

The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life

I noticed this book by Bruce Wilkinson on the best seller list month after month. Several of my clients even mentioned the book by name and believed that it made a difference in their lives. Yet I was skeptical about the book. I grew up on my parents' favorite biblical stories, mission's requests, and summer tent revivals. Many a night, my small bedroom was offered up to the missionary who came to preach that Sunday, or the minister traveling from church to church in the district. I wonder if Bruce Wilkinson is what we called a "Seed Faith," an evangelist pounding out a message of giving for the promise of some spiritual investment worth ten times more. I let my curiosity fade. I decided not to buy the book and put it out of my mind.

Perhaps the book had its own plan for getting into my possession.

Walking through the living room at my pen-pal's home in South Africa, I spied "*The Prayer of Jabez*" on a walnut bookshelf near the front door. "Hmm," I wondered, "There's that book again. I wonder why Nora has it and what she thinks of it." My inquiry to Nora led to a quick, "Please, take the book, Curt. I would like you to have it." So, the little book with the curious title found its way to me. I gathered it up in my hand and walked toward the over-stuffed chair I had come to enjoy relaxing in, and began to read.

Bruce Wilkinson begins his story by pointing out that Jabez is a relatively unknown figure from the Old Testament. He says, "You will find Jabez hiding in the least-read section of one of the least-read books of the Bible." This is true, for we find Jabez referenced in but two brief verses. That's it. Yet for Wilkinson, Jabez is the Bible's "Little Big Man," a man who had no future until he made a direct request for God's help.

Where do we find this amazing Jabez hiding? In 1 Chronicles, the recorded genealogies of the Hebrew tribes begin with Adam and continue down through the ages. By the time you reach Chapter Four, you have read through more than five hundred long and difficult names. At name forty-five in Chapter Four you finally hit pay dirt! There is Jabez and, as Wilkinson indicates, the writer portrays Jabez in such a way that he stands out over all others.

We learn from Wilkinson that Jabez was a young man whose life began unpleasantly. Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called him Jabez, because, "I bore him in pain."

In a rather bold move, Jabez requested that God assist him throughout his life.

Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, You would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be upon me and You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"

What was God's answer to Jabez's request?

So God granted him what he requested.

(1 Chronicles 4:9-10) (NKJV)

For Wilkinson, Jabez's changed life and special attention in the bible are a direct outcome of his prayer. Thus, he believes that "*The Prayer of Jabez*" can and will bring a changed life to those who pray it. He describes this as "releasing something miraculous in your life," and asks the reader to consider their own desire for a life which includes God's fullest blessings.

In essence, Jabez's prayer makes four requests of God. Each request is simple and sincere, yet for Wilkinson the requests have dramatic importance for our life and run counter to our current way of thinking about God.

The request I found most interesting asked God to "enlarge my territory." Wilkinson describes territory as anything that has been put into our care. For example, in my care is the role of husband, father, employer, friend, son, colleague, cousin, neighbor, uncle, church member, and so on. While this "relational" list appears long, it would expand were I to add talents, interests, and activities. With the Prayer of Jabez, I am better able to understand my territory: the responsibility inherent in these aspects of my life, and the need to ask God for his blessings as I go about tending to and nurturing my territory. It also allowed me to examine the many interconnections in my life, and allow God into my life more fully. By asking God to bless me, I have felt more motivated to reach out to others in a loving way.

Like Jabez himself, I found this to be a "Little Big Book." It is easy reading, and only ninety-two pages long. The author includes suggestions for how to use the book while also challenging the reader to make the Jabez prayer their own. Not one to dismiss such a challenge, I feel that I made the prayer my own. As opposed as I was to what I feared would be "Seed Faith" doctrine, my acceptance of the Prayer of Jabez has given me a new understanding of servitude and motivated me to see greater possibilities in God's plan for my life.

By *Curt Levang*