

BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

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People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).

Text

Nehemiah 9:1-38

Topic

The Jews assemble to recall the history of God's faithfulness to them as a nation, but their own unfaithfulness as His people

Title

*Nip It At the "But" & You Will
Keep Yourself In the "And's" of God*

Nehemiah 9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.

Nehemiah 9:2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

Nehemiah 9:3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God *for one-fourth* of the day; and *for another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Nehemiah 9:4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, *and* Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

Nehemiah 9:5 And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said:

"Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God

Forever and ever!

"Blessed be Your glorious name,

Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

Nehemiah 9:6 You alone *are* the LORD;

You have made heaven,

The heaven of heavens, with all their host,

The earth and everything on it,

The seas and all that is in them,

And You preserve them all.

The host of heaven worships You.

Nehemiah 9:7 "You *are* the LORD God,

Who chose Abram,

And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans,
And gave him the name Abraham;
Nehemiah 9:8 You found his heart faithful before You,
And made a covenant with him
To give the land of the Canaanites,
The Hittites, the Amorites,
The Perizzites, the Jebusites,
And the Girgashites -
To give *it* to his descendants.
You have performed Your words,
For You *are* righteous.
Nehemiah 9:9 “You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,
And heard their cry by the Red Sea.
Nehemiah 9:10 You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,
Against all his servants,
And against all the people of his land.
For You knew that they acted proudly against them.
So You made a name for Yourself, as *it is* this day.
Nehemiah 9:11 And You divided the sea before them,
So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land;
And their persecutors You threw into the deep,
As a stone into the mighty waters.
Nehemiah 9:12 Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar,
And by night with a pillar of fire,
To give them light on the road
Which they should travel.
Nehemiah 9:13 “You came down also on Mount Sinai,
And spoke with them from heaven,
And gave them just ordinances and true laws,
Good statutes and commandments.
Nehemiah 9:14 You made known to them Your holy Sabbath,
And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws,
By the hand of Moses Your servant.
Nehemiah 9:15 You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger,
And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst,
And told them to go in to possess the land
Which You had sworn to give them.
Nehemiah 9:16 “But they and our fathers acted proudly,
Hardened their necks,
And did not heed Your commandments.
Nehemiah 9:17 They refused to obey,
And they were not mindful of Your wonders
That You did among them.
But they hardened their necks,
And in their rebellion
They appointed a leader

To return to their bondage.
But You *are* God,
Ready to pardon,
Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger,
Abundant in kindness,
And did not forsake them.
Nehemiah 9:18 “Even when they made a molded calf for themselves,
And said, ‘This *is* your god
That brought you up out of Egypt,’
And worked great provocations,
Nehemiah 9:19 Yet in Your manifold mercies
You did not forsake them in the wilderness.
The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day,
To lead them on the road;
Nor the pillar of fire by night,
To show them light,
And the way they should go.
Nehemiah 9:20 You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,
And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth,
And gave them water for their thirst.
Nehemiah 9:21 Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; They lacked
nothing;
Their clothes did not wear out
And their feet did not swell.
Nehemiah 9:22 “Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations,
And divided them into districts.
So they took possession of the land of Sihon,
The land of the king of Heshbon,
And the land of Og king of Bashan.
Nehemiah 9:23 You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven,
And brought them into the land
Which You had told their fathers
To go in and possess.
Nehemiah 9:24 So the people went in
And possessed the land;
You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land,
The Canaanites,
And gave them into their hands,
With their kings
And the people of the land,
That they might do with them as they wished.
Nehemiah 9:25 And they took strong cities and a rich land,
And possessed houses full of all goods,
Cisterns *already* dug, vineyards, olive groves,
And fruit trees in abundance.
So they ate and were filled and grew fat,

And delighted themselves in Your great goodness.
Nehemiah 9:26 “Nevertheless they were disobedient
And rebelled against You,
Cast Your law behind their backs
And killed Your prophets, who testified against them
To turn them to Yourself;
And they worked great provocations.
Nehemiah 9:27 Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies,
Who oppressed them;
And in the time of their trouble,
When they cried to You,
You heard from heaven;
And according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved
them
From the hand of their enemies.
Nehemiah 9:28 “But after they had rest,
They again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their
enemies,
So that they had dominion over them;
Yet when they returned and cried out to You,
You heard from heaven;
And many times You delivered them according to Your mercies,
Nehemiah 9:29 And testified against them,
That You might bring them back to Your law.
Yet they acted proudly,
And did not heed Your commandments,
But sinned against Your judgments,
'Which if a man does, he shall live by them.'
And they shrugged their shoulders,
Stiffened their necks,
And would not hear.
Nehemiah 9:30 Yet for many years You had patience with them,
And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets.
Yet they would not listen;
Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.
Nehemiah 9:31 Nevertheless in Your great mercy
You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them;
For You *are* God, gracious and merciful.
Nehemiah 9:32 “Now therefore, our God,
The great, the mighty, and awesome God,
Who keeps covenant and mercy:
Do not let all the trouble seem small before You
That has come upon us,
Our kings and our princes,
Our priests and our prophets,
Our fathers and on all Your people,

From the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.
Nehemiah 9:33 However You *are* just in all that has befallen us;
For You have dealt faithfully,
But we have done wickedly.
Nehemiah 9:34 Neither our kings nor our princes,
Our priests nor our fathers,
Have kept Your law,
Nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies,
With which You testified against them.
Nehemiah 9:35 For they have not served You in their kingdom,
Or in the many good *things* that You gave them,
Or in the large and rich land which You set before them; Nor did they turn from
their wicked works.
Nehemiah 9:36 “Here we *are*, servants today!
And the land that You gave to our fathers,
To eat its fruit and its bounty,
Here we *are*, servants in it!
Nehemiah 9:37 And it yields much increase to the kings
You have set over us,
Because of our sins;
Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle
At their pleasure;
And we *are* in great distress.
Nehemiah 9:38 “And because of all this,
We make a sure *covenant* and write *it*;
Our leaders, our Levites, *and* our priests seal *it*.”

Introduction

- being changed to bring change -

There are a lot of **and's** in the first part of this chapter. The **and's** are a listing of God's faithfulness in His dealings with them. Let your eyes scan the text and take a look at some of the **and's**, beginning with verse six:

1. As they are recalling God's creation, they say, **And you preserve them all.**
2. Then, as they are recalling God's dealings with Abraham, the father of the Jews, you see in verses seven and eight, **And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans... And gave him the name Abraham... And made a covenant with him...**
3. Then, as they are recalling God's dealings at the time of their slavery to Egypt, they say in verses nine and eleven, **And**

- heard their cry by the Red Sea... **And** You divided the sea before them.
4. They go on in verses thirteen through fifteen, saying things like, **And** spoke with them... **And** gave them just ordinances and true laws... **And** brought them water from the rock... **And** told them to go in and possess the land.

Sounds great – *until verse sixteen*. There is another significant word: **But**. **But** they acted proudly. As you read on you see that, despite all God's blessings, throughout their history the Jews refused to obey... hardened their necks... rebelled... were disobedient... did evil in God's sight... and sinned against His judgments.

Thus, the spiritual application for us is to **nip it at the but and keep ourselves in the and's of God!**

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Reflect On All The "And's" In God's Love For You, and #2 Reject All The "But's" In Your Walk With God.

#1 Reflect On All The "And's" In God's Love For You
(v1-16)

One day you're feasting and your leaders are telling you, **Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength** (8:10). The next day you're fasting, wearing sackcloth, and throwing dust on your head. Were their leaders confused?

I don't think so. The Jews had just celebrated their first Feast of Tabernacles in almost a thousand years. They were getting ready to rededicate themselves to the Law of God – which we will read about in chapter ten. It only made sense that they spend a day reflecting on their history thus far. As they reflected, it only became obvious that God had remained faithful to them despite their unfaithfulness through their history.

Their reflection was not designed to rob their joy, but rather to retain it. Although they had failed, as a nation, God's grace and mercy were super-abundantly available to them to press forward in their walk and work.

We fail. We fail as Christians; we can fail as a Church. Rather than see our joy disappear, we want to see that God's grace and mercy are always super-abundantly available to us, both individually and corporately, to press forward in our walk and work.

The first five verses set the stage for us:

Nehemiah 9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.

Nehemiah 9:2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

Nehemiah 9:3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God *for one-fourth* of the day; and *for another* fourth they confessed and worshipped the LORD their God.

Nehemiah 9:4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, *and* Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

Nehemiah 9:5 And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said:

“Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God

Forever and ever!

“Blessed be Your glorious name,

Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

We are immediately drawn to the **fasting**, to the **sackcloth**, to the **dust**, to the **confession** of sin. Do not overlook that they also **read** from the Bible and **worshipped** during the half-day retreat. Do not overlook that they were empowered to **stand up and bless the Lord**.

We sometimes do not take time to confess our sin. There are even those who will tell you that it is wrong to do so!

We can also spend too much time wallowing in our sin. Neither approach is biblical.

We can learn something from the Jews in our chapter about confession. A few simple themes come into focus:

1. We see that God is the Creator and that He chooses us to have fellowship with Him.

2. The problem is that we are chosen but remain free to make our own wrong choices. We often choose to be carnal (fleshly) rather than spiritual.
3. Thus we need to confess our sins so we can receive God's cleansing and regain and retain the joy of our fellowship with Him.

In verse six, we recall God as the Creator:

Nehemiah 9:6 You alone *are* the LORD;
 You have made heaven,
 The heaven of heavens, with all their host,
 The earth and everything on it,
 The seas and all that is in them,
 And You preserve them all.
 The host of heaven worships You.

There is so much theology crammed into this verse... You could spend your lifetime on it! There is a personal God; He created everything out of nothing; He sustains His creation by His almighty power; higher beings than man recognize Him and give Him the worship He deserves.

Recalling God as creator puts everything else into its proper perspective.

The Creator chooses us. We see that as the Jews jump ahead several thousand years through history from creation to Abraham:

Nehemiah 9:7 "You *are* the LORD God,
 Who chose Abram,
 And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans,
 And gave him the name Abraham;
 Nehemiah 9:8 You found his heart faithful before You,
 And made a covenant with him
 To give the land of the Canaanites,
 The Hittites, the Amorites,
 The Perizzites, the Jebusites,
 And the Girgashites -
 To give *it* to his descendants.
 You have performed Your words,
 For You *are* righteous.

Behind the praise for God as Creator is the understanding that all creation only exists so that human beings can have a habitat in which to live while God is revealing Himself to us, to save us and have fellowship with us. As amazing and intricate as creation is; *that is all it is!*

God chose Abraham. Then He made a new nation from Abraham's descendants. They were to be His special people, His chosen nation, to reveal Him to the rest of the world.

God chooses you in the same way He chose Abraham. He justified him by faith. To be justified is to be declared righteous by God and accepted into heaven. The Book of Romans is heavy with discussions about Abraham and how he was justified by his faith in God.

Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Abraham was a Gentile pagan idolater in the land of Ur when God called him. He was not performing works of righteousness, making himself ready for salvation. God revealed Himself to Abraham while he was yet ungodly. Abraham believed God and then God **accounted** him righteous.

This word **accounted** is also translated *reckoned* or *imputed* or *counted*. It is a banking term, borrowed from bookkeepers. It means to "put over into your account"; "to make an entry in your ledger." If you could have seen Abraham's ledger sheet before God chose him it would have been filled with the record of his sins. The moment Abraham believed God, his sins were put over to the account of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ's righteousness was put over into Abraham's account. Thus Abraham was saved - justified while he was yet ungodly - having no righteousness of his own to offer God.

God's plan of salvation is to declare you righteous by faith in Jesus Christ. When you believe Him for your salvation, you find you have been chosen by Him – just as Abraham was.

In verses nine through fifteen the Jews recall some of their national history; specifically, they recall their slavery in Egypt, God's deliverance, and the giving of the Law to govern them. For our application this morning, it reminds us that we are part of something greater. In our case, it is the Church on earth. The apostle Peter calls the Church **a chosen generation** (First Peter 2:9). We do not replace Israel as God's special, chosen people. But we, too, are a chosen people. God has showered many spiritual blessings upon us. In fact, the apostle Paul says we have **all** spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

The God Who created the universe in order to choose us has been faithful to bless us. It's important we often reflect on our spiritual blessings. They are not just too numerous to list; *they are innumerable!* There are an endless number of **and's** that we could list that will cause us to **stand up and bless the Lord!**

Until we say, "But," and fall into our unfaithfulness.

#2 Reject All The "But's" In Your Walk With God
(v16-38)

After all God did in His faithfulness, the Jews were unfaithful:

1. In verses sixteen through eighteen, they were unfaithful at the giving of the Law. While Moses was away on Mount Sinai, they appointed his brother Aaron to lead them; and they made a Golden Calf to be their god.
2. In verses nineteen through twenty-one, they were unfaithful to go in and possess the land of Canaan that God promised them. Instead they wandered in the wilderness for forty-years, until that generation which had disobeyed God was all dead.
3. In verses twenty-six through thirty-one, they were unfaithful after they entered the land. You read about it in the Book of Judges and in their subsequent history. Ultimately the kingdom was divided, and the people were taken away captive to Assyria and Babylon.

God chooses us to enjoy fellowship. We are chosen, but remain free to choose. Because we still have a body of flesh to contend with, we often choose to be carnal, or fleshly, rather than remain spiritual.

The apostle Paul described the contention, and our choices, in a couple of famous portions of Scripture:

1. In Romans chapter seven he spoke of not doing what he wanted to do, and of doing what he did not want to do. Then, in Romans eight, he discussed the victory that you can have in the conflict as you yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit.
2. In Galatians chapter five Paul wrote of the conflict between the lusts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Again, by yielding to the indwelling Holy Spirit, you may walk in victory.

Truth is, we fail. We fall. Though God is our creator, and has chosen us... We are prone to being carnal.

What to do? **Confess!** If you confess, you will be cleansed and put immediately back on track in your fellowship with God.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- being changed to bring change -

The Jews were confessing their sin in order to be cleansed. They were rededicating themselves to God. They were rejecting the **but's** of their previous history in order to receive the **and's** of His blessings.

What are some of the **but's** that we might nip before they interfere in our walk with the Lord?

Pride is mentioned in verse sixteen. Thinking more highly of ourselves than we should leads to an attitude of not heeding God's words or warnings. It leads to rebellion. Thankfully, God remains (as it says in verse seventeen), **Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness.** He will not ever **forsake** you!

Look through verses nineteen through twenty-five and you will see the list of blessings that God was faithful to bestow in spite of their pride.

Disobedience is mentioned in verse twenty-six. It's a **but** we want to nip. It leads us to rebel against God; to reject His clear Word; to presume we know better than God.

Look through verses twenty-seven through twenty-nine, though, and you will see God still faithful, still desiring to bless, during your times of disobedience.

Stiffened... necks are mentioned in verse twenty-nine. It means *stubbornness*, and it is a **but** we must nip. It is associated with **shrugging your shoulders**. It seems to be apathy, or complacency.

Apathy, or complacency, doesn't seem so evil. It is. Still, God remains faithful; look through verses thirty and thirty-one. God remains **patient, gracious, and merciful**.

In verses thirty-two through thirty-five, they summarize all they'd been saying. God was faithful; they were unfaithful – both individually and corporately.

Having confessed their sin, they ask to be restored to greater blessing:

Nehemiah 9:36 "Here we *are*, servants today!
And the land that You gave to our fathers,
To eat its fruit and its bounty,
Here we *are*, servants in it!
Nehemiah 9:37 And it yields much increase to the kings
You have set over us,
Because of our sins;
Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle
At their pleasure;
And we *are* in great distress.
Nehemiah 9:38 "And because of all this,
We make a sure *covenant* and write *it*;
Our leaders, our Levites, *and* our priests seal *it*."

They were subject to the rulers of Persia; they longed for the blessings that God had promised them.

What are you subject to? What, or who, are you a slave to? Do you long to be set free from some sin, some habit, and experience the blessings God has promised to you in His Word?

Then confess it and let Him cleanse you... Be empowered to [stand and bless the Lord your God!](#)

