

Prayerful Theology – Nehemiah 9:1-7

I. Introduction:

- A. I wish that I could somehow paint the scene that I have in my head.
1. I picture several thousand hungry eyes resting on the pulpit which had been built in the Water Gate street.
 2. Ezra and Nehemiah are standing toward the back of the raised platform, and immediately in front of them are nine godly men – all Levites.
 3. One of the nine steps forward, raising his hands in invitation – *“Everyone stand up & let us praise our God.”*
 4. After pausing until the crowd is standing perfectly still,
 - a. with his hands still raised and closing his eyes, he prays to the God of Heaven – Jehovah.
 - b. *“Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”*
- B. I hope that you are basically familiar with the lengthy prayer which this man offers to the Lord.
1. Interspersed with notes of praise is a great deal of Israelite history.
 2. And this makes me wonder about the actual nature of this prayer.
 3. It might be more like a **prayerful hymn** than what we usually think of as prayer.
 4. There are **only a few requests** in these 34 verses – to go along with a **couple of promises**.
 5. It is primarily a recounting of God’s merciful blessings upon a disobedient and gainsaying – argumentative people.
 6. As we shall see beginning with v.6, the history will be interpreted through the lens of Biblical theology.
 7. As I say, it may have been a prayer in the form of a hymn.
- C. Many of the hymns which we sing today contain the testimonies of the writers – the lyricists.
1. We sing them, hopefully, with an *“amen”* in our hearts – *“Lord, this is my testimony as well.”*
 2. Not only should they reflect our hearts, but those testimonies should also reflect the truths of God’s Word.
 3. They should be Biblically and theologically accurate.
 4. Obviously, we can say that about the hymn of this chapter – if indeed it is a hymn.
 5. It appears to me that the first few words glorify God in 5 major areas while destroying 5 common heresies.
 6. See if you don’t agree with me.

II. The first error is the false doctrine of **POLYTHEISM** – the idea that there are many gods.

- A. The speaker prays – or chants – or sings – *“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone.”*
1. There is only one God, and His name is *“Jehovah.”*
- B. As is true of most Biblical names, *“Jehovah”* has meaning beyond just identifying someone.
1. If you will remember, when Moses was being commissioned to return to Egypt to deliver Israel from their bondage, he asked his commissioner, *“What shall I say when they ask me your name?”*
 2. *“And God (Elohim) said unto Moses”* in **Exodus 3:14**, *“I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”*
 3. In the language God used He said, *“I am Yahweh (Jehovah). It is Jehovah who commissions you.”*
- C. *“Jehovah,”* or as it is pronounced by some *“Yahweh,”* means *“I am.”*
1. And *“I am”* suggests that God is **self-existent** (dependent on no one), and that He is eternally **now**.
 2. Jehovah is timeless; He doesn’t have a past, and He doesn’t have to look into the future, because He exists in the future.
 3. Jehovah is always *“I am.”*
 4. These are two ways in which He is God – self-existence and eternity.
- D. Today, at least in our part of the world, it is easy to look around and see evidence for the existence of God.
1. We see beauty throughout creation, and we see unfathomable power in storms, volcanos & earthquakes.
 2. And we see intricacies of design which demand an engineer – a divine engineer.
 3. There is design in our bodies, in a flower, in the weather, in the solar system – in almost everything.

4. We see **evidence of God** in creation, but in our observations, we **cannot** really learn **who the Creator is** or **what He is like**.
 5. For that we must turn to what He has revealed about Himself – originally through His prophets and now through the Bible.
- E. Those Judeans had just spent much of three weeks reading and studying God’s revelation – the Bible.
1. They had learned how God created Adam, & how He had fellowship with Adam in the cool of the evening.
 2. They had learned how Jehovah revealed himself to Noah, Abraham and Moses.
 3. They had learned His name and seen His holy nature in the **Book of Exodus**.
 4. And they had also seen in the scriptures that none of the gods of men could stand before Jehovah Elohim.
 5. God’s prophet Elijah destroyed Baal; Samson destroyed Dagon; the Egyptian deities were nothing before the Jehovah, the God of Moses.
 6. So these people in Nehemiah’s day could sing and pray, **“Thou, even thou, art LORD ALONE.”**
 7. **Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”**
- F. I am tempted to spend an hour on this one point, but the speaker that day didn’t, and so I must move on.
1. But I do want to point out something which might have been in the back of some of their minds.
 2. Had their teachers brought to their attention the prophecies of **Isaiah?**
 3. **Isaiah** recorded the words of Judah’s honorable **King Hezekiah**, when that man prayed...
 4. **“O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou ALONE, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.”**
 5. Judah was at the time under military attack by the King of Syria, and Hezekiah prayed for deliverance.
 6. He concluded his prayer with the words, **“Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even THOU ONLY.”**
 7. Judah and Hezekiah were indeed delivered from the hand of Sennacerib, and Jehovah proved Himself to be the one and only God.
 8. And now these refugees from Babylon may have looked at themselves in the same light as Hezekiah.
 9. And they could say, We have been saved from the hands of the Chaldeans **“that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only.”**
- G. God has said to His people through **Isaiah**, **“Ye are my witnesses... and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me” – Isaiah 43:10.**
1. **“Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.**
 2. **Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God...” – Isaiah 44:6 & 8.**
 3. If you say that you believe the Bible, then you must say that there is no God but Jehovah.

III. The second false doctrine addressed here is **ATHEISTIC EVOLUTION**.

- A. **“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein...”**
1. Again, if you say you believe the Bible, then you must also admit that God created the world in six, twenty-four hour days.
 2. That is the testimony of **Genesis**, and it is reiterated over and over again throughout the Word.
 - a. It is an Old Testament doctrine, and it is a New Testament doctrine.
 - b. The Lord Jesus staked His credibility on God’s creation of the first man, Adam.
 - c. And Paul, the Apostle, declared that Christ, the Second Person of the God-head, created all things, staking **his** credibility on the Genesis account of creation.
 3. A three-legged stool can hold a thousand pounds, but if you knock out one leg, everything will fall.

4. **Genesis**, Jesus & Paul all unequivocally, positively, unashamedly declare that Jehovah created all things.
 5. And without any one of them, Christianity would collapse like a two-legged stool.
 6. But they are not the only testimonies of creation in the Bible.
- B. The first verse in God's Word declares that *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."*
1. The first four verses in the **Book of John** tell us, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.*
 - a. *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*
 - b. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men."*
 2. God commissioned his prophet in **Jeremiah 10** to tell Israel and her enemies, *"The LORD (Jehovah) is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king...*
 - a. *Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.*
 - b. *He (Jehovah) hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion."*
 3. The last book in the Bible exhorts us to shout *"with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" – Revelation 14:7.*
 4. I don't wish to sound mean, but it's a fact – to deny God's direct hand in creation is to deny the Bible.
 5. And to deny the Bible disqualifies someone from claiming to be a Christian.
- C. Notice how specific Nehemiah's worship leader was – *"Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein..."*
1. He mentions heaven and then the heaven above the heavens and all the angelic host.
 2. Then he speaks of everything in the earth and everything in the seas.
 3. And this formula is repeated over and over again throughout the Bible
 4. **Exodus 20:11** – *"For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day."*
 5. **Psalms 146** – *"Happy is he... whose hope is in the Lord His God, which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever."*
 6. Early in the **Book of Acts**, the church in Jerusalem *"lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is..."*
 7. The God we worship and to whom we pray is the Creator of the universe.

IV. Then this prayer exposed something might be called **THEISTIC EVOLUTION** or perhaps **DEISM**.

- A. **"Deism"** was a philosophy which flourished for a hundred years throughout the 18th century.
1. Many of the United States' founding fathers dabbled in the false religion of deism.
 2. It began with a rejection of the Bible as the revelation of God – the source of most false religion.
 3. It deified the mind of men.
 4. And then it ended with the idea that while smart men may think God exists, He basically wound up creation like a toy and then released it to spin around in whatever fashion it wants – completely on its own.
- B. Similarly, **theistic evolution** is the blended religious/scientific philosophy which says God used evolution to create.
1. It is an attempt by professing Christians to maintain some credibility before their atheistic scientific colleagues.
 2. But in their attempt to maintain billions of years of evolution, they must deny the words of **Genesis 1** and so many other scriptures.

C. Please turn to one of those other scriptures – **Colossians 1:16-17**.

1. *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and by him all things consist.”*
2. The word *“created”* in **verse 16** isn't a simple past tense statement of fact – *“God, in Christ, did it.”*
3. Paul used the Greek past perfect tense, for which English doesn't have an equivalent.
4. **Verse 16** declares, in a sense, that what God created He is still creating.
5. And if we Anglophones (English speakers) miss that point, he removes all doubt in the next verse.
6. *“All things were created by him, and for him; and by him all things consist.”*
7. By the Creator's hand all things stand or are established and maintained.
8. Jehovah is as interested in, and active in, His creation today as He was on day one, two or three of the creation week.

V. We might call the fourth false doctrine exposed by this scripture – **“ATHEISTIC SECULARISM.”**

A. *“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.”*

1. *“And the host of heaven worshippeth thee.”*
2. *“Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever.”*

B. Have you ever heard people talk about someone's *“worldview?”*

1. I had to laugh when I read Wikipedia's definition of the word.
 - a. *“A worldview is the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the whole of the individual's or society's knowledge and point of view.”*
 - b. *A worldview can include natural philosophy; fundamental, existential, and normative postulates; or themes, values, emotions, and ethics.”*
2. Why didn't they just say, *“A person's worldview is how he looks at the world?”*
3. And why didn't that definition refer to a person's faith or religion?

C. Christians should have a worldview that is Bible-based.

1. It should begin with an understanding that God created the universe for His own glory.
2. And a Christian should recognize that Jehovah is the sovereign God of His creation.
3. His worldview should include a realization that God is not finished with His creation and that He has future plans for it.
4. And then that worldview should conclude with worship – Since these things are true, *“stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever.”*

D. In **Revelation 4:11** the Apostle John is permitted into God's throne room where he sees the twenty-four elders – representatives of the Lord's elect – His saints.

1. John hears their praise – *“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power.”*
2. Why is Jehovah worthy of worship? *“For thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”*
3. Why did God choose to create, choose to permit the fall and choose to save some of the fallen?
4. *“O Lord, thou hast created all things for thy pleasure, for thy glory and for thy honour.”*
5. If these things are not a part of your worldview, then your worldview is not Biblical or Christian.
6. One of the things we learn in **Nehemiah 9** how our worship should begin.

E. There is one other major Bible doctrine brought to our attention by our Levitical worship leader.

1. **Verse 7** – *“Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees and gavest him the name of Abraham.”*

VI. GOD IS SOVEREIGN over all of His creation and over SALVATION.

- A. The Bible tells us that our first human father, Adam, chose to rebel against the Lord, our Creator.
1. Through Adam, sin was introduced into humanity, *“and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”* in Adam, our federal head – our first father.
 2. A few generations later, *“GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,”* so the Creator – the Sovereign God – washed the face of the earth clean with a flood.
 3. Humanity began again out of one family, but that family was still tainted with sin, and rebellion once again filled the earth.
 4. Then, a few generations later, God graciously reached down into the Iraqi city of Ur and called to Himself a man named *“Abram.”*
 5. Out of all the cities of the earth, out of all the families of the world...
 - a. Out off all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world,
 - b. Jehovah, the great *“I am,”* walked into Ur of the Chaldees and chose one man,
 - c. saying unto him, *“in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”*
- B. God changed the name, as well as the heart, of that man.
1. The name *“Abram”* means *“exalted father;”* but *“Abraham”* means *“father of a multitude.”*
 2. It’s not until we come to the New Testament that we begin to understand what the name *“Abraham”* really implies.
 3. In **Romans 4** we read – *“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”*
 4. Abram, the idolater from Ur of the Chaldees was chosen by the sovereign God who invited him to follow and serve the Lord.
 5. And Abram believed God, becoming, as Paul says later in **Romans 4**, *“The father of us all.”*
 6. *“Abram”* became *“Abraham,”* the father of those who believe God.
- C. Let’s assume that you believe that Jehovah is God alone.
1. Let’s say that you believe that He directly and purposefully created all things, *heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and... preservest them all.*
 2. **Why** is it that you believe these things when the common prevailing worldview is secular and atheistic?
 3. You might say that it’s because you were raised to believe these things; your family believes these things.
 4. You might say that it’s because you are smarter than the average person.
 5. While these might be true to a degree, isn’t it also true that others who were raised in the these Biblical truths, just like you, have lived and died rejecting them?
 6. Why have you been blessed with faith to believe and receive God’s word?
- D. I can tell you why.
1. Because, like Abram, the Lord God, didst choose to bring you out your natural unbelief and self-idolatry.
 2. If you possess faith to trust the Lord, and specifically, to trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, it is because the Jehovah called you and drew you to Himself, just as He did Abram.
 3. All you did was bow to the Lord’s grace and authority.
 4. Like Abraham – like Saul of Tarsus and so many others – you said, *“Lord, I believe you. Show me what You’d have me to do.”*

VII. Conclusion:

- A. I close this morning with the same words with which we began.
 - 1. *“Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”*
 - 2. Like Abram, none of us deserve God’s call and invitation. We are sinful idolaters.
 - 3. But the Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.

- B. If He is speaking to your heart, calling your name and inviting you to come to Him, don’t resist.
 - 1. Say to Him, *“Here I am Lord. I trust you to save my soul. Give me faith to trust you alone.”*
 - 2. *“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*
 - 3. *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”*