.0 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 500–999g
- 59.4 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 1,000–1,499g
- 246.9 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw under 1,500g
- 27.6 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 1,500–1,999g
- 11.4 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 2,000–2,499g
- 59.4 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw under 2,500g
- 2.5 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw over 2,500g
- 4.5 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 2,500–2,999g
- 2.3 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 3,000–3,499g
- 1.7 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 3,500–3,999g
- 1.6 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw over 4,000g
- 1.5 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 4,000–4,499g
- 2.0 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw between 4,500–4,999g
- 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births with bw over 5,000g.

Disorders related to prematurity and low birth weight caused 15.7% of deaths less than 1 year old in USA 1999.

Disorders related to prematurity and low birth weight caused 23.1% of deaths for neonates in USA 1999.

(See www.wrongdiagnosis.com/p/premature_birth/deaths.htm.)

10. The " prefix of the name יִשְׁנָאָב is better read as preterite prefix rather than the prefix for the imperfect. For the preterite prefixed forms, see Moscati, 1964: 131–134.

11. Compare Curtis’s (1910: 107) statement, “His mother had given him a name of ill omen [“He causeth pain”], but he prayed that its significance might not be fulfilled and God granted his
request.” This claim that the name Jabez was an ill omen has been reiterated by many, including Williamson (1982: 59), Tuell (2001: 28), and Heath (2002: 11) who concluded, “his name is represented as a kind of curse placed on him by his mother . . . a negative spiritual force is released upon Jabez in his mother’s naming him . . . he was born under a curse.”


13. Compare the Syriac רָאָה (yiqar) with its polarized meanings (1) “to be heavy, oppressed, oppressive” and (2) to be honored, honorable, venerated” (Payne Smith 1903: 196–197).

14. Clapp and Wright (2002: 31), though had an answer to this question. They conjectured that “Jabez’s corpulent affliction continues into adulthood, meaning he needs increased amounts of food (an so more arable property) to sustain his girth and, in his anxious and hungry eyes, his very life.”

15. This artificial דבכ— (with the Aramaic מ instead of the Hebrew כ) is simply an attempt at a wordplay with the well-known Ichabod (דחא) of I Sam 4:21.

16. See above, note 7. Jabez’s כַּלֵּל, could mean he was infirm “weak, crippled, or deprived of the power of motion, by disease, or by a protracted disease.”

17. Lane 1863: 138; 1893: 3064; Wehr 1979: 48, 1299; Hava 1915: 904. For the Arabic أَيَّمِ اللَّهِ (‘aymu ‘lallahi) note also Castell 1669: 100 and 1615, “juramentum per Dei nomen”; and “בלב,” felicitas: prosperitus Benedictio: rerum copia, oppulentia . . . felix, prosper, fortunatas, 2, adjuravit, ad juramentum adegit eum petiitve ab eo ut juraret.”
18. Knoppers (2003: 316) succinctly stated, “The precise location of this town is unknown.”

19. Castell (1669: 474) also cited جبيل (jibill), meaning “hominum turba, multos, copiosus.”

20. See BDB 52 and Jastrow 1903: 26–27 for ḫ delegated “people, nation, government, gentile.” For the Arabic أمة (ʾummat) “a nation, people, race, tribe, distinct body, community, family, kinfolk,” see Lane (1863: 90) and the Qurʾan, Sura 2: 213 [or 209 in some translations], “mankind were one community.”

21. For the confusion of the ץ and the י, see Delitzsch, 1920: 103–105, §103a–c.

22. Compare Myers (1965: 28) who simply conjectured, “This little pericope [4:9–10] is theological in meaning though it may have been intended as a comment on ii 55 where Jabez is a place name. . . This is a case of prayer without a vow, which may have fallen out.”

23. According to Judges 1:16 and 4:11, the Kenites/Qenites are the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and are thereby distant relatives of the Israelites. See Knoppers (2003: 315–317) for a detailed discussion on I Chron 2:55. For the possibility that the Song of Deborah was written by Jael, the Kenite heroine, in a Kenite dialect see McDaniel, The Song of Deborah: Poetry in Dialect, 208–209, 247–251, available online at http://daniel.eastern.edu/seminary/tmcdaniel/Deborah.pdf (especially pp. 248–251).

24. For many other examples of the confusion of ב and ב, see Delitzsch, 1920: 113–114, §114a–c.
25. Castell’s lexicon was not widely available in the past, and, therefore, seldom consulted. A cross reference in *KBS* to Castell’s definitions would have been helpful. The two folio volumes of Castell’s *Lexicon Heptaglottien* are now available online at http://daniel.eastern.edu/seminary/tmcdaniel/.

26. The name Jacob should be read with what precedes it and what follows it. Compare the “Israel : Jacob” in the Septuagint text of this verse,

καὶ ἐγενήθη μερίς κυρίου λαὸς αὐτοῦ Ἰακὼβ
σχοίνισμα κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ Ἰσραήλ

And his people Jacob became the portion of the Lord,
Israel was the line of his inheritance.

These words are echoed in Psa 135:4,

פָּרָסָּךְ בֵּית לָךְ וּנְאֵרָא לְמַלְךָ

For Yahweh has chosen Jacob for himself,
Israel as his own possession.