

KINGDOM WORK

Week Nine | June 23, 2019 | Kingdom Workers Worship Their King

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Nehemiah 7–10. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God is worthy of our worship.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

We worship Him by rejoicing in and obeying His Word.

MEDITATE

"And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (Nehemiah 8:6).

GETTING STARTED

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.*

We are worshippers. We were made for it. To worship means to show reverence and adoration. Our hearts naturally latch on to what we deem to be a worthy object of our worship. The world offers us many options to choose from—food, sports, entertainment, leisure, careers, academics, fitness, status, possessions, and much

more. But we were made for more. We were made to worship our King. He alone is worthy of our worship. These lesser options fail to win our affections when our eyes are fixed on Christ. When we behold Him, all other attractions fade. Nothing comes close to the incomparable beauty of Christ. He is our treasure. We echo the psalmist's words. "Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!" (Psalm 96:9). "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

Our King is worthy of worship. The tomb is empty; the throne is occupied. He defeated death and rose so His people could be united with Him for all eternity. And one day, we will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12). He is worthy of our worship because He is our Creator. "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Revelation 4:11). He is worthy because He sacrificed Himself for us. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12) We are the chosen people of God. "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, and the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Kingdom workers worship their King. Worship is not confined to the practice of singing hymns in our local church gatherings. We worship when we give, when we show hospitality to orphans, widows, and refugees, and when we share His gospel with our unbelieving neighbors. We worship when we exalt Him to our children and when we pray and fast.

Today we will focus on two specific ways we worship our King—when we rejoice in His Word and when we obey it. Our hearts rejoice as our hands obey. Our text shows how Nehemiah and the Israelites did this. We will see them gather and feast, celebrate and repent. We will sit alongside them as they hear Ezra read the rich history of God's faithfulness throughout their unfaithfulness. We will bear witness to the covenant they make with God. Their history is our history. Their God is our God. We are all united through the precious blood of Jesus.

The temple has been rebuilt. The wall is finished. Now we see God rebuilding His people. We have a lot of ground to cover today. So get comfortable, and let's dig in to the Scriptures! Let's treasure the words we read today, not because they're magical, but because they're breathed out by God. His Word is alive. He interacts with us through it. Let's meet Him in His Word right now.

Father, we expect to encounter You in Your Word. We are excited to be changed by what You reveal about Yourself. Open our eyes. Teach us. Stir our hearts to worship you as we study Your Word, for Your Name's sake. Amen.

Q: *What does the Bible have to say about how we worship God?*

Q: *Consider all the ways you can worship God. Are you a good worshipper? What changes can you make to be a better worshipper of God?*

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will learn the importance of God's people worshipping and covenanting with Him.

1. KINGDOM WORKERS TREASURE GOD'S WORD

2. KINGDOM WORKERS OBEY GOD'S WORD

3. KINGDOM WORKERS COVENANT WITH THEIR KING

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

KINGDOM WORKERS TREASURE GOD'S WORD

■ NEHEMIAH 8:1-12

Q: *Where was Ezra when read the Book of the Law of Moses [v. 4]?*

Q: *Why were the people rejoicing [v. 12]?*

If you search the internet, you will find videos of grateful people receiving Bibles in their native language for the first time. One such video shows a group of remote villagers in a faraway but not forgotten corner of the world, cheering

as a small charter plane lands on a dirt runway. These people were undoubtedly happy to see the pilot safely land the plane, but their raucous shouts and cheers were for the cargo onboard the plane. They wept and danced and cheered because the pilot brought them the Word of God. Treasure arrived in their village that day!

Kingdom workers revel in the privilege of hearing God speak through His Word. The people in Nehemiah's day were no different. They were a large group of people, about fifty thousand (Nehemiah 7:66), and their King knew each by name. Nehemiah 7 lists in great detail many of the names of the returned exiles. Rather than glossing over this list, we can take comfort in what God reveals about Himself in this chapter. He is a personal God. He's relational. He's near to His people. He knows us by name.

When God's people gathered after their work was done, they were rewarded with the reading of God's Word. Ezra the priest read from the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) from "early morning to midday" (Nehemiah 8:3). Can you imagine gathering to hear Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy read aloud for half the day? These people did. Not only were they blessed with hearing the Scriptures read to them, the Levites moved among them to help them understand it. The Word was so treasured that the priests worked to make sure all who heard it could understand its meaning.

We don't read it out of obligation. Spending time with Him in His Word is not an item to be checked off our to-do list each day. God's people treasure His Word. It's that simple.

The people made it clear how much they treasured God's Word in another tangible way. Ezra read from a platform, one built for this express purpose. You can bet these Kingdom builders knew how to build a raised stage for their priest to read the Scriptures! The Word of God was elevated above them. And when Ezra read it aloud, the people stood in reverence to hear their King's words (Nehemiah 8:5). They responded by lifting their hands and bowing their heads. Their response was worship.

They also wept (8:9). Why? When confronted with God's holiness and His faithfulness to them, they were grieved by their sin. But Nehemiah and Ezra told the people this was not a day for mourning, but for feasting and rejoicing. "And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them" (Nehemiah 8:12).

Can you picture it? These Kingdom workers worshipped their King by treasuring His Word. They excitedly gathered to hear it read aloud. They build a platform so Ezra could be seen and to elevate the Word of God in honor. They stood out of respect through the reading of five books of the Bible. They asked the priests questions about the things that confused them. They repented of their sins. They feasted and rejoiced as God's grace was poured over them through His Word.

Is this an unfamiliar scene to you, or can you identify with their joy over God's Word? If this kind of affection for the Bible is unfamiliar to you, repent. Ask God to open your eyes to behold wondrous things out of His law (Psalm 119:18). If their joy is contagious to your heart, join them in celebrating God's Word. Make it your treasure.

Q: *What does treasuring God's Word look like in our day? Give examples.*

Q: *Consider the things you're tempted to treasure instead of the Bible. How can your faith family encourage one another to worship God by treasuring His Word daily?*

KINGDOM WORKERS OBEY GOD'S WORD

NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

Q: *Why were the leaders gathered together [v. 13]?*

Q: *What did they find written in the Law [v. 14]?*

The first day of the gathering of God's people had come to an end. No doubt the Israelites slept hard after a long day of hearing and responding to God's Word. They had worshipped and rejoiced. Now it's day two, and the leaders came together to study God's Law. "And they found it written in the Law that the Lord through Moses had commanded that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month" (Nehemiah 8:14). They realized they were in the seventh month and that God's Law required them to keep the Feast of Booths. This feast had been celebrated only occasionally in the past, not regularly as God intended.

But these kingdom workers were eager to worship their King more. So, on day two, they worshipped Him by obeying His Word. They celebrated the Feast of Booths. God commanded them to keep this feast to commemorate what He had done for them. They were to celebrate His mighty act of rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. It was to be a time of remembrance. "You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 23:42-43).

God's commands are always for our good and His glory. He's not a tyrant who shouts orders for people to follow. He's our Father. He has good plans for us and wants what's best for us. And He knows how to accomplish His best in our lives, so He gives us good commands. This command was to help the backsliding Israelites remember their good and gracious King. To turn their eager-to-wander eyes upward. Nehemiah similarly charged the Israelites to "remember the Lord who is great and awesome" when they were afraid (Nehemiah 4:14).

God wanted them to celebrate their salvation from Egypt. He wanted them to be reminded of when they lived in temporary dwellings in the wilderness. So, He commanded them to keep the Feast of Booths. And they did. "All the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing" (Nehemiah 8:17).

They obeyed their King and rejoiced. There is joy in obedience. There is "very great rejoicing" in obedience. Does obeying your King bring you joy? Do you obey begrudgingly or eagerly?

Surely, our paths of obedience can sometimes cause pain. You may be rejected or persecuted. You may experience loss because you obey. Paul said that he suffered the loss of all things and counted them as rubbish that he might gain Christ (Philippians 3:8). Underneath all the pain in this life, there is still joy. It can be overshadowed by pain. Sometimes it's small and needs cultivating. But Kingdom workers obey God's Word dutifully and joyfully because of our love for our great God who has rescued us from His own wrath. Each step of obedience we take, even the painful ones, boldly declares that our King is worth it all. He is worthy of our worship, and obedience is worship. Take that next step of obedience and keep stepping. Walk in obedience to your King. Worship Him with each step you take to obey His Word!

Q: *Is there an area of your life where you are not walking in obedience? Spend some time repenting and seeking accountability from your faith family.*

Q: *What does the Bible say are the blessings for those who obey?*

KINGDOM WORKERS COVENANT WITH THEIR KING

NEHEMIAH 9-10

Q: *What did the Israelites do in response to God's great faithfulness towards them [9:38]?*

Q: *What did they pledge to do [10:29]?*

As we close our study today, Nehemiah and the Israelites make a covenant with their King. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. This rich word is rare in our modern culture. It's more than fulfilling the terms of a contract or business transaction. It's a vow or promise. This special agreement is unique and reserved for the most precious of commitments. We covenant with our spouse. We covenant with our local church. It's certainly most appropriate to be used in the context of our relationship with our King. God has always covenanted with His people (Some examples: Noah in Genesis 9, Abraham in Genesis 15, Moses in Exodus 19–24). The specific terms vary, but all of God's covenantal arrangements call for obedience.

Most of Nehemiah 9 is a beautiful retelling of God's rich covenantal history with His people. This is our history too. They praise God as they remember Him as Creator, Redeemer, Lawgiver, Disciplinarian, Savior, and Judge. As they recall His faithfulness to them, they call on Him to be faithful once again. "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day" (Nehemiah 9:32). These frequently faithless people ask God to show them mercy once again. They ask for new mercies.

We can learn from their bold petition. We also obey God imperfectly. But instead of our sin leading us to flee from our holy God, we can take courage from the example of these flawed followers and run to the throne as they did. We don't need to hide from our Father when we sin. We can draw near with confidence to His throne and ask for mercy and grace in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). We rejoice in the benefits of being the adopted sons and daughters of the King.

That day, the Israelites made a firm covenant in writing with God (Nehemiah 9:38). They sealed this precious document, and the first half of chapter ten lists the names written on the seals. All the lists of names in the book of Nehemiah reveal God's focus on the individual, yet corporate, aspect of our faith. Those who contribute to the kingdom work are many. As many members of the same body, we do not walk through God's kingdom alone.

The second half of chapter ten lists their promises of the covenant. The Israelites entered into “a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes” (Nehemiah 10:29). They made three pledges to God—to not intermarry with pagans, to keep the Sabbath and the sabbatical year, and to support the ministry of the temple.

The people pledged their obedience to their King. They recommitted themselves to the Mosaic covenant. Though God keeps all His covenants, His people have always failed to keep covenant with Him. This is why we need the new covenant of Christ. Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection made way for a better covenant. He accomplished what we have always failed to do—He keeps covenant with God.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 describes this new covenant we live under. It’s different than all of God’s previous covenants with His people. In this covenant of grace, He writes His law on our hearts. He reveals Himself to us, lets us know Him. He forgives our sins and remembers them no more. What amazing grace! This new covenant comes only through Christ (Luke 22:20).

Worship your King because He has provided a new covenant for you. Worship Him by rejoicing in and obeying His Word. Worship by covenanting with Him. Embrace the covenant of grace you live under and worship Him by walking in obedience. The great and awesome God has given you new and eternal life with Him and peace with Him through His Son. He’s given you a beautiful inheritance of His presence forever. Kingdom worker, worship your King!

🔗: *How does your faith family covenant with each other and with God?*

🔗: *How does God’s new covenant of grace inspire worship in you today?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- ♀: *Worship is something we do both corporately and individually. How do you worship God individually? How can you worship Him more?*
- ♀: *Spend some time reflecting on the benefits of being a kingdom citizen. Worship Him now for the grace He has shown to you. Consider the impact on those in your sphere of influence when you worship God by rejoicing in and obeying His Word.*

PRAY

+ *Use this prayer point to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

Father, we worship You and only You. You are our great and awesome King, and we are Your blessed children. You are Creator, Redeemer, Judge, and Savior. You speak to us today through Your Word. It is our treasure, and we rejoice in it and obey it. You are the covenant-keeping God, and You have blessed us with a new covenant through Christ. We covenant with you, O King. Stir our hearts to worship You, Lord. We bless Your name. We tell of Your glory among the nations. Be glorified in us.

COMMENTARY

NEHEMIAH 8:10—*the joy of the Lord is your strength.* As the people rejoiced in God and delighted in His presence, He would show Himself strong to help them and defend them. “Joy” was a keynote because God had saved Israel, in both the remote and the recent past, and this story of salvation would have been told again in the reading of the Book of the Law.

NEHEMIAH 9:6-37—The prayer resembles, in part, Ezra’s prayer of confession upon his discovery of the problem of mixed marriages (Ezra 9:6–15). It has even more in common with certain psalms of confession (such as Psalm 78 and 106), which interweave confession with memories of God’s grace, and notes of petition. The prayer follows the biblical story as told in Genesis–Kings.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible*
Commentary Notes.