

The Prayer of Jabez:

Some time ago a member put a copy of a book titled, *The Prayer of Jabez*, by Bruce Wilkinson, in my hands with some uncertain concerns. Since then I have noticed the book's popularity in stores with an accompanying array of promotional items. The author suggests that God has great things in store for Christians which many never cash in on due to low expectations in our prayer lives.

Jabez, an enigmatic figure of brief mention in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, is said to have honorably distinguished himself among his brothers. Verse 10 reads, "Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh, that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that your name might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!' and God granted him with what he requested." The author's concern is to have us repeat this magic prayer and expect the same kind of border-enlarging return.

The short book promotes something called Moody/Keswick Theology, or The Higher Life Movement. This is the belief that there are two types of Christians. First, there are those who live defeated lives of failure, groping out a mediocre, unfulfilled existence, missing out on all that God would like to do for and through them, if only they would follow certain "simple steps to success." Second, there are those Christians who have "broken through" (see

the subtitle, and the titles of the other books advertised in the back of the book, and the series title), and learned how to access, and experience the sustained exhilaration of being one of the super-spiritual, macro-productive, successful Christians. This is also a version of something called Second Blessing Theology.

While the book is about prayer on the surface, it is more essentially about getting into that supposed super, high-impact spiritual zone that will set you apart with power, and victory, and fulfillment you have been longing for. It is within your reach. Just buy this book, and follow these simple steps. Listen to all these success stories. All this could be yours, and more. So get up, and pray the prayer of Jabez! As such, this book plays on people's spiritual insecurities and frustrations. This is what I call infomercial spirituality. Don't buy it!

Hebrews 11 explains that Abraham and all the Old Testament saints like him died without seeing their blessing, and that their longing was for a better country, "that is a heavenly one" (16). If Jabez is the saint he appears to be, he had his mind on a heavenly boundary, like Abraham, not on the size of his farm like Bruce Wilkinson.

One of the best things I have ever read on prayer is answer #98 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which reads: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with

confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies."

- Pastor Ferry