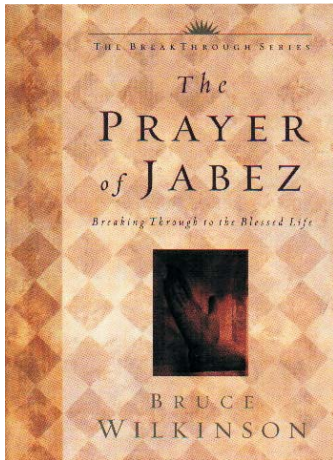

Media Spotlight Book Review



The Prayer of Jabez Does It Really Work?

Authored by Bruce H. Wilkinson - Reviewed by Albert James Dager

With less than one hundred small pages, Bruce Wilkinson, founder and president of Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, has taken the Christian community by storm. In his book, *The Prayer of Jabez* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publications), Wilkinson offers what he says is a new discovery for effective prayer. By praying the prayer that Jabez prayed, Wilkinson claims, we can receive abundant blessings God longs to give us.

The man Jabez is found in two short verses of 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, midst the genealogy of King David. Between Coz who begat Anub and Zobebah, and Chelub who begat Mehir, we find Jabez. He just appears out of nowhere; there is no mention of who begat him, or whom he begat. He's just there:

And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow.

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested. (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)

No praise is given to anyone else in the genealogy; only Jabez is so honored by God. This has prompted Wilkinson to assume there must have been something extraordinary in Jabez's prayer for God to include it in what Wilkinson calls the "boring" history of Israel's family tree.

I have a problem with calling any part of God's Word "boring." However, we won't indict Wilkinson for what may be just a careless use of words.

It was while listening to a lecture by Dr. Richard Seume, Dallas Theological Seminary chaplain, that Wilkinson began to be puzzled by the prayer of Jabez. He wondered just what Jabez did to merit being singled out as more honorable than his brethren. The clue, Wilkinson surmised, must be hidden in Jabez's prayer. He read the prayer over and over, searching "with all my heart for the future God had for someone as ordinary as I." The next morning he prayed Jabez's prayer word for word. That began thirty years of praying Jabez's prayer every morning. He claims that this has revolutionized his life more than any prayer except his prayer for salvation. Now, he wants to share his secret with us.

He asks, "How do I know that it will significantly impact you?"

His answer: "Because of my experience and the testimony of hundreds of others around the world with whom I've shared these principles. Because, more importantly, the Jabez prayer distills God's powerful will for your future. Finally, because it reveals that your Father longs to give you so much more than you may have ever thought to ask for."

What is it about Jabez's prayer that Wilkinson finds so compelling?

First, it asks God to bless him. Says Wilkinson:

To bless in the biblical sense means to ask for or to impart supernatural favor. When we ask for God's blessing, we're not asking for more of what we could get for ourselves. We're crying out for the wonderful, unlimited goodness that only God has the power to know about or give to us.

Wilkinson commends Jabez for leaving it up to God to decide what the blessings would be and where, when, and how Jabez would receive them.

But is it so extraordinary to ask for God's blessings? We all ask God to bless us. Is there ever any time in a true believer's life when God does not bless him?

Of course not. We may not perceive the trials and tribulations of life as blessings, but that's exactly what they are. They are meant to refine us; to build us up spiritually so that we may be conformed to the image of Christ. But that is not the definition of "bless" that we find in Wilkinson's book. Rather, he looks for God to "release something miraculous" in his life. However, chastisement may be miraculous, too, even if it isn't the pleasant "blessing" for which Wilkinson looks.

Such thinking assumes that when something miraculous is not being released in one's life, one is not being blessed.

Second, Jabez's prayer asks God to enlarge his coast. This, Wilkinson says, is the means by which God will increase not only your material prosperity, but your spiritual prosperity. One's ministry will be increased if one prays the Jabez prayer with understanding and faith.

Certainly there is nothing wrong with asking the Father to increase our ministries, or even to increase our businesses and to give us material blessings. But Wilkinson draws some erroneous conclusions about ministry:

When you start asking in earnest—begging—for more influence and responsibility with which to honor Him, God will bring opportunities and people into your path. You can trust Him that He will never send someone to you whom you cannot help by His leading and strength.

Not true. God sends detractors to try us by fire and to refine our faith. Some may be sent by God so that His Word through us might condemn them for their hard hearts. Wilkinson's careless approach implies that nothing but overtly "good" things will come our way. Tell that to Paul, Peter and all the saints who have suffered for their faith.

Perhaps without realizing it, Wilkinson applies to Jabez's prayer something that is contrary to the teachings of Jesus:

Think of it this way: Instead of standing near the river's edge, asking for a cup of water to get you through each day, you'll do something unthinkable—you will take the little prayer with the giant prize and *jump into the river!* (emphasis Wilkinson's)

But what did Jesus say?

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?...

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:25-34)

When our prayers focus so much on what we can get from God we must question whether we are praying properly.

True, Jabez prayed for God to bless him and to increase his borders. But we have no idea what was in his mind, or the purpose for which he asked these things. We cannot assume that this is *the* way to pray in order to get God to work for us. And does not God's Word already promise us that the steps of a good man are ordered by God (Psalms 37:23)? Does He not assure us with the words that, although we plan our course, God directs our steps (Proverbs 16:9)?

Third, the Jabez prayer asks that God's hand might to upon him. Wilkinson states that this insures God's intervention in difficult situations which we initiate:

As God's chosen, blessed sons and daughters, we are expected to attempt something large enough that failure is guaranteed...unless God steps in....

With that, we release God's power to accomplish His will and bring Him glory through all those seeming impossibilities.

In truth, anyone who jumps out to do something at which he knows he will fail unless God intervenes is tempting God. This is one of the worst pieces of advice

one can give. It is one thing to be led by the Spirit of God into areas over which it is impossible to gain the victory without Him. To "jump into the river" expecting God to rescue us is utter foolishness.

I hope that's not what Wilkinson means, but if it isn't he doesn't make that clear; he doesn't qualify that advice with sound biblical reasoning. Not only that, he states that our "surrendered need turns into [God's] unlimited opportunity. And He becomes great through you."

Just who is in charge here? God isn't looking for "unlimited opportunity" that we may grant Him through our "surrendered need." The true servant of God is directed by the Holy Spirit, not by his own designs for greatness in serving God.

Nor does God "become great" through us. God is as great as He's going to get. We can do nothing to make Him greater. Such lack of understanding calls into question Wilkinson's qualification to teach anyone anything.

That lack of understanding is further in evidence in the following:

When we ask for God's mighty presence like Jabez and the early church did, we will also see tremendous results that can be explained only as from the hand of God....

They were known as a community who spent hours and even days in prayer together, waiting upon God and asking for His power (see Acts 2:42-47).

Yes, do see Acts 2:42-47. Then tell me where they were asking for God's power. God's power came at the right time in accordance with the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. We don't know exactly for what they were praying. So we cannot know they were asking for "God's mighty presence." Such conjecture is typical of those who approach the Scriptures with their theological presuppositions.

Fourth, Jabez prayed for God to keep him from evil in order that it not grieve him. Here, Wilkinson warns the reader not to be complacent; the more you do for God, the more Satan will attack you.

Maybe yes; maybe no. This is not an iron-clad given. What Satan does is up to God more than it is up to Satan. No evil can touch us unless God allows it. Some people give Satan credit for more power than he possesses. One of Wilkinson's many anecdotes relates a conversation he overheard between Professor Howard Hendricks and a student at seminary:

The student was excited to tell Dr. Hendricks how well his life was going.

"When I first came here," he said, "I was so tempted and tested

I could barely keep my head above water. But now—praise God!—my life at seminary has smoothed out. I'm not being tempted hardly at all!"

But Hendricks looked deeply alarmed—not the reaction the student was expecting. "That's about the worst thing I could have heard," he told the surprised senior. "That shows me that you're no longer in the battle! Satan isn't worried about you anymore."

Wrong! There are plenty of times God allows His children to work in the Kingdom without being harassed by evil. Blanket judgments such as these misdirect the trusting person into possibly straying out of God's will. This advice is contrary to the whole purpose of praying that God keep us from evil in the first place. If we are not kept from evil is our prayer not being answered? Or if we are kept from evil are we failing God? The contradiction is glaring.

Wilkinson contends that God will keep us from evil and will protect our "spiritual investment." Yet, in spite of his praying the Jabez prayer for thirty years, he has been involved with Promise Keepers from the start. What does that tell us about keeping from evil?

We cannot build a theology of prayer upon one verse of Scripture that merely tells us what someone prayed. The only prayer upon which one may build any theology is that called "The Lord's prayer."

It never ceases to amaze me how men try to tell us how to pray, meditate, and approach God by different means other than that offered by the Lord.

Jesus didn't mean we are to pray by rote the prayer He offered as an example. It is a model for prayer. Except for the plea to keep us from evil, it does not model Jabez's prayer.

If Jabez's prayer is meant for all believers, why didn't Jesus just refer His disciples to that verse?

Now, not everything Wilkinson has to say is in error. But his little book is little more than spiritual fluff.

It is more anecdotal than scriptural, supposing that a man's "experience" is to be desired above God's Word. For that matter, if thousands of people follow any rote practice you can be sure a number of them will come back with good reports. They assume that anything "good" that happens to them after they begin their ritual must be because of the ritual.

How many who pray the Jabez prayer don't get what Wilkinson promises in his book?

But what does that matter in the face of "experience"?❖