

A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

Request: I have heard different explanations of the “Great Cloud of Witnesses” in Hebrews 12. Would you explain who they are?

The “Great Cloud of Witnesses” is found in Heb.12: 1-2. This is one Greek sentence.

We will study this Greek sentence by the following 7 investigating questions.

The answers to these 7 questions will explain who this “Great Cloud of Witnesses” are and why they are surrounding us.

1. Who is the great cloud of witnesses?

The answer is in the Greek grammar of “therefore.” Therefore is the conclusive particle (toigaroun). It refers back to the 19 heroes of faith listed by name in Heb.11: 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29, 30, 31, 32 - [36, 13, 39-40] – “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses.” (Heb.11:1-2, 39)

2. Why are they are surrounding (perikeimai) (p/m/ptc/asn) [us]? Read - Heb.11: 3 (40) and 12:1.

All CA believers have (echo) (p/a/ptc/nplm) [to hold as prototypes] these heroes of faith cycle surrounding them in the word of God of Heb.11 of the Old Covenant. These heroes of the faith cycle are not so much spectators of our faith but martyrs (martus) of the faith.

“They stand in Scripture as a witness to the character of committed faith and to the possibilities of faith for later generations.” (Call to Commitment by Lane, pg.157)

This is much like a sport arena that has retired jerseys of outstanding players.

3. How is the encumbrance (ogkos) [weight, impediment, hinders efficiency] different from the sin (ten hamaritia) that so easily entangles (euperistastos) [that which stand around so closely] us? (Gal.5:7)

“The Christian runner must rid himself even of innocence things which might retard him. All that does not help hinders. It is by running he learns what these things are.” (Wuest, pg.214)

- How do we lay aside (apotithemi) (a/m/ptc/nplm) the encumbrance? (Mark 4:18-19; Eph.4:22-24)
- How do we lay aside the sin that so easily entangles us? (Gal.5:16; 1 John 1:9)

So easily entangles refers to when the lust of the flesh works in conjunction with the lust of the mind (Rom.7: 23-25; 8:2, 4-8; 12:2; 3:12-14; 2 Cor.10: 5; 1 Pet.2: 11).

4. What is the race (ton agon) [general contest] that has been set before (prokeimai) (p/a/ptc/asm) us?

The race is the plan of God. We may run in a different heat or in a different type of races but as spiritual advancing believers we all run in the plan of God. This is the point of the 19 heroes of the faith of Heb.11 (Phil.2: 15-16).

Each of us have a specific race to run in the plan of God and it will not be without difficulty but it should be without ENCUMBRANCE AND SIN THAT SO EASILY ENTANGLES US

5. What two ways are we told to run the race?

- **“Let us run** (trecho) (p/a/subj) **with** (dia+abl) [by means of] **endurance** (hupomene) [to bear up courageously; to patiently endure] **the race that is set before** (prokeimai) (p/a/ptc) **us.**”

“Behold, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the endurance of **Job** and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” (James 5:11)

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)

“I have fought the good fight of faith, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim.4: 7)

- **We run with our eyes fixed** (aphorao) (p/a/ptc/nplm) **on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith.**”

Aphorao refers to focusing upon the goal of the race. It refers to turning one’s attention away from the distractions and towards who, what, and why this race is important for us to run – JESUS THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF FAITH. “The minute the runner takes his eyes off the Lord Jesus, and turns them upon others, his pace in the Christian life is slackened and his onward progress in grace hindered.” (Wuest, pg.215)

Note the title Jesus holds for enduring the cross for us? This is what we focus upon while running our race no matter how difficult.

“In our passage, it describes Jesus as the one who in the pre-eminence of His faith far surpasses the example of faith commemorated in chapter 11.” (Wuest, pg.215)

6. What was set before Jesus that caused Him to endure the race of the CROSS (salvation of world)?

“Who for (anti+gen. of substitution) [in stead of / exchange] JOY (chara) set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

“The heroic character of His faith appearing in His renouncing a joy already in possession in exchange for shame and death. The passage thus falls in with Phil.2: 6-8.” (Wuest, pg.216)

“Committed faith holds on to the promise, even when the integrity of the promise is called into question by the evidence of harsh circumstance. Faith knows that the one who promised is Himself faithful.” (Call to Commitment, pg.159)

7. What reward did Jesus receive for finishing His race? “And has sat down (kathizo) (perf/a/ind) at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What reward is promised us for finishing our race? “In the future, there is laid up for me the Crown of Righteousness.” (2 Tim.4: 8)

“Faith celebrates now the reality of future blessings which are certain because they are grounded in the promise of God.” (Call to Commitment, pg.159)