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The Prayer of Jabez

by John Miller

INTRODUCTION

Last week while listening to Focus On The Family, I was introduced to Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, president and founder of Walk Thru the Bible Ministries and his book, "The Prayer Of Jabez". Dobson claimed that the book had sold one million copies last month and the book's official website, <http://www.prayerofjabez.com>, claims that there are four million copies of the book in print. It is a USA Today/New York Times top ten bestseller and is being embraced by Evangelicals, Catholics, Fundamentalists and even non-Christians.

On Dobson's show, Wilkinson claimed that two weeks of praying the prayer of Jabez would change your life. Upon hearing the rest of the radio programs devoted to the book and after reading the book, I have serious reservations about Wilkinson's claims.

THE REAL PRAYER OF JABEZ

The real prayer of Jabez is found in 1 Chronicles 4:9 & 10: 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. (KJV)

That's it. Jabez was a good and honorable man who asked God to bless him and God did. It's an example of God providing for and caring for His chosen people. Jabez asked and GOD sovereignly CHOSE to answer. The focus here is on God and His provision.

I read through Chronicles several months ago and Jabez and his prayer stood out to me and I smiled when I saw it because it made me see what a great God we serve.

Jabez asked and our loving Father gave him what He requested - not because Jabez said the right thing or twisted His arm, but because God decided to show His glory to Jabez by answering his prayer. Period - end of story.

BRUCE WILKINSON'S POSITION

However, I think Bruce Wilkinson would disagree with me. Wilkinson claims that if we'll just pray the prayer of Jabez, word-for-word, every day for two weeks or a month, then we'll finally see God's power released in our lives.

To Dr. Wilkinson, the key isn't God's choice to answer Jabez's prayer. To him, the key is that Jabez stumbled upon the RIGHT FORMULA for asking things of God. Wilkinson reverses the cause and effect and declares that Jabez was honorable because he figured out the right way to pray. Wilkinson's emphasis is on Jabez finding the correct method instead of on God and His Sovereignty.

Although this is not intended to be an exhaustive study on prayer I'd like to touch briefly on some of Dr. Wilkinson's major tenets and let you see what the major fallacies are in his teachings.

1) JABEZ's prayer or JESUS' prayer?

In Matthew 6:5-13 (and Luke 11:2-4), Jesus gave us some instructions on how to pray: And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, USE NOT VAIN REPETITIONS (emphasis mine) as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

AFTER THIS MANNER (emphasis mine) therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (KJV)

Jesus said "after this manner" is how you should pray. I'll admit, I think it's great that we teach little kids the Lord's (or model) prayer. But I think Jesus was pretty clear that His prayer was a TEMPLATE or GUIDE for us to follow as we talked with God. Nor do I think Jabez's prayer is wrong. James 5:16b says "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." I would say that from scripture, Jabez's prayer qualifies as the fervent prayer of a righteous man.

However, Dr. Wilkinson encourages folks to pray Jabez's prayer VERBATIM EVERYDAY. This is contrary to Jesus' instructions of "when you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do." Wilkinson seems to be selling Jabez's prayer as a scripturally sanctioned incantation that can guarantee blessings. So, you decide - Who's instructions on prayer are you going to follow: Dr. Bruce Wilkinson's or Jesus?

2) "The Prayer Of Jabez" is more about the wisdom and shrewdness of the one doing the asking than the greatness of the One who answers the prayer.

A theme of the book is that it appears Dr. Wilkinson believes that Jabez 'got it right'. - that Jabez figured out exactly what it took to get something from God and that was why he was considered more honorable than everyone else. So what it boils down to is that Dr. Wilkinson isn't just teaching a doctrine of works, but one of guile, talent and intelligence. It's implied that those who pray Jabez's prayer are just smarter than those who don't.

3) The book encourages and sanctions selfishness as part of your relationship with God.

I'll admit it, I'm selfish and I ask God for things that I want, but I also ask Him to change my heart if that's not His will. Molding us by changing our desire is part of the sanctification process. But, there's no cry to God to change our hearts in "The Prayer Of Jabez". Selfishness for it's own sake is encouraged.

4) Success is seen as a measure of whether you too have figured out the formula of Jabez.

The very last section of the book is called 'Redeemed For This' and implies that we were saved so we could successfully pray the Jabez prayer and unleash God's power in our lives. By implication, if we fail to see God's power unleashed, would Wilkinson question our salvation?

5) Wilkinson also uses the success stories of others to validate his method.

There are hundreds (perhaps thousands) of people who have prayed Jabez's prayer and attribute their prosperity to the prayer - www.prayerofjabez.com even has a forum to discuss their success stories. However, I know some followers of Islam who pray toward Mecca every day and credit that practice for their prosperity. Others credit Oprah, yoga, the tarot, crystals or a host of other things for their success. Experience should never be used to validate any practice - only the Word Of God.

6) The formula Wilkinson is teaching leaves no room for GOD to say "NO" or "WAIT".

When a believer accepts the Lordship of Jesus over their lives, he or she begin a relationship with Him that is in part defined by submission to the will of God and a recognition of His absolute right to do what ever He pleases with us.

We may not like what happens, it may make us angry, and sometimes it can really hurt, but accepting this allows us to accept a "NO" from God and still believe that He loves us. I just don't see that in the philosophy Wilkinson is teaching. According to Dr. Wilkinson, sin in our lives is the only thing that will stop the Jabez prayer from working.

THE REAL LESSONS OF JABEZ'S PRAYER

Something inside of me wishes that Bruce Wilkinson was right - that you could pray something for a month and that God would be obligated to bless you and make you prosperous.

But God's purposes for us and our lives are far beyond what we're able to comprehend and sometimes we don't see His blessings until months or years after He's provided them (Genesis 50:20).

We can't know the mind of God and we can't coerce Him into blessing us. He can't and won't be controlled or manipulated. If He could, then He wouldn't be a god worthy of the honor and praise that He is due. For me the lesson of 1 Chronicles 4:9&10 is that even though some may have been taught that it is selfish to ask God to bless us, God will hear the prayer offered in faith and desperation.

Jesus showed us a better way, but I think Jabez did no wrong when he asked for God's blessing. We serve a good God who answers prayers that don't exactly fit the formulas or even His instructions for prayer. It would seem that God is interested less in formulas and more about us knowing Him.

THE BOOK'S GOOD POINTS

If any good is to come from the Jabez phenomenon, it will be that people will spend more time in prayer to God. Also, Wilkinson does acknowledge our dependency upon God for the impossible, but he fails to make it clear that we are unable to do anything for God without His provision.

I think Wilkinson's belief is that our dependency upon God is rooted in our right choice in praying the prayer of Jabez as opposed to our inability to do any good or right thing based upon our fallen Adamic nature.

In turn, God's willingness to work through us isn't based upon our identity and sonship in Christ, but rather that God is OBLIGATED to answer Jabez's prayer.

Additionally, Wilkinson may be on the right track when it comes to asking God to help us avoid temptation and evil rather than confront it. So, there is some good in the book despite the very poor hermeneutics.

MY CONCERNS ABOUT THE BOOK

I'm not concerned that the book has been printed or that people actually believe the things in it. I'm concerned because we're seeing the camel's nose of heretical beliefs poking into the tents of formerly sound mainline denominations and independent churches. Dr. Dobson's endorsement has caused the book to literally fly off the shelves and I think he has given creditability to what would have previously been denounced as a prosperity gospel or "name-it and claim-it" theology.

For me though, the real tragedy of Bruce Wilkinson's book will be in the carnage created as desperate souls follow his advice and pray Jabez's prayer for a month and see no change or things getting worse around them.

The book has no discussion of what to do when the prayer seems to fail (and a child dies, a marriage fails, a job is lost or healing does not come, etc.). Many of them will turn to themselves seeking the reason. Wilkinson seems to have guaranteed that the prayer will work and the implication must be that a failed prayer means failed faith or something else wrong with the individual in question. They will hurt and they will feel alone and like spiritual failures, unable to confess what they're going through to a church that has embraced 'The Prayer Of Jabez'. Many who fail to see the promised results will turn from God thinking that Christianity is a sham.

They will question God's existence or His faithfulness because the book teaches a shallow 'results-oriented' faith that is supposed to guarantee success as opposed to a deep, abiding, loving relationship with our Father that will sustain us through heartaches, failure and success.

So that there will be people there to pick up the pieces, please pray that God will use you when the time comes. Please don't spend the money to buy the book unless you're just curious about the depths of its error. If you must have it, I've been told that Wal-Mart sells it for seven dollars as opposed to the ten you'll pay at a Christian bookstore.

John Miller

OTHER REVIEWS

Another review of the "Prayer of Jabez" is to be found at **THIS LINK** (<http://www.intotrueth.org/apostasy/Jabez.htm>)

zyworld.com/AgeTwoAge/Jabez.htm)

The "Media Spotlight" newsletter of Al Dager also has a review of the book in the current issue: Volume 24, number 1. This can be obtained by mail only from Media Spotlight, PO Box 290, Redmond, WA 98073-0290 USA

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