



Critical Issues Commentary

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THE PRAYER OF DANIEL

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Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from harm, that it may not pain me!" And God granted him what he requested. (1Chronicles 4:10)

And I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled, even turning aside from Thy commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Thy servants the prophets, who spoke in Thy name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land. Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day— to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which Thou hast driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against Thee." (Daniel 9:4-7)

It is the nature of fallen man to gravitate to works righteousness and self help. Religious solutions that offer promises of success for those who know the secrets will always be popular. Quick, easy, and rote answers sell. The book by Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*, is one of these.¹ A little book about a one sentence prayer has sold millions of copies and spawned a hugely successful market for "Prayer of Jabez" merchandise.² We know little about the person Jabez in the Bible and have no indication in Scripture that the content of his prayer was meant to be repeated by others hoping to cash in on his success. How ironic that this little prayer has become a virtual "Our Father" for evangelicals.

The Bible warns against repetitious prayer: "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for

their many words" (Matthew 6:7). True prayer is personal, relational, meaningful, and Biblically informed. Prayer is to bring our sins, concerns, needs, and the needs of others before God's throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). Humble, God honoring prayer recognizes God's sovereign purposes as revealed in Scripture. Therefore, if we are to learn more about prayer we need to look much further than the prayer of Jabez. In this article, we shall study the prayer of Daniel found in Daniel 9 to enrich our understanding of God honoring prayer.

DANIEL'S PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE

Daniel was an old man when he prayed in Daniel 9. As a young man he had been taken captive by the Babylonians. Jeremiah the prophet had prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11,12). Daniel had been reading the book of Jeremiah, which

motivated him to pray:

In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. (Daniel 9:2,3)

Since Daniel was at least a teenager at the time of the captivity (see Daniel 1), this means he was nearly 90 years old when he prayed as recorded in Daniel 9. God used him in many special ways as he lived out a life of prayer and faithfulness in Babylonian captivity. The theme of the message God revealed to Daniel as recorded in the book bearing his name is God's sovereignty over history.

Scripture that revealed God's sovereign purposes prompted Daniel to pray. This is the passage that about the end of the captivity: "Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the Lord, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation'" (Jeremiah 25:12). Therefore it was **certain** that the captivity would soon end. Those who like to criticize we who believe in God's sovereignty over all things, including human history, often suggest that such doctrines will lead to fatalistic attitudes and a lack of prayer. The example of Daniel should lay to rest such false conclusions. Daniel prophesied about the future history of the major empires of the world, including

the exact number of years until the “cutting off” of Messiah. Yet **Daniel prayed fervently**.

Daniel prayed **because** the 70 years were nearly completed. He read the Scripture, knew what God was going to do, and “so” he gave himself to seeking God in prayer (**Daniel 9:2**). Bible study and prayer, God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, and God’s purposes and a faith response in the hearts of His people all go hand in hand. Many are fond of setting up false dilemmas where the Bible sees none. The certainty of a thing is a motivation to pray, not an obstacle. For example, since the days of the apostles, Christians have prayed for the return of Christ. The Lord’s Prayer is such a prayer. The Bible ends with a prayer for the return of Christ, “*He who testifies to these things says, >Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus*” (**Revelation 22:20**). Yet there is nothing **more** certain than the return of Christ. Those who refuse to pray unless they conceive of an “open” future determined by the acts of man rather than the purposes of God have a deficient understanding of prayer and Scripture. **Daniel 9** will help correct that deficiency.

Biblical prophecy about God’s purposes for Israel under girds Daniel’s prayer. At the end of Daniel’s prayer even more specific details about the future history of Israel were revealed to him (**Daniel 9:24-27**), part of which is still future in our day. Many today are thinking that the expanding of their “territory” (i.e. business opportunities³) is expanding the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom will not come until after the 70th week of **Daniel 9:27**, when “all Israel will be saved” (**Romans 11:26**) and Christ will establish His millennial reign on earth. Our prayers, like Daniel’s, should be based on a sound understanding of Biblical prophecy. Such Biblically informed prayers would include: praying for the Lord to send

forth laborers into the harvest (**Luke 10:2**), praying for the peace of Jerusalem (**Psalms 122:6**), praying for the salvation of all God’s elect, including the chosen remnant from among the Jews (**Romans 10:1 & 9:27**), and praying for our God-given civil leaders (**1 Timothy 2:1,2**). This is not a comprehensive list, but shows that God’s sovereign purposes in history and for history are important in our prayers. These prayers are directly about the expansion of the gospel.

If we do not study the Scriptures diligently we will be lacking an understanding of God’s person and purposes and thereby be lacking God-honoring content in our prayers. When the early church prayed, they cited Scriptures and the purposes of God:

[W]ho by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord, and against His Christ.’ For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. (**Acts 4:28**)

The prayer of the apostles in Acts referenced God’s certain, unchangeable purposes in history and the fulfillment of Scripture. Obviously the Biblical writers saw God’s purposes and sovereignty as a **reason** to pray, not an excuse not to. The prayer in Acts 4 concludes, “*And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence.*” (**Acts 4:29**). They were all the more motivated to preach the gospel now that persecution had broken out as predicted in Scripture.

Another way Scripture influenced

Daniel’s prayer concerned the nature of God. Daniel repeats a phrase about God’s nature that comes from God’s self-revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai: “*O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandment*” (**Daniel 9:4b** see **Exodus 34:6,7**). It is thematic in Biblical prayers to plead to God based on His self-revealed nature. Daniel references truths about God’s nature several places in his prayer: God’s covenant faithfulness (**verse 4**), God’s righteousness (**verse 7**), God’s compassion and forgiveness (**verse 9**), and the justice and righteousness of God’s deeds (**verses 14, 16**). When the Lord’s Prayer includes “*Hallowed be thy name,*” the reference is to God’s person and the self-revelation of His holy nature. The prayer is for God to act in redemptive history to demonstrate His holy nature. Daniel’s prayer includes this idea about God acting redemptively to vindicate the holiness of His name (person): “*O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Thine own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name*” (**Daniel 9:19**). The more we know the Scriptures the better we understand God’s nature and pray accordingly.

DANIEL’S PRAYER AND REPENTANCE

The Scripture says that because God had promised to restore Israel from captivity after 70 years, Daniel sought the Lord, “[*B*]y prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.” These signified remorse, sorrow and grief. Daniel was contemplating the **reason** for the 70 year Babylonian captivity: Israel’s sin and rebellion against God. Daniel realized that though God promised to restore them after 70 years, He would not do so outside of the original purpose of the captivity being fulfilled. The captivity was to cleanse Israel from idols and from obstinately refusing to listen to the Word of God. Therefore the aged prophet, feel-

ing solidarity with his people Israel, “owned” the sins of the people and earnestly sought God’s mercy and forgiveness. Restoration could only mean forgiveness and cleansing. God would not send Jews back to Israel to worship other gods!

Although Daniel was a sinner as are all humans, as far as the written record goes, Daniel lived an exemplary life. Yet Daniel was **more** grieved about sinfulness than most and owned the sins of the people as his own. He confesses, “[We] have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled, even turning aside from Thy commandments and ordinances” (Daniel 9:5).

This sense of sinfulness is part and parcel of the idea of God’s holiness discussed earlier. Any person approaching the Holy God of the Bible does so with a sense of great sinfulness and need for cleansing. We can only come to God if He mercifully provides a way. When Peter got a glimpse of the nature and person of Christ, he responded like Isaiah did when Isaiah saw the Lord: “*But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’*” (Luke 5:8). Daniel’s prayer contained no false piety; Daniel knew God well enough to be fully aware of his sinfulness and that of the people. His expressions of remorse are from the heart.

Daniel had no inclination to blame God for what had happened. He saw God’s righteousness even in allowing His own people and their place of worship to be plundered, ravished, and hauled away by sinful, pagan, idolaters. Daniel prayed: “*Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, . . . Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee*” (Daniel 9:7a,8). Repentance is not the giving of excuses,

but the owning of one’s own sinfulness and confessing God’s righteousness. What Daniel prays is the opposite of Adam’s response to his own sin: “*And the man said, ‘The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate’*” (Genesis 3:12). Adam as the prototypical sinner blames God and others.

DANIEL’S PRAYER AND GOD’S JUSTICE

Daniel suffered greatly because of the sins of others. It was not his idolatry that caused the captivity, but the idolatry of his parents’ and grandparents’ generation. Daniel could have seen his situation as a “generational curse” passed down by his ancestors. Yet Daniel owned the sin as his own, spent no time contemplating the injustice of his situation, and pleaded for God’s mercy as if he himself had been the most blasphemous of idolaters. Daniel’s understanding of God’s righteousness was deep. He realized: “*If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*” (Psalm 130:3).

When the Lord’s Prayer asks for forgiveness and expresses forgiveness to others it shows this same idea that is in Daniel’s prayer. Forgiving others shows that we are giving up the sinful desire to blame others for our situation. Asking God’s forgiveness shows that we realize this (as Adam did not and David did): “*Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge*” (Psalm 51:4). Daniel was very forthright about this: “*To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets*” (Daniel 9:9,10). There was no injustice in the captivity, not even for Daniel who had served God honorably. God was being merciful even in His judgment.

The captivity, rather than causing Daniel to question God’s justice, served for Daniel as **proof** of God’s justice. Daniel prayed, “*Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem*” (Daniel 9:11,12). It was only right and just that God would do exactly as He promised them through Moses. The captivity “confirmed His words.” Deuteronomy 28 contains a list of the curses that would come upon the nation for breaking covenant. Deuteronomy 31:29 predicted future apostasy and God’s judgment. Daniel saw God’s justice in fulfilling the His own Word, even if it meant turning His elect nation over to pagan conquerors.

DANIEL’S PRAYER AND GOD’S MERCY

God is just God **and** merciful. Daniel’s prayer now turns to that revealed aspect of God’s nature. God’s mercy informed Daniel’s prayer throughout, but now Daniel specifically asks that God would show favor to Israel. Daniel prays, “*O Lord, in accordance with all Thy righteous acts, let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people have become a reproach to all those around us*” (Daniel 9:16). Wrath is what sinners deserve. God’s wrath is real. Paul says that it is “*revealed from heaven*” (Romans 1:18). Wrath is not a popular topic today. Many just assume that since God is good (the pagans will agree with that) that therefore He will make things better for any who ask. However, that

God is good means that He is also the righteous and good judge who must punish those who break His law. Thus Daniel's deep concern: the manifest presence of God's righteous wrath toward covenant breakers. Wrath must somehow be "turned away."

Those who do not believe that they have broken God's law and deserve eternal punishment cannot see the need for atonement. The dealings of God in the Old Testament were very concrete and revealed in history. Daniel knew that God's wrath was justly being manifested in what happened to Israel. Even that is only an object lesson for the greater manifestation of wrath that awaits those who go into eternity with unforgiven sin. They face eternal damnation. Many people who pray daily for God's blessing have no idea that they need atonement for sin, lest they end up in Hell. That should concern us and inform our prayers. Oh that the gospel message of averted wrath through the shed blood of Jesus Christ would be preached to every person in every nation.

Daniel pleaded for God's mercy. He did so on an interesting, important basis. He pleaded for God to show mercy **for His own sake!** There is no human merit in Daniel's theology and consequently he prays as he does. Daniel continues, "So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary" (**Daniel 9:17**). Why would God show mercy for His own sake? It is the people who need it. As Moses reminded God on Mount Sinai, God had chosen this people and promised them a land (see **Exodus 32:11-13**). The people of promise bear God's name. If God destroys them completely, then His promises to Abraham (**Genesis 12:3**) would fail. This promise included the promise of a Messiah to bless all the families of the earth. **Daniel 9** is ultimately about Messiah. Mercy is

shown not because the people deserve it, but because God has promised to reveal His merciful, saving nature and purposes through these people. All the families of the earth will learn of God's nature through His dealings with Israel. Thus mercy is shown for God's sake.

In the next verse, Daniel makes explicit what is implied throughout: there is no human merit. Daniel prays, "O my God, incline Thine ear and hear! Open Thine eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name; for we are not presenting our supplications before Thee on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Thy great compassion" (**Daniel 9:18**). They bear the name of God. They have sinned horribly and brought reproach to His holy name. Their condition was a direct result of their own rebellion, and God's righteous wrath. But God, being compassionate and merciful, would take action to vindicate His holy name and fulfill His promises. Paul echoes this thought in the New Testament:

*Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (**Ephesians 2:3-5**).*

The merciful God of the Bible gives life to dead sinners who merit only wrath and judgment.

Daniel was praying about the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. This was the immediate concern and the occasion of his prayer. He knew that they had no reason to expect God to do this other than God's compassion, mercy, and willingness to demonstrate the holiness of His name. The answer that came on the

occasion of Daniel's prayer goes way beyond the restoration of Jerusalem to the coming of Messiah, to Messiah's rejection, and to the very end of the age and the great tribulation.

The plan of Messianic salvation exists because God is a merciful God. God could have wiped out the nation entirely as He threatened to do in Moses' day (**Exodus 32:10**), and remained perfectly just. God could wipe out the entire rebellious human race and be perfectly just. God's mercy is revealed in that rather than doing so, He chose to reveal His mercy in saving some. He promised to raise up Messiah from the seed of the woman (**Genesis 3:15**), the seed of Abraham (**Genesis 12:3**), and the seed of David (**2Samuel 7:12-16**) who would bring salvation to a remnant of the Jews (**Romans 9:27; 11:5**). Through this promised Jewish Messiah a remnant of Gentiles would also be brought to faith (**Psalms 22:27; Isaiah 49:6**). If Daniel's prayer went unanswered and the Jews were left in Babylon to be assimilated into the Babylonian nation and religion, then the promises of God would have failed. There would have been no Messiah and no salvation. The stakes could not have been higher.

THE ANSWER TO DANIEL'S PRAYER

As Daniel was still praying, the angel Gabriel came to him (**Daniel 9:21**). Gabriel was commanded to go to Daniel when Daniel began praying, "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision" (**Daniel 9:23**). The answer given by Gabriel is one of the most specific, clear prophecies in the Bible. There would be seventy "weeks" (literally "sevens"; a collection of seven things⁴) to finish God's redemptive dealings with Israel. The Old Testament at times refers to sabbatical weeks of years, i.e. a seven year period

(Leviticus 25:3-13). The prophecy of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24 refers to a period of 490 years.⁵ As the seventy years of captivity were about to come to an end, Gabriel told Daniel of another period of seventy, this time seventy weeks of years.

Gabriel told Daniel, "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined" (Daniel 9:25,26). The decree to which Gabriel refers is the one issued by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. (Nehemiah 2).⁶ The first seven weeks of years, beginning at 445 B.C. brings us to the close of Malachi's prophecy and the closing of the Old Testament canon.⁷ The next 434 years from that time (totaling 483 years) brings us to the time of Christ. The amazing prophecy in Daniel 9 includes a prediction of Messiah's rejection, the exact time of this rejection, and the future destruction of Jerusalem.⁸

The final week, the seventieth week, is the Great Tribulation. In the middle of this seven year period the "prince to come" (Antichrist) will set up the abomination of desolation spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24. It says in Daniel 9:27: "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." This seventieth week is yet future. The answer to Daniel's prayer was a revelation of the future history of his people the Jews. There is a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, which

is the period from the Day of Pentecost until the beginning of the Great Tribulation. The rejection of Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem was not the end of God's dealing with Israel. During the indeterminate period between Messiah's rejection by Israel and the future covenant with a false messiah who will make desolate, God is bringing Messianic salvation to Gentiles and Jews who believe the gospel.

CONCLUSION

Daniel's prayer did not cause the return of the Jews to Jerusalem; but God did. God cannot lie, and will not break His promises. Everything decreed and promised shall certainly come to pass. Daniel 9:24 says that the seventy weeks, "have been decreed." If the future history of Israel and her dealings with the Gentile world is certain, then what purpose is there to prayer? The answer is that prayer is part of the means by which God has chosen to work. God raised up Daniel and placed him where he was at that crucial time of history. God's grace kept Daniel from caving in to the delicacies and temptations of pagan Babylon. God used Daniel's prayers because God delights to use ordinary people in extraordinary situations to His glory.

Likewise, we live in extraordinary times. As we see evidence of the nearness of the coming seventieth week we should all the more be motivated to pray according to God's revealed purposes. We do not need modern end time prophets to tell us how to pray, the Scriptures already tell us what will happen. Just as Daniel studied prophetic Scripture and prayed accordingly, so should we. We cannot pray what Daniel prayed; but we can pray as Daniel prayed. To do so forces us to contemplate our situation and how the Bible applies to it. We cannot pray what Daniel prayed; but we can pray as Daniel prayed. To do so forces us to contemplate our situation and how the

Bible applies to it.⁹

Prayers modeled after Jabez are inadequate. There are so many more important matters before us. The beauty of Daniel's prayer is that it cannot be recited over and over because it is too long and mostly has already been answered. Therefore it serves a much better purpose: to teach us the principles of godly intercession. It also serves the purpose of reminding us of the key to all of history: Israel and her Messiah. It also reminds us about God's nature, His justice, His mercy, and our need. How much better to learn from the prayer of one of the more godly and exemplary characters in the Bible than from an obscure man who uttered a one sentence prayer.

END NOTES

1. See the article by Dick Kuffel in this issue of CIC for a more thorough critique of the book.
2. Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*, (Multnomah: Sisters OR, 2000)
3. Wilkinson, *Jabez*, says "Your business is the territory God has entrusted you. He wants you to accept it as a significant opportunity to touch individual lives, the business community, and the larger world for His glory. Asking Him to enlarge that opportunity brings Him only delight." 31. This simple minded logic is not really Biblical. It assumes too much. It is as if to say, "since I am Christian, what I do is helping God have more influence in the world. Therefore if my domain was much larger, God's influence would be also. Therefore nothing is more important than for me to get bigger." This thinking has caused many churches to lay aside the preaching of the cross so the church can be bigger and so more can be influenced.
4. Lehman Strauss, *Daniel*, (Loizeaux: Neptune, NJ, 1969) 268.
5. Ibid. 270.
6. Ibid. 272.
7. Ibid.
8. See Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998 reprint of 1957 edition) 67 -129 for a detailed explanation of the 69 weeks and their fulfillment.
9. This study of Daniel's prayer is not meant to be a comprehensive teaching on prayer. Much more is taught on this subject elsewhere in Scripture.

Book Review by Dick Kuffel
**“The Prayer of Jabez:
 Breaking Through to the
 Blessed Life”**
 by **Dr. Bruce H. Wilkinson**

SUMMARY

Jabez is an obscure person mentioned in only two verses of scripture: 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. These verses offer no introduction, nor is there any reference from other scripture. From these simple beginnings Dr. Wilkinson has developed for us “principles”¹ to learn how to “pray a daring prayer that God always answers.”² He comments, “It’s only what you believe will happen and therefore do next that will release God’s power for you and bring about a life change.”³ That sums up the book pretty well: pray the prayer every day, focus on specific problems, keep a record to see the changes in your life, and enjoy the results. The result will be “[God’s] release of His miraculous power in your life now.”⁴

WHO IS DR. BRUCE H. WILKINSON?

Dr. Wilkinson is the founder and president of “Walk Thru the Bible Ministries” based in Atlanta, GA. In his best selling book he mentions that they conducted 2500 bible conferences in the year 2000 (50 conferences each week-end), that they now publish 10 magazines recently exceeding the 100,000,000 mark, and that he has a vision to create the world’s largest Bible teaching faculty with 120,000 teachers (one for every 50,000 people on earth).

WHAT IS THE PRAYER OF JABEZ?

The following verses contain all we know about Jabez:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, “Because I bore him with pain.” Now Jabez called on the

God of Israel, saying, “Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!” And God granted him what he requested. (1 Chronicles 4:9,10)

WHAT IS THE BOOK ABOUT?

The opening paragraph of the preface summarizes the book and states that, “I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers . . . I believe it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God.”

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the discussion with the following enticement: “The little book you’re holding is about what happens when ordinary Christians decide to reach for an extraordinary life—which, as it turns out, is exactly the kind God promises.”⁵ Not unexpectedly it turns out that he has prayed the prayer daily for 30 years, that he attributes the outstanding daily events in his life to the prayer, and, most importantly, he wants to share the principles he’s learned with his readers.

What actually happened? Jabez was an honorable man who prayed; God responded to his prayer. Wilkinson concludes that, “clearly, the outcome can be traced to his prayer.”⁶ Dr. Wilkinson then entices his readers with this: “I want to show you just how dramatically each of Jabez’ requests can release something miraculous in your life.”⁷

He holds out even greater hope: “And with a handful of core commitments on your part you can proceed from this day forward with the confidence and expectation that your heavenly Father will bring it to pass for you.”⁸

Chapter 2, “Why Not Ask?,” focuses on the first request: “Oh, that You would bless me indeed!” According to Wilkinson he is just asking for what God wants for us: God’s will. This is a request for supernatural favor; it is not wealth oriented. But the guaranteed by-prod-

uct of asking for His blessing is miracles. God wants to bless us; but we never ask. His resolution: “What counts is knowing who you want to be and asking for it. Through a single believing prayer you can change your future. You can change what happens one minute from now.”¹⁰

His suggestions in Chapter 3, “Living Large For God”¹¹ focus on the second request: “Oh, that You would enlarge my territory.” This is a request to, “[A]sk God to enlarge your life so you can make a greater impact for Him.” It is for more than just real estate, it includes influence, responsibility, opportunity to make a mark for God, and opportunity to be used of God. Much ministry that we can’t do on our own, we can do by God’s Spirit; “*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts*” (Zechariah 4:6).

According to Wilkinson, to do Chapter 3 we need Chapter 4, “The Touch of Greatness.”¹² This is based on the third request: “Oh, that Your hand would be with me.” This is dependence—relying on Christ. Wilkinson suggests that we attempt to do things too big for us. This means stepping out in faith and releasing God’s power to do His Will. So, we are to ask for God’s presence and see the results of the hand of God in action.

Chapter 5, “Keeping the Legacy Safe,”¹³ focuses on the fourth request: “Oh, that You would keep me from evil.” According to Wilkinson it means to be kept out of the fight. God offers His power to not have to fight unnecessary temptation.

Chapter 6, “Welcome to God’s Honor Roll,”¹⁴ is a discussion of the opening words of verse 9, “Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.”

Chapter 7, “Making Jabez Mine,”¹⁵ is Wilkinson using the final phrase in verse 10 to move us to action: “So God granted him what he requested.” His conclusion is that God favors those who ask. He concludes that if you pay attention

God will use you. God will open doors because you prayed. This is the cycle of abundant living, according to Wilkinson. Obviously, we want to get started. What are we to do? Suggestions (paraphrased) from page 86 and 87 include the following:

Pray Jabez prayer every morning—keep a record

Write out prayer; tape it in your bible

Reread the book once per week for the next month

Share commitment with someone and be accountable

Record changes in your life

Pray Jabez prayer for family, friends, church

The condition, however, is that you must first believe, then you must do to bring life changes.

ANALYSIS

Old Testament genealogies often contained stories in the midst of lists. The prayer of Jabez is one such story expanding one of the four themes in 1 Chronicles 4—blessing related to faithfulness. To expand that simple story to become “a daring prayer that God always answers” is a stretch; the concept lacks support. And given the fact that Jabez is never referenced in any other scripture, there is little support for the expansion that Dr. Wilkinson provides in his 93 page “little book.”

Wilkinson’s conclusions in Chapter 1 (that “clearly the outcome can be traced to his prayer” and “Jabez’ requests can release something miraculous in your life” 4,5) suggest that the prayer is a tool, a device, a method—spiritual technology that works every time. Somehow God’s role, His desire to bless His people, His character and His plan for us

seem to become lost in our drive to get our needs met. There is an underlying suggestion that I can continually have all I desire by simply reading the daily prayer.

Chapter 2 says that we should ask. Wilkinson teaches that God wants to bless us, but because we don’t ask He holds back. This creates a wrong picture of God. It suggests that you get miracles whenever you ask, which is not always the case. Wilkinson claims:

What counts is knowing who you want to be and asking for it. Through a single believing prayer you can change your future. You can change what happens one minute from now (page 8).

This is getting very close to “mind over matter” and “what your mind can conceive you can achieve” type of thinking. This is dangerous ground.

Chapter 3 focused on “Oh, that You would enlarge my territory.” Wilkinson states that it is more than real estate. He expands this to include influence, responsibility, opportunity to make a mark for God and looking for the opportunity to be used of God. That, however, does not make it a model for us with a guarantee of results just because Jabez’ request was granted.

Wilkinson teaches that our reach is to exceed our grasp—we are to attempt to do things too big for us, to step out in faith and release God’s power to do His will. Terms are as much of a problem here as are concepts. If a thing is too big for us, don’t do it. If it is big and we’re not quite sure how to achieve it, but it is worthwhile and the Lord seems to be supporting the work—go for it. But to “step out in faith and release God’s power” is a mechanical, programmed, plug-in-technology approach to getting our way. God doesn’t have a spiritual trip hammer activated by our presumption hoping He will cover the gap between our circumstances and some

impossible end. We are thinking people who must do our best, act boldly in His behalf, and know that He will be there for us.

The fifth chapter, “Oh, that You would keep me from evil,” addresses avoiding confrontation. Our Lord has promised to be with us and that we will never be tempted beyond what we can handle. He also promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Why must we do the Jabez mantra daily to obtain what the Lord told us is our everyday provision?

The book closes with the thought that this “Jabez” prayer is the key; the prayer opens doors and creates the cycle of abundant living. The book concludes with the specifics of how to do the prayer of Jabez properly with the condition that first you must believe, then you must act if you are to bring **life changes into your life. Maybe we should remember that repeating a rote prayer like the prayer of Jabez hardly makes one honorable. Pagans pray rote prayers, too.**

CONCLUSIONS

The text begins by telling us that Jabez was a good man deemed “more honorable than his brothers.” He prayed a proper prayer and the Lord granted his request. That is good and we rejoice with Jabez that our God hears and answers the prayers of His people.

What troubles me about Wilkinson’s work is his expanding a two verse story to become a method to corner God to get what we ask for. This isn’t prayer. This is manipulation. God chose to answer Jabez’ prayer so evidently it was His will to do so for Jabez. It does not logically or biblically follow that it is God’s will for every subsequent believer to pray the same prayer. If we are trying to do the same we should pray according to God’s will as He declared it in the scriptures and pray according to the

prayers included in scripture. Begin with the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, consider Daniel 9:3-27 as an example of prayer, and pray for the things we are commanded to pray for. Here are some examples:

- The peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6);
- That laborers will be sent out (Luke 10:2);
- The salvation of Jewish people (Romans 10:1);
- For our civil authorities (1 Timothy 2:1,2);
- The pattern shown in the Lord's prayer;
- Whatever else is needful in our lives (Philippians 4:6).

The focus of this little book seems to be

on technique rather than on relationship with our Father. I am concerned that the prayer has become more important than the One prayed to. And I am uncomfortable with reading into the text so much that cannot be supported from scripture.

Believers would be better off to spend time in the Word, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer (Acts 2:42).

A Book Review by Dick Kuffel

END NOTES

¹Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez; Breaking Through to the Blessed Life;* (Multnomah; Sisters, Oregon 2000).

11.

² Ibid. 7.

³ Ibid. 87.

⁴ Ibid. 92.

⁵ Ibid. 15.

⁶ Ibid. 15.

⁷ Ibid. 15.

⁸ Ibid. 17.

⁹ Ibid. 18.

¹⁰ Ibid. 29.

¹¹ Ibid. 30.

¹² Ibid. 45.

¹³ Ibid. 62.

¹⁴ Ibid. 76.

¹⁵ Ibid. 86.

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In Memory of Don Anderberg

My dear friend Don Anderberg went to be with the Lord in July. He was only 49 years old and left behind a wonderful family. They are in our prayers. Don was instrumental in the founding of Critical Issues Commentary. It was his support, encouragement, and financial help that launched CIC in 1992. Don loved the truth and was often found helping pastors and ministries develop and have greater impact. His idea was that the truth should get a broader hearing. We thank God for the influence Don had on this ministry and pledge to carry on bringing God's Word to as many people as the Lord enables us as Don encouraged us to do.

Bob DeWaay