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We Are Surrounded by a Great Cloud of Witnesses

12: 1-3

We are surrounded by a Great Cloud of Witnesses DIG: Describe the three categories of readers addressed in the book of Hebrews. Who are the cloud of witnesses? Why was Yeshua's becoming a man and dying for our sins the greatest act of faith ever? As believers, what should we concentrate on when we run the race? What are the prizes for those who successfully run the race with endurance? What should we do when we believe the race is getting to difficult?

REFLECT: In what ways is your spiritual life like a race? Who are the people you look up to as having run the race the way you hope to run it? List the kinds of things that weigh you down on your spiritual journey. What keeps you from letting go of the things that weigh you down? What do you look forward to in finishing this race that we call the Way (Acts 19:9). How does God's grace make a difference in your race?



Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses ([to see link](#)

click [Cl](#) - The Hall of Faith), **let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles (12:1a)**. In the book of **Hebrews**, as in many places in the New Covenant, the phrase **let us** may refer to believers, to unbelievers, or to both. As a matter of courtesy and concern, the author frequently identifies himself with those to whom he is writing, whether or not they are part of the Messianic community (see **[Ag](#) - The Audience of the book of Hebrews**). In **Hebrews 4:1, 14 and 16**, for example, I think unbelievers are being addressed. Similarly, **6:1** speaks of unbelievers going on to the maturity of salvation. In **10:23-24**, the reference can be both to believers and unbelievers.

Here in **12:1**, I believe **let us** refers to the Jews who are intellectually convinced that **Yeshua** is the **Messiah**, but have never stepped over the line from knowledge to **faith**. They had not begun **the race** of **faith** (see **[Cw](#) - Faith to Run the Believer's Marathon**), which starts at salvation - to which the author is now calling them. The truths, however, also apply to believers, who are now **running**. It is as if the writer is saying, "If you have not stepped over the line from your head to your heart, if you have not **trusted** in the sacrifice of **Yeshua** rather than the Levitical sacrifices . . . get in **the race**, because you have to enter before you can ever hope to win. If you are a believer, **run** with endurance. Don't give up."³⁶¹

And let us run with endurance the race set before us (12:1b). **Endurance** includes both passive endurance and active persistence. It is the steady determination to keep going. **The race** of a believer is a marathon, not a sprint. The congregations of **God** have always had many believers who are sprinters, but **ADONAI** wants those who will **finish the race (Second Timothy 4:7)**. Many of the **Hebrew** believers to whom the letter was written had started well. They had seen signs and wonders and were thrilled with their new lives (**2:4**). But as the new began to wear off and the persecution started, they began to lose their enthusiasm and their confidence. They stated to look back over their shoulder to Levitical Judaism, and they began to weaken and waver.

Rabbi Sha'ul knew of some believers in the same condition, and to them he wrote: **Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever (First Corinthians 9:24-25)**. Of course, our competition is different from that of athletic **race** in two important ways. First, we do not compete against other believers, trying to outdo each other in righteousness or accomplishments. Ours is not a **race** of works but a **race** of **faith**. Yet, we do not compete against each other even in **faith**. Our competition is against the Adversary, his world system, and our own **sinfulness**, often referred to in the New Covenant as the flesh. Second, our strength is not in ourselves, but in **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**; otherwise we

could never endure. We are not called on to endure in ourselves, but to endure in **Messiah**.³⁶²

Fixing our eyes upon Jesus (12:2a). The minute the Greek runner in the stadium took his attention away from **the race** and the goal to which he was running, and begins looking at the crowd, he unconsciously slowed down. It is so with us. The minute we take our eyes off of **Yeshua Messiah**, our sanctification is hindered. Some believers are preoccupied with themselves. They may not be selfish or egotistical, but they pay way too much attention to what they are doing, to the mechanics of **running**. There is a place for such concern, but if we focus on ourselves, we will never **run** well for **the Lord**. Sometimes we are preoccupied with what other believers are thinking and doing, especially in relation to us. Concern for others also has a place. We do not disregard our brothers and sisters in **Christ** or what they think about us. But if we focus on others, we are bound to stumble. We are not even to focus on **the Holy Spirit**. We are to be filled with **the Spirit**, and when we are, our focus will be on **Jesus**, because that is where **the Spirit's** focus is. **The Holy Spirit will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you (John 16:14).** If our focus is truly on **Yeshua**, we will see everything else in its right perspective.

Yeshua is the Author (Greek: *archegos*, meaning *the chief leader*) **of our faith** (Hebrews 12:2b JKV quoting **Habakkuk 2:4**). In 2:10, **Jesus** is called **the author of salvation**. Here **He** is called **the author of our faith**. **He** is the pioneer, or originator, of all **faith**. **He** authored **Abel's faith**, **Enoch's** and **Noah's**, as well as **Moshe's**, **Abraham's**, **David's**, and ours. As Rabbi Sha'ul explains: **For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the Sea of Reeds. They ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied the, and the rock was Christ (First Corinthians 10:1, 3-4).**

But **Jesus** is not only **the Author** or our **faith**, **He** is also **the Finisher** (Greek *teleioo*, which means *to carry through completely, to finish, to make perfect or complete*) **of our faith** (Hebrews 12:2c JKV quoting **Habakkuk 2:4**). **He** continued to **trust His Father** until **He** could say: **It is finished (John 19:30)!** These words, along with: **Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit (Luke 23:46).** **His** work was **finished** not only in that it was completed, but in that it was perfected. It accomplished exactly what it was meant to accomplish, because, from birth to death, **His** life was totally committed **into His Father's hands**. There has never been a walk of **faith** like **Yeshua's**.³⁶³

For (Greek: *anti* meaning *instead of*) **the joy set before Him (12:2d):** *Anti* is also used in

Luke 11:11 where we have: **If he asked for a fish, will he *anti*, instead of a fish give him a serpent?** Therefore, **the joy** spoken of here is the divine blessing of **His** preincarnate life in fellowship with **the Father**; the glory that **He** had with **YHVH** before the world was formed. In exchange for this, **He endured the cross, scorning its shame (12:2e)**. The contrast is drawn between **the race set before** the readers in **verse 1** and **the joy** that was already present in **Messiah**. The heroic character of **His faith** appears in **His** renouncing a **joy** already possessed in exchange for indignity and **death**. So **Yeshua, being the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8)!** **Jesus'** dying for our **sins** was the greatest act of **faith** ever because **He** had the most to lose.

Messiah sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2f quoting Psalm 110:1). The words **sat down** (Greek: *kekathiken*) are in the perfect tense, the idea being that after **His** work of providing salvation was **finished**, **He sat down**, and remains **seated**. **He** never needs to raise and repeat **His** work on **the cross** for **sinners**. **He** is not only seated, but **He** occupies the position of preeminence, **at the right hand of the throne of God the Father** interceding for us (Acts 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20).

For the joy set before Messiah, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (12:2). OK, but what's at the end of **the race** for us? What do we get if we win? First, a marathon, the agony **race**, seems to never end. It is not a jog in the park, simply for the joy of **running**. If you don't have something important to look forward to at the end of this **race**, you will likely not start it and will certainly not finish it.

Jesus didn't **run the race** of **faith** for the pleasure of **the race** itself, though **He** must have experienced some great satisfaction in seeing people healed, comforted, brought to **faith**, and started on their way to spiritual growth. But **He** didn't leave the presence of **His Father** and **the Ruach**, **His** heavenly glory, endure temptation and fierce opposition from the Adversary himself, suffer ridicule, scorn, blasphemy, torture, and crucifixion by **His** enemies for the sake of whatever few pleasures **He** had while on earth.

Only what was at the end of **the race** could have motivated **Messiah** to leave what **He** did and endure what **He** did. **Jesus** ran for two things: **For the joy set before Him** and **sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God**. **He** ran for **the joy** of exaltation. After the

Passover Seder with **His** apostles on the night in which **He** was betrayed, **Jesus** said to **His Father**, **"I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began (Yochanan 17:4-5). Yeshua** gained **His** reward by **glorifying His Father** while on the earth. **He** also **glorified ADONAI** by totally reflecting **the Father's** attributes and by fully doing **the Father's** will.

The prize believers are to **run** for is not heaven. If **Yeshua** is truly our **Lord** and **Savior**, heaven is already ours. We **run** for the same prize that **Christ** ran for, and achieve it in the same way **He** did. We **run** for the exaltation **YHVH** promises will be ours if we **glorify Him** on earth as **His Son** did. There are five **crowns** that can be ours at the bema seat of **Messiah** (see the commentary on **Revelation Cc - We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**). We glorify **God** by allowing **His** attributes to shine through us and by obeying **His** Word and **His** will in everything we do.

When you get weary in **the race**, when your **faith runs** out and you think maybe **God** has turned **His** back on you, when it seems we you'll never get out the mess you're in and you're sure your **faith** can't hold out any longer, remember this verse: **Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (12:3)**. Part of the purpose for **fixing our eyes upon Jesus** is the same as that for considering **the great cloud of witnesses** - our encouragement.

Heaven was not foreign to **Jesus**. **He** is the only person to live on earth *after* **He** had lived in heaven. As believers, you and I will live in heaven after our time on earth, but **Yeshua** did just the opposite. **He** knew heaven before **He** came to earth. **He** knew what awaited **Him** upon **His** return. And knowing what awaited, **He** continued to be **faithful** to **the Father**.

The righteous of the TaNaKh were heroes of **faith** (see **Cl - The Hall of Faith**), but **Yeshua** is the preeminent example of **faith**. **He** is the divine **Son of God**, but while on the earth **He** did not live by **His** own power and will, but in **His Father's** power and will. Otherwise **He** couldn't be our example. And unless, by the power of **the Ruach**, we are truly able to live a holy life, **His** life would not be an example but an impossible ideal to mock and to judge us.

We rejoice that one day we will **live together with Him (First Thessalonians 5:10)**, but we should also rejoice that we can live like **Him** right now! We don't live in our own power but in **His**, just **He** did not live in **His** own power but in **the Father's** power while on the earth. We can say with Rabbi Sha'ul: **I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).**³⁶⁴