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Echoes of Genesis in 1 Chronicles 4:9–10: An Intertextual and Contextual Reading of Jabez's Prayer

Echoes of Genesis in 1 Chronicles 4:9–10: An Intertextual and Contextual Reading of Jabez's Prayer

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1. Introduction

1.1 "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!" In this form—the quotation is from the New King James Version—the words of 1 Chron 4:10 have become stunningly popular with millions of readers of Bruce Wilkinson's runaway bestseller *The Prayer of Jabez*.[1] The enthusiasm of the general evangelical public for the book is evident not only in the number of copies sold—as of August 14, 2001, the book had sold over 7.6 million copies[2]—but also in the coffee mugs, mouse pads, T-shirts, neckties, and more that now circulate with part of 1 Chron 4:10 imprinted on them. Reaction in the mainstream press has ranged from incredulity at the book's sales figures to harsh skepticism regarding the book's apparent endorsement of selfishness in the name of prayer.[3]

1.2 Biblical scholars, however, have not shown much interest in this little paragraph from 1 Chronicles. A search of the American Theological Library Association's database yielded only one indexed article on 1 Chron 4:9–10, and that was a sermon reprinted in the *Expository Times* of 1954 from a yet earlier source.[4] Commentaries on 1 Chronicles of course mention the passage, as do essays on various topics in the broader interpretation of 1–2 Chronicles, but the attention span

varies from commentator to commentator. Sara Japhet's discussion constitutes the most serious attempt at a careful exegetical study of these verses—a treatment less than two pages long.[5] Upon close examination, however, 1 Chron 4:9–10 presents some very intriguing possibilities. Some of these have been mentioned by scholars, but remain at present in disparate contexts; others (including key lexical ambiguities) seem to have been overlooked. This article elucidates the sense and structure of this brief passage internal to 1 Chronicles, explores certain intertextual connections between 1 Chron 4:9–10 and selected passages in the book of Genesis, and suggests some possible functions for 1 Chron 4:9–10 and related passages in 1 Chron 4–5 within the socio-historical context of Achaemenid Yehud.

2. The Sense and Structure of 1 Chron 4:9–10

2.1 While it is Jabez's appeal to God in 1 Chron 4:10 that millions of Christians have now apparently adopted as their own daily prayer, the introit to that prayer in 1 Chron 4:9 is interesting and quite necessary to the sense of the narrative. Verse 9a reports that Jabez was "more honored than his brothers." This seemingly innocuous statement is full of ambiguity. No "Jabez" actually appears in the genealogical lists of 1 Chronicles, so it is somewhat difficult to specify just who Jabez's "brothers" are. This story (if it is long enough to be so called) appears in the context of the Judahite genealogy of 1 Chron 4:1–23, and "Jabez" also appears in 1 Chronicles as the name of a town inhabited by scribes[6] who appear to be identified as Kenites attached to the tribe of Judah (1 Chron 2:55). Only this vague connection to Judah is available to fix the identity of Jabez's "brothers." Nor does the narrator provide

any direct information as to why Jabez was more "honored" than those "brothers," nor by whom this honor was bestowed. Several translations, including NASB, NIV, NKJV (which Wilkinson uses in *The Prayer of Jabez*), and RSV prefer to translate נכבד as "honor*able*" rather than "honored," but a survey of the other thirty occurrences of נכבד suggests that the verb normally implies esteem granted to its grammatical subject by others, rather than a personal quality abstractly attaching to the subject. "Honored" is thus preferable as a translation, but the questions "Why?" and "By whom?" remain to be answered.

2.2 Verse 9b contains a punning etymology on Jabez's name. Jabez's mother names him יעבץ, giving the explanation "Because I bore him in עצב ('hard work' or 'painful struggle')." Jabez's name is essentially an anagram of עצב.[7] English Bible versions typically render the noun עצב here as "pain" (so JPS Tanakh, NASB, NIV, NLT, NKJV, [N]RSV; KJV "sorrow"). Japhet seems to follow this trend, and considers the discrepancies among the pronunciation "Jabez," the lexical tendency of the root עצב, and the note about Jabez's prosperity to be the central problematic of the story. In Japhet's interpretation, the transposition of the ב and צ in Jabez's name, and Jabez's own prayer to God, are both designed "to avert the name's inherent dangers." Japhet later refers to the name's "potency" and "latent intrinsic force," averted by the mispronunciation of Jabez's name, and by his prayer.[8] Elaine Heath goes even farther, and asserts that Jabez's name "is represented as a kind of

curse placed on him by his mother" and that "a negative spiritual force is released upon Jabez in his mother's naming of him."[9]

2.3 But while Japhet's interpretation has the virtue of being the lengthiest treatment (at about two pages) of the passage in contemporary scholarship, it seems to assume too much.[10] Japhet's treatment relies on the problematic assumption that the Chronicler subscribes to a notion that names *have* "inherent dangers" or "potency" or "latent intrinsic force[s]." The only other personal name given an etymological explanation in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles is that of Peleg, son of Eber, "for in his days the world was divided" (1 Chron 1:19, deriving Peleg's name from פלג ("to divide"). It hardly seems likely that the Chronicler believed that the world was divided *because* Peleg was named Peleg; in fact, to say so inverts the etymological formula.

2.4 It could be argued, perhaps, that the Chronicler explicitly reverses the formula in 1 Chron 22:9 with regard to Solomon, whose name (theoretically derived from שלום) is connected with the peace (שלום) that this verse says he will enjoy. But the example of Solomon does not really support Japhet's implicit claim that the Chronicler thinks names have "inherent dangers" or "potency" or "latent intrinsic force[s]." Solomon will enjoy peace, according to 1 Chron 22:9, not because of anything special about his name, but because God will give him peace. Solomon's name is a (proleptic) commemoration of an act of God, not itself a source of the peace in his day. Moreover, the peace to which Solomon's name is etymologically

linked is explicitly specified as a future peace; the chronological relationship between the naming (prior) and the experience (latter) is thus made explicit.[11]

2.5 Similarly, Jabez's mother specifies that it is *her* עצב, not some anticipated עצב that might attach to her son, that provides the key to his name (thus her experience explicitly precedes Jabez's naming, opposite the sequence in Solomon's case). Had Jabez's mother been worried about "cursing" her son by building his name from the root עצב, why did she not simply choose a different name? Japhet's contention that the Chronicler wishes to explain "how did it happen that a man named 'Jabez' was nevertheless prosperous" seems to further assume either a traditional or historical Jabez well enough known to the Chronicler and the Chronicler's contemporaries that his name would require explanation, but no sign of any such individual can be found outside of 1 Chron 4:9–10. For these reasons, I do not find Japhet's explanation of the narrative persuasive.

2.6 Words formed from the root עצב clearly play an important aesthetic or thematic role in this brief passage. Jabez's life begins amidst his mother's עצב, and his prayer concludes with a reference to his own עצב. Setting aside those contexts in which the noun עצב denotes a physical object (such as an idol or a jar), the word occurs in only a handful of contexts. In those passages, the noun עצב refers rather clearly to labor or toil, whether imposed by oppressors (Isa 14:3) or by the need or desire for food or other goods (Ps 127:2; Prov 5:10; 10:22; 14:23; see the related עצבון ["toil"] in Gen 3:17). In Isa 58:3 (only), the plural construct is used to

denote laborers. These references suggest that עצב is normally used to denote hard work toward some specific end. In Ps 139:24 and Prov 15:1, the noun appears in the absolute position of a construct chain; here it seems to be used adjectivally, with the sense of "hurtful" or "harsh."[12]

2.7 The sense of עצב in 1 Chron 4:9–10 is important in two respects. The first (sequentially) question that arises is the sense of Jabez's mother's explanation of his name: "Because I bore him בעצב." The only other biblical use of עצב with a prefixed ב is likewise the only other biblical use of עצב in the context of childbearing. That is, of course, Gen 3:16. These syntactical and contextual echoes resonate strongly.[13] Carol Meyers has argued quite persuasively that עצב in Gen 3:16 ought not be understood as the physical pain of childbirth, but of the unrelenting labor required even of pregnant mothers in a pre-industrial, agrarian subsistence economy, and the concomitant psychological stresses of motherhood in such a milieu.[14] Thus, when Jabez's mother says that she bore him בעצב, she is more likely speaking of the context of his birth within a difficult life of subsistence agriculture than of the physical pain of parturition. Neither type of pain or struggle is necessarily unique to Jabez within his mother's experience, but her specification of "painful effort" as the context for Jabez's story is thematically significant.

2.8 Understanding Jabez's petition in verse 10 likewise requires understanding the sense of עצב—in this case, as a verb. The final phrase in Jabez's prayer is לבלתי עצבי (the sense of which is debatable). The NKJV, upon which

Wilkinson's popular treatment is based, translates this phrase as "that I may not cause pain." All other English translations consulted (ASV, JB, JPS Tanakh, NASB, NEB, NET, NIV, [N]RSV) use some variation on "that it may not pain me"; so too the commentators.[15] The NKJV translators take the suffix as possessive (Jabez as the source of "pain"); the others take it as accusative (Jabez as the recipient of "pain"). There does not seem to be a hard-and-fast syntactical rule that would resolve this ambiguity. One would perhaps expect the suffix נִי – rather than י – for an accusative suffix, and this consideration may underlie the NKJV translators' choice of rendering. However, that expectation is hardly an inflexible rule; Judg 11:31 (among other passages) demonstrates convincingly that י – may serve equally well as a possessive or accusative suffix for an infinitive construct.[16] Nor does the use of לבלתי ("so that not" or "in order to avoid") to negate the infinitive resolve the ambiguity, as לבלתי can negate infinitives taking י – as either a possessive (e.g., Deut 4:21) or accusative (e.g., Jer 38:26) suffix. Thus the phrase לבלתי עצבי presents readers with a syntactically irreducible ambiguity. It remains to be seen what sense could be made, contextually, of each construal, and then determine whether there are any contextual clues aiding the resolution of the ambiguity.

2.9 The next-to-last phrase in Jabez's prayer, עשית מרעה, is routinely translated along the lines of "keep me from harm," reading מרעה as the noun רעה ("evil,

harm") with a prefixed מן ("from"). The translation "keep me from harm" certainly accords well with the sense that translators normally make of the immediate sequel, לבלתי עצבי (see above). However, the usual translation of עשית מרעה implies a syntactical construal that is otherwise unattested in biblical Hebrew. The translation "keep me from harm" requires assigning the construction עשית ("to make, do") + מן the sense "to keep [someone/something] away from [the noun to which מן is affixed]," or the sense "to turn [the noun to which the מן is affixed] away from [someone/something]." However, none of the other biblical instances of עשה + מן exhibit any such sense.[17] The מן in such constructions is normally instrumental (Num 6:4; Ezek 23:21; 35:11), temporal (1 Sam 8:8; Isa 37:26; Neh 8:17), comparative (1 Kgs 14:9; Jer 16:12), or—most commonly—partitive (Lev 2:8; 4:2; 18:26, 29, 30; Num 5:6; 1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Chron 2:18). None of these uses make particularly good sense in this context. The temporal sense is clearly inapplicable. The instrumental sense, "make [something] using harm [as a resource or raw material]," seems to run against the grain of the rest of the passage, as do the comparative ("do worse") and partitive ("make some harm") senses. The LXX translators apparently had difficulty with this phrase as well (or worked from a Hebrew text that contained something other than מרעה in 1 Chron 4:10), as they rendered the entire last part of the prayer "make me know that I will not be humiliated"(καὶ ποιήσεις γνῶσιν τοῦ μὴ ταπεινῶσαί με).

2.10 Either the syntactical function of the מן in Jabez's עשית מרעה is unique, or the Hebrew text is corrupt, or the phrase requires a different understanding altogether.[18] If the Masoretic vowel points are ignored, the consonantal text reads very well not as רעה + מן ("from harm"), but rather as the noun מרעה ("pastureland").[19] If thus read, this line of Jabez's petition—"make pastureland"—strikingly parallels the first request, "enlarge my territory." The possibility of reading מרעה here as "pastureland" is strengthened by the fact that three of the eleven biblical uses of מרעה ("pastureland") appear at the end of 1 Chron 4 (vv. 39, 40, 41), in a narrative embedded in the Simeonite genealogy much as the brief Jabez narrative is embedded in the Judahite genealogy.[20] Grazing lands also figure into the brief notices of 1 Chron 5:9–10 and 5:15–16, and territorial expansion is the theme of the narrative in 1 Chron 5:18–22. Reading מרעה as "pastureland" instead of "from evil" thus solves the syntactical problem posed by the more frequent reading and exposes the connections between the short narratives embedded in the genealogies of 1 Chron 4–5. Moreover, the emphasis on land in v. 10 links back strongly to the agricultural overtones of the cluster of עצב terms in v. 9.

2.11 In this perspective, Jabez's prayer can be seen as a short poem exhibiting a classic parallelistic pattern:

A If only you would really bless me

B and extend my boundaries,

A and if your hand will be with me

B and make pastureland [available] …

This understanding of the structure and content of Jabez's petition helps to identify land acquisition as the thematic focus of the vignette. However a broader view is required to explain the ambiguity of the final line of Jabez's prayer (לבלתי עצבי; paragraph 3.3 below discusses possible understandings of the sense of this phrase) and to expose the strong thematic coherence of the Jabez narrative with its literary context.

3. 1 Chron 4:9–10 in Its Literary Context

3.1. 1 Chron 4:9–10 in 1 Chron 1–9

3.1.1 First Chronicles 1–9 is punctuated by four noticeable narratives, namely 4:9–10 (the Jabez narrative under consideration here), 39–43; 5:9–10, 18–22. Each of these narratives describes land acquisition by (presumably) a subset of the genealogical line being listed at that point in the text. First Chronicles 4:39–43 describes a group of (presumably) Simeonites seizing Meunite and Amalekite territory and exterminating the populaces of those areas. The two passages in 1 Chron 5 are separated by a brief Gadite genealogical list, but they together relate a story in which a combined force of Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites attack and conquer Hagrite territory in Transjordan—an attack that is successful, not incidentally, because "they cried to God in the battle, and he granted their entreaty" (1 Chron

5:20). That each of these brief genealogically-framed narratives concerns land acquisition can hardly be coincidental, especially in light of the lack of embedded narratives treating other themes. The realization that the Jabez narrative belongs in a group with 1 Chron 4:39–43 and 1 Chron 5:9–10 + 18–22 opens up new and significant possibilities for the interpretation of the earlier passage.

3.1.2 As noted earlier, Jabez's story (such as it is) appears in the context of a Judahite genealogy, but Jabez is not explicitly linked to any other Judahites by filial ties. This omission (and the Chronicler can hardly have failed to notice) of Jabez's nearest kin raised the question of the identity of Jabez's "brothers," with whom Jabez is compared in 1 Chron 4:9. The connections between the three land-acquisition narratives in 1 Chron 4–5 suggest that at the broadest level of the narrative, Jabez's "brothers" might best be considered the Simeonites and Reubenites who acquire land in those parallel narratives.[21]

3.1.3 In turn, identifying Jabez's "brothers" in this way funds an interpretation of the sense in which Jabez was "more honored" than his brothers. The "brothers" each gained land by different means: Jabez, by asking God for it; the Simeonites of chapter 4, by fighting for it; and the Reubenites of chapter 5, by fighting for it after asking God to support them in the fight. This configuration of land-acquisition mechanisms suggests several possible interpretations of the source of Jabez's "honor" and the sense of his final phrase, לבלתי עצבי. If one takes the י – on Jabez's final עצבי as possessive (thus, עצב caused by Jabez), one might suggest that Jabez was more honored than his "brothers" because he sought a nonviolent

means of attaining land: "If only you would expand my borders ... without my causing grief." If one takes the י – on עצבי as accusative (עצב experienced by Jabez), one might take the same tack, but from a different angle: "If only you would expand my borders ... without my having to struggle [for more land]." In this case, Jabez's greater honor is not a *result of* his desire for nonviolent land acquisition, but rather that honor is *constituted by* Jabez's receipt of more land without the necessity of wresting it violently from others. In either case, it is precisely the lack of violence that distinguishes Jabez's land acquisition from that of his "brothers," the Simeonites and Reubenites of 1 Chron 4 and 5. It is also noteworthy that there is no explicit statement of *whose* land Jabez acquired as a result of his prayer, whereas the inhabitants of the land taken violently by the Simeonites and Reubenites are specified. The Chronicler seems to want to imply that Jabez acquired additional land *at no one's expense*, in contradistinction to his "brothers."[22]

3.2. 1 Chron 4:9–10 in 1–2 Chronicles as a Whole

3.2.1 Interpreters have focused significant attention on the Chronicler's overarching interest in prayer, and it is in this connection that 1 Chron 4:9–10 usually enters into scholarly conversation. Rodney K. Duke in particular has shown how the theme of "seeking the Lord" (e.g., in prayer) unifies the Chronicler's work.[23] When 1–2 Chronicles is read sequentially, Jabez's prayer introduces that theme.[24] Land acquisition (or loss) also figures prominently as a recurring theme in 1–2 Chronicles. Although the Jabez vignette does not introduce this theme sequentially

(a fight for land is already mentioned in chapter 2), Jabez's prayer is the first *conflation* of the prayer and land acquisition themes that readers encounter in 1 Chronicles.

3.2.2 Section 3.1 above advances the argument that Jabez's status as "more honored than his brothers" derives from his attempt to acquire land nonviolently, simply by asking God for it. Other narratives within 1–2 Chronicles support this thesis. Although the Chronicler certainly does not disapprove of war in the advancement of Israel's interests, and does affirm that God provides military victories, the Chronicler nevertheless seems to hold the absence of war as a higher desideratum. John Wright captures the Chronicler's ambivalence well, with respect to one of the Chronicler's heroes, David:

> God's election and David's faithfulness coalesce in David's military success. Yet it is precisely his prowess in battle that excludes David from the honor of building the temple (1 Chron. 22. 8). Victory in battle is good; rest from battle is better.[25]

For the Chronicler, David's violent land acquisition was enabled by God and was praiseworthy, but still fell short of a yet loftier ideal.

3.2.3 The story of Jehoshaphat's "non-battle" against hostile forces (2 Chron 20) further underscores the Chronicler's preference for nonviolent land acquisition (or, in this case, retention). When faced with enemy attack, Jehoshaphat prayed to God for help, which God granted; Judean territory was spared the incursion, but without the Judean army's violent participation in any battle. Rather, God manipulated the

enemy troops so that they attacked and destroyed each other. As in 2 Chron 20, so in 1 Chron 4:9–10: God responds most favorably to a plea for nonviolent land acquisition. The striking reappearance of the obscure Meunites in 2 Chron 20 after their initial introduction in 1 Chron 4:39–43 suggests more than a passing resemblance—something more like an intentional prefigurement or allusion—between the two texts. These latter texts reinforce the impression that the Chronicler has a special interest in nonviolent land acquisition by means of prayer, and support the suggestion that the Jabez vignette focuses on this theme.

3.3. 1 Chron 4:9–10 in the Biblical Canon

In a certain way, it is inevitable that Jabez—presumed to be Judahite—should be more honored than his Simeonite and Reubenite "brothers."[26] It must be so, just as Judah himself is elevated above Simeon and Reuben in the book of Genesis. While the Chronicler does not quote from Gen 49 outright in 1 Chron 5:1–2, the intertextual echoes of Gen 49:3–4, 10 are too striking to be missed. Those explicit echoes suggest at least the possibility, if not the likelihood, of two other echoes. The Reubenites in 1 Chron 5 fight alongside some of the descendants of Manasseh. First Chronicles 5:18–22 is, as far as I could discover, the only passage where Manassites are overtly connected with archery, as their "father" Joseph is in Genesis 49:24—where Joseph is said to have gained success in some unspecified hostilities by relying on God, just like the Reubenites and Manassites in 1 Chron 5 (cf. 5:2 for the explicit Joseph connection). If 1 Chron 5:1–2, 9–10, 18–22 tropes on Gen 49:3–4, 22–24, so too 1 Chron 4:39–43 tropes on Gen 49:5–

7. Simeon's violence in Genesis 34 is paralleled by the Simeonites' violence in 1 Chron 4, "demoting" Simeon and the Simeonites within the Israelite ranks. The descendants of Reuben, Jacob's "original" firstborn, are paired with the Manassites, descendants of one of Jacob's "replacement" firstborns (Joseph's sons). These paired "firstborn clans" are akin to the Simeonites in their use of violence to secure land, but unlike the Simeonites of 1 Chron 4, the Reubenites and Manassites of 1 Chron 5 appeal to God for help in their battles. They are thus "a cut above" the Simeonites, while not entirely removed from them. Standing yet taller than the Reubenites and Manassites, however, is Jabez—a Judahite who gained land simply by asking God for it.

4. 1 Chronicles 4:9–10 in Its Historical Context

4.1 The book of Chronicles was clearly composed no earlier than the Persian period of Judean history (the number of generations in some of the genealogical lists require a date in the latter half of the fifth century at the earliest), and probably no later than 200 BCE given the apparent allusion in Sirach 47 to Chronicles' portrayal of David as the inventor of temple music. Most commentators on Chronicles regard a Persian-era date as more likely than a Hellenistic-era date.[27] If the book of Chronicles was composed in the province of Yehud, Chronicles' earliest readers would surely have more readily identified themselves with the descendants of Judah than with the descendants of Simeon, Reuben, or Manasseh.[28] They may very well have seen in Jabez a mirror of their own situation: a community now perhaps in its second or third generation, conscious of the very hard work the

previous generation or two had put into forming, stabilizing, and maintaining the province in political, religious, and economic (not least agricultural/pastoral) terms.[29]

4.2 Perhaps—although here we can only speculate—the Chronicler sensed among his contemporaries a dissatisfaction with Yehud's borders. Perhaps, drawing on their pictures of the "glory days" of Joshua and/or David, some of the Chronicler's contemporaries in positions of community leadership were inclined to think in terms of militaristic expansion (not unlike what the later Hasmoneans would pursue). Perhaps the Chronicler embedded his brief stories of land acquisition in the Judahite, Simeonite, and Reubenite genealogies to highlight issues of methodology in land acquisition. Without denying that military action could be a successful means of land acquisition, and without denying that God might even insure the success of such a venture if invoked, the Chronicler may have deployed the story of Jabez as a roundabout argument that merely *asking* for additional territory, and waiting to receive it as a divine grant—manifested, most likely, as an imperial grant—as the "more honored" path toward land acquisition.[30]

5. Concluding Observations

5.1 The little story about Jabez, tucked away in 1 Chronicles 4, proves on this analysis to be rather more interesting than it first appears. The following points, at least, are suggested by the preceding exegesis.

5.2 Many observers in the popular press, reacting to Wilkinson's book, have noted that Jabez's prayer is about land acquisition. That observation is true as far as it goes,

although the prayer may be even more thoroughly about land than previously suspected. More importantly, Jabez's prayer is part of a *triptych* of stories about land acquisition, which make the most sense when examined as a group.

5.3 Jabez's "honor" consists either in the fact that he seeks a nonviolent, nonvictimizing means of land acquisition, or in the fact that God responds positively to his request for land as a divine grant, whereas none of Jabez's "brothers" enjoy such a release from the struggle for land.

5.4 The group of land-acquisition stories in 1 Chron 4–5 echo Genesis' stories and sayings about the relative prominence of Jacob's sons and the reasons their relative "ranks" did not mirror their putative birth order. Similarly, Jabez's mother's explanation of her son's name echoes Gen 3. The Chronicler may be using the Jabez story and the other land-acquisition stories to show (whether accurately or fictively is open to debate) how the interpersonal dynamics in certain key parts of the book of Genesis "played out" in later Israelite and Judean collective experience.

5.5 In terms of its literary function, 1 Chron 4:9–10 introduces the theme of seeking the Lord in prayer, and combines that theme with the theme of land acquisition or retention (already introduced in 1 Chron 2). Jabez's story may be compared to a motif within an overture to the Chronciler's work.

5.6 In terms of its social function, the Chronicler's intention for 1 Chron 4:9–10 may have been to encourage the Jews of Yehud to rely on divine and/or imperial land grants and resist any temptation to militaristic, nationalistic territorial expansion.

5.7 Perhaps 1 Chronicles 4 is not really quite as dreadfully dull as journalists think biblical scholars think it is.

6. Endnotes

[1] Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2000).

[2] Roy Rivenburg, "A Phenomenon of Biblical Proportions: How a Minor Old Testament Figure Became a Magnet for the Faithful and a Marketing Miracle," *Los Angeles Times* (August 14, 2001): 5.1.

[3] Such responses are rightly elicited by passages like: "If Jabez had worked on Wall Street, he might have prayed, 'Lord, increase the value of my investment portfolios.' When I talk to presidents of companies, I often talk to them about this particular mind-set. When Christian executives ask me, 'Is it right for me to ask God for more business?' my response is, 'Absolutely!'" (Wilkinson, 31).

[4] B. L. Manning, "Jabez and His Sorrow," *Expository Times* 65 (1954): 155–6.

[5] Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 109–10. Elaine Heath's treatment ("Jabez: A Man Named Pain: An Integrative Hermeneutical Exercise," *Ashland Theological Journal* 33 [2001] 7–16) devotes about one printed page (11) to the basic internal sense of the story. Larry Pechawer's book *The Lost Prayer of Jabez* (Joplin: Mireh, 2001) appeared too late for me to examine Pechawer's argument in its printed form. In personal correspondence with Pechawer, I learned that his book advances (for a mass market) an argument similar to the one presented in this article for the translation of עשית מרעה in 1 Chron 4:10.

[6] Or perhaps "Sepherites," if ספרים is a gentilic here rather than the common noun "scribes."

[7] No root עבץ is attested in biblical Hebrew.

[8] Japhet, 109, 110; cf. Samuel E. Balentine, 'You Can't Pray a Lie': Truth *and* Fiction in the Prayers of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth Hoglund, and Steven L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 261; Edward Curtis Lewis and Albert Alonzo Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 107. Japhet alone really *develops* the argument; the other authors cited here seem merely to *assume* it.

[9] Heath, 11.

[10] Excluding Pechawer's book, which I have not had the opportunity to examine and which, I am given to understand, is addressed primarily to popular audiences.

[11] The Chronicler also puns on Jehoshaphat's name in 2 Chron 19:8, where Jehoshaphat appoints judges (משפטים), but does not present this pun as an etymological link.

[12] In Ps 139.24, "way of עצב" stands in antithetical parallelism to "everlasting way"; in Prov 15.1, "word of עצב" stands in antithetical parallelism to "a gentle answer."

[13] So too Japhet, 109.

[14] Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 108. Meyers reaches her conclusion after a careful semantic and

syntactical analysis of הרה "to be(come) pregnant" and ילד "to bear; to be(come) a parent." The phrase עצבונך והרנך in Gen 3:16 has often been taken as a hendiadys referring to "pangs in childbearing" (e.g., JPS Tanakh, NET, NRSV, and the majority of modern critical commentators on Genesis). Meyers herself (100–101; 103) addresses and rejects the possibility of hendiadys. To her arguments, which need not be repeated here, could be added the objection that the more common rendering tends to *begin* with the assumption that the phrase is a hendiadys, and then to make the lexical sense of the words fit as best they can, rather than beginning with the semantic range of the individual words and then considering whether a hendiadys formed from those two words makes sense in the immediate context. So, for example, the textual note in the NET Bible reads: "The two words form a hendiadys … 'Conception,' if the correct meaning of the noun, must be figurative here since there is no pain in conception; it is a synecdoche, representing the entire process of childbirth and child rearing from the very start." Thus the translators allow syntax to trump semantics.

The parallel phrase in Gen 3:16, בעצב תלדי בנים — the point of contact with 1 Chron 4:9–10 — seems more obviously to refer to actual pain of parturition, but Meyers argues that this conclusion derives from a failure to perceive the nuances of the syntax of ילד. According to Meyers, "when the verb *yld* is intransitive, it normally denotes the birth process; but when it is used transitively, it refers to the status of parenthood" (106). Meyers represents this only as a "tendency," so the case should not be

overstated, but the possibility of these two nuances can easily be demonstrated by passages that Meyers herself does not cite. Jer 30:6 asks whether a male can "bear" (intransitive ילד); that the expected answer is "no" is clarified by the following sentence, which compares every man to a "woman in labor" (יולדה). This verse shows that ילד can be used intransitively with the sense "give birth." On the other hand, Ezek 18:10 refers to a man who "fathers" a violent son (והוליד בן־פריץ). In the context of Ezek 18, the son's violence cannot reasonably be thought something intrauterine or even an inbred propensity, for it is subject to change according to the son's responses to other individuals' behavior (his father's lifestyle, the prophetic word, and so on). This verse thus shows that ילד can be used transitively in the social or interpersonal sense "to be a parent" rather than the merely biological sense "to give birth to a child" or "to inseminate" (as appropriate to each biological sex). These examples, and Meyers' own, at least open the possibility (even though I do not think they clinch the case) that ילד in Gen 3:16 refers to the social role of parenting rather than the biological role of giving birth.

Even rejecting Meyers' arguments regarding the syntax of ילד does not commit one to reading בעצב תלדי בנים as "you will experience pain when you bear children." Here the semantic range of עצב restricts the range of interpretation, while the syntax of ב opens up the range of possibilities. The ב prefixed to עצב need not indicate

that עצב is an experience that *accompanies* or *results from* the childbearing; it could just as easily indicate that the עצב defines the *context for* the childbearing. As argued in paragraph 2.4 of this article, עצב normally refers to the activity of manual labor, not to physical pain. If Gen 3:16 uses עצב to refer to physical pain, it is using the term in an unusual way. The unmistakable affinity between עצב and עצבון in Gen 3:16 and the explicit association of עצבון with agricultural labor in Gen 3:17 well support Meyers' thesis.

[15] Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles* (Word Biblical Commentary 14; Waco: Word, 1986), 56; Jacob M. Myers, *I Chronicles: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 12; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 23.

[16] לקראתי שובי "to meet me [accusative] when I return [possessive]." Cf. GKC § 115c.

[17] D. Winton Thomas has suggested that lexicographers should recognize a distinct עשה II ("to turn") in biblical Hebrew, cognate to Arabic ʿashā "to turn" ("Translating Hebrew ʿāsāh," *Bible Translator* 17 [1966], 192–193. (Thomas's עשה II ["to turn"] should not be confused with the עשה II ["to be hairy"] listed in Gesenius' lexicon, nor with BDB's עשה II "to press, squeeze." References to עשה II throughout this footnote follow Thomas's nomenclature.) Thomas cites 1 Chron 4:10 as an example, translating it, "… and thou turnest thyself (ʿāsīṯā) from evil so as not to vex me." Thomas does not provide

specific arguments for reading עשה as his proposed עשה II here, so his brief and implicit arguments related to the four other instances he cites (which apparently provide an *exhaustive* list of the occurrences of the putative עשה II) must be examined carefully before the strength of his suggestion related to 1 Chron 4:10 may be assessed.

In short, Thomas seems to rely chiefly on parallelistic word-pairs and ancient versions to support his claim for עשה II in 1 Sam 14:32; 1 Kings 20:40; Job 23:9. He foregrounds the ancient versions with regard to 1 Sam 14:32 and 1 Kings 20:40. In both of these instances, the Septuagint, targums, and other ancient versions understand עשה to mean "to turn." These two verses do provide some support for Thomas's proposal for the existence of an עשה II. However, the LXX does *not* support reading עשה in 1 Chron 4:10 as this עשה II, as the translators attempted to render עשה there with a form of ποιέω "to make, to do" (see paragraph 2.3 in the main text of this article). The same is true for Ruth 2:19, Thomas's other putative example of עשה II.

Thomas relies chiefly on parallelism in Job 23:9, where עשה is parallel to עטף, which Thomas renders "to turn aside." Yet עטף it itself a problematic term, renderable by "to turn aside" but also by "to cover [oneself]." Arguments could be advanced for each of the possible sense of עטף here, and a corresponding nuance or analysis of עשה could be adduced (n.b. Thomas's own demonstration of the sense "to cover" for עשה [190–192]). This flexibility in the language of Job 23:9 restricts the value of that verse for

determining the sense of עשה in 1 Chron 4:10. Nevertheless, Thomas's use of parallelism as a tool for gauging the sense of עשה in Job 23:9 helps to evaluate his suggestions with regard to 1 Chron 4:10 and also Ruth 2:19.

In Ruth 2:19, Naomi asks, "Where did you glean today, and where did you עשה?" Although Thomas argues for reading עשה here as his עשה II "to turn," the more familiar עשה "to work" would seem to be a better semantic parallel to לקט "to glean." "Work" certainly fits better in the other two instances of עשה in the same verse, where they are accompanied by עמו, "with him." "She told her mother the name of the man with whom she had turned, saying, 'The name of the man with whom I turned today is Boaz'" does not make very good sense; Ruth did not accompany Boaz anywhere. (In 1 Sam 14:32, אל is used to mark the "direction" of the "turning" denoted by עשה II there, if Thomas's analysis of that sentence is correct.) "She told her mother the name of the man with whom she worked" does, however, make fine sense.

In sum, while biblical Hebrew *may* have an עשה II "to turn" as Thomas suggests, only 1 Sam 14:32 and 1 Kings 20:40 are really good candidates for verses demonstrating this usage (and that on the basis of the versions). Thomas's own implicit touchstones, parallelism and the versions, themselves create skepticism about reading עשה in Ruth 2:19 as עשה II, and the ambiguity in Job 23:9 renders it almost useless in the discussion. Finally, with regard to 1 Chron 4:10 itself, the LXX (ποιέω) and the internal parallelism

strongly speak against Thomas's proposal for the end of Jabez's prayer (see paragraphs 2.4–2.5 of this essay for a more complete analysis of the internal parallelism).

[18] The BHS editors suggest inserting ישועתי after עשית, speculating that ישועתי might have dropped out through some species of haplography. However, they present no manuscript evidence for such an omission, and the cross-reference they offer, Isa 26.18 (ישועת בל־נעשה ארץ) is not a strong parallel.

[19] Curtis and Madsen indicate that this reading "has been suggested," but they do not say who has suggested it. Their opinion, unsupported by any argumentation, is "Better retain M[T]" (108).

[20] The similarly spelled and synonymous מרעית occurs ten times; מגרש is much more common.

[21] Cf. Simon J. De Vries's comment: "The ANECDOTE is a private, biographical report of an important event in the life of a person, in this case a certain Jabez; but this anecdote has been turned into an ETIOLOGY for this person's clan. … 'Jabez was/became more important than his brothers/brother clans'" (*1 and 2 Chronicles* [FOTL 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 47).

[22] So too John W. Wright, "The Fight for Peace: Narrative and History in the Battle Accounts in Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund, and Steven L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 153. By attributing to Jabez's prayer "the principle of military success/failure," Rodney K. Duke seems to overlook or elide this fundamental contrast

between Jabez and his "brothers" (*The Persuasive Appeal of the Chronicler: A Rhetorical Analysis* [JSOTSup 88; Bible and Literature 25; Sheffield: Almond, 1990], 79). Whether this "victimless" land acquisition is realistic in Jabez's implied socio-historical context deserves some attention, and the question might serve as the impetus for an ethically-oriented deconstruction of the passage.

[23] Duke's *Persuasive Appeal* is dedicated to advancing this argument; cf. Balentine.

[24] Duke, 56, 126 n. 1, 159.

[25] Wright, 158. Wright's entire article focuses on this ambivalence. Cf. William Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History* (JSOTSup 160; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 64–65.

[26] Not all interpreters would agree that the Chronicler presents Jabez as Judahite. De Vries gets the "impression … that Jabez may be a convert" (48); if so, the Chronicler may want readers to perceive Jabez's relationship to the tribe of Judah on analogy with that of the Kenizzite groups named immediately following the Jabez vignette. Even if this is the case, both Jabez and the Kenizzites listed are firmly embedded within the larger setting of the tribe of Judah. Balentine's identification of Jabez as an *ancestor* of Judah seems to be a mere misstatement (261).

[27] So Peter Ackroyd, *The Chronicler in His Age* (JSOTSup 101; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 8–10; Japhet, 24, 27–28; Judson R. Shaver, *Torah and the Chronicler's History Work* (Brown Judaic Studies 196; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 71–2; H.G.M.

Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1982), 16.

[28] I use the forms "Yehud" and "Yehudian" to provide chronological specificity and to distinguish the Persian province from the kingdom that occupied roughly the same territory in the seventh century BCE and earlier.

[29] For later Yehudians' cultural memory of such struggles as significant obstacles to the first generation or two of Yehudians, see (*inter alia*) Ezra 4–6; Hag 2.10–19; Mal 3.6–12. The identification of a typological or allegorical identification of the Yehudians with Jabez is the substance of Cooper's remarks briefly quoted in Goodstein's *New York Times* article.

[30] On the tendency of some biblical texts to closely associate, if not conflate, the will of the Persian king with the will of God, see R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah* (Semeia Studies 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 183–184. On the province of Yehud as an imperial grant, see Heard, 19–20 and the literature cited there.