



Enter the stories of the faithful in *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*. This six-week Bible study dives into Hebrews 11, examining the lives of Rahab, Enoch, Gideon, Sarah, and many more whose faiths withstood the tests of their days. By studying the great cloud of witnesses, your own faith will be strengthened to run the race before you.

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CONTENTS



About This Study *9*

Introduction *19*

Week One: Once for All *22*

Week Two: The Possibility of Faith *38*

Week Three: The Well-Known *56*

Week Four: A Faith That Points to Jesus *76*

Week Five: The Powerful and Faithful *94*

Week Six: The Beaten, Persecuted, and Martyred *112*

Conclusion: The Founder and Perfecter of Our Faith *130*

Resources for Further Study *135*

Appendix A: A Note to Bible Study Leaders *136*

Appendix B: Four Practical Guidelines for Reading Old Testament Stories *141*

The background of the page features a blue watercolor-style illustration of mountain ranges. The mountains are rendered in various shades of blue, with some white highlights suggesting snow or mist. The style is soft and artistic, with a textured, painterly appearance. The mountains are positioned at the top and bottom of the page, framing the central text.

Once for All

Although most of our time will be spent in the Old Testament, we will set up the study with a strong understanding of the intent of the author of Hebrews, and a definition of faith. We find much of that starting in Hebrews 10. There, we find the greatness of Christ—His one and done, all-satisfying sacrifice for all who would believe, securing our redemption and abolishing the need for rituals. We see the comparison of the supremacy of Christ to all other things clearly in this chapter as well: The new covenant, ushered in by Jesus, is better than the old covenant, and Jesus is better than Mosaic animal sacrifices.

We can be sure of all that God has done through His Son—we can draw near; we can hold on to our faith as we wait for our Savior to return. And we can entrust ourselves to the living God. Hebrews 10 sets us up for learning about the faithful so that we might emulate their faith. In many ways, we see the why before we see the how. In this chapter, we begin to understand why you and I can walk by faith.

READ | HEBREWS 10

RESPOND

These are the core Bible study questions you'll work through this week:

1. The chapter opens with a mention of the law. What is the law the writer is referring to? Although the reference is clearly in the Old Testament, the book of Hebrews provides glimpses of the law's covenants, sacrifices, and priesthood.
2. What does it mean by "a shadow"?
3. Hebrews uses the words "draw near" in several places. What is the significance of drawing near? How does one draw near according to 10:1–3?
4. A sacrifice is a sacrifice, right? Not according to Hebrews. Why can't the blood of bulls and goats (Levitical sacrifices) take away sins once and for all? (See verses 3–10.)

5. In verses 11–14 the writer summarizes the previous text. “Perfected for all time” does not mean that you and I are sinless; what does it mean that “he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (v. 14)?
6. Verses 15–18 are cited from Hebrews 8:10; Hebrews 8:10 is cited from Jeremiah 31:31–34. What is the significance of this text in Jeremiah?
7. “New covenant” is the focus of Jeremiah 31:31–34. What does the text mean by “new covenant”? (A quick search reveals that this mention of new covenant is the only one found in the Old Testament.)

There will be two places—one this week and one at the end of the study—where you will be able to extend your study to eight weeks. Pause after question 7 if you are doing an eight-week study. Pick up on question 8 next week. If you do end on question 7 the first week of your study, go ahead and answer these questions to complete Week One of the core Bible study questions:

Where is Jesus in these verses? Where do you see the gospel?
What do you learn about God and His character in these verses?
How might you apply these verses to your life?

Pick up on question 8 for the second week. Otherwise, continue this week with question 8.

8. “Therefore” means that the texts, chapters, or a significant point before these verses explains the why in v. 19. Why can “we have confidence to enter the holy places”? What are the holy places? (Other versions of the Bible use “Most Holy Place.”)

9. If the verses before the “therefore” share the *why*, the rest of verses 19–22 share the *how*. Can you list how we are able to enter the holy place?

10. The writer begins to share three exhortations in verses 19–25 (draw near, hold fast, consider). An exhortation is one way the biblical writers urge the hearers or readers toward something. In each case, what is he urging us to do? How and why?

11. In verse 26, the writer goes from exhortation to warning about the judgment of God. The writer is not warning against sinning in general. In these verses, he is warning against apostasy, or renouncing the faith, which can only happen if one knows the truth and then chooses to reject it.

12. What do you think it means to “set aside the law of Moses” (v. 28)? What was the punishment for the outright rejection of the law? The writer contrasts this Old Testament punishment with rejecting Jesus (v. 29). Why was this punishment worse? And what is this judgment (vv. 29–31)?

13. Again, our author takes a sharp turn from exhortation, warning, and now reassurance. The writer asks his readers to remember how they persevered through suffering. Why did they endure joyfully? What is the “better possession” (vv. 32–35)?

14. According to Hebrews 10:37–39 and Habakkuk 2:3–4, which is the text quoted, what happens when we shrink back (or what do we need to remember so that we *don't* shrink back)? What does it mean to shrink back?

15. Where is Jesus in these verses? Where do you see the gospel?

16. What do you learn about God and His character in these verses?

17. How might you apply these verses to your life?

WEEK ONE | DAY ONE

EXPLORE

Sin's Daily Reminder, God's Ultimate Sacrifice

READ | HEBREWS 10:1-14

Have you ever watched a dog find its shadow? It's delightful and often hilarious. Dogs will bark at the shadow as if seeing another dog. There's something so curious about a shadow. Kids play with their shadows, discovering ways to change their shape and appearance—a little bit longer here, a little shorter there. There's something about a shadow that is similar, but altogether different than the original source. For example, a shadow is not the same as the dog. A shadow can't do what a dog can do.

Similarly, we see the author refers to the law as a shadow (10:1). Specifically, the text is referring to the laws pertaining to priesthood, covenant, and sacrifices (see Heb. 7:11–9:29). So, we have a picture of a shadow, something that can only tell of or foreshadow the good things to come.

Every year priests would sacrifice an animal as a reminder of their sin and their need for a savior. God's ultimate sacrifice did away with the practice of sacrifices—we no longer must sacrifice anything to receive full forgiveness. Our sacrifices can never take away sin. Sometimes we try and try, thinking our efforts will save us. Only God's finished work can take away sin. And He accomplished it through the "good thing" that has come—the perfect and finished work of Jesus (Heb. 10:1).

REFLECT

1. What do you think it would be like if we had to sacrifice an animal each year?
2. Do you ever struggle with trusting that the sacrifice of Jesus is enough? If so, how?
3. How do you fight the temptation to think you must offer something to the Lord to be forgiven?
4. What is the difference between denying ourselves and the sacrificing that we are discussing in this text?

WEEK ONE | DAY TWO

EXPLORE

Draw Near with a True Heart and Full Assurance

READ | HEBREWS 10:15-22

In my work, I have the opportunity to speak with people I may never see again in this life. I go to a location, share God's Word, and then I head home. I've often found that in those contexts, people are extremely open with me. I wonder if it's because they know that I won't see them again, so they feel a sort of freedom to share. Or maybe it's because I'm not all that threatening (at 5'2"). Recently, I had one such interaction. A college student thanked me for my talk and then shared that she lacked assurance of her faith and didn't think she could draw near to the Lord. As we talked, I gathered that she lacked confidence because she was comparing herself to others, focusing on how she felt, and worrying she wasn't doing enough.

I imagine many of us wouldn't feel confident to draw near to the Lord if we spent enough time focusing on those things. We all fall short. If our goodness was the measure for when and how we approach God, well, I don't think I'd ever do it!

But that's the good news for all of us. In these texts, we see why we can draw near. Our confidence doesn't come from our abilities. Our confidence is in the blood of Jesus (10:14). He opened the way to the Father. And because of this truth, we can draw near with a true heart—believing that what Jesus has done is enough. Our confidence, assurance, and trust aren't in our flesh, they're in Him.

Today, if you have placed your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus, look to Him as you go to Him. Our assurance comes from Jesus—He who promised is faithful (10:23).

REFLECT

1. What often keeps you from running to Jesus?
2. Have you ever struggled with doubt in your salvation? Do you now? Find a faithful friend to share about Jesus and encourage your faith.
3. What are other Scriptures that remind us that we can draw near to God because of Jesus?
4. We can rest in knowing that Christ will hold us fast (Rom. 8:31–39; Phil. 3:12; Jude 24), so why do you believe we are exhorted to “hold fast the confession of our hope” (Heb. 10:23)?

WEEK ONE | DAY THREE

EXPLORE

Building Each Other Up

READ | HEBREWS 10:24–25

As I type, the world is in the middle of a terrible pandemic. Everything is shut down. It will be a time that may irrevocably change how we interact and will undoubtedly be studied and written about for years to come. It's also an unprecedented time in the history of the church. Almost no church on the planet is gathering for worship—in person. For the safety of our neighbors and due to the government's recommendations, people are not allowed to gather in groups and must remain six feet apart.

As I come to this text here in Hebrews, it carries a greater weight than perhaps it did before. The writer sticks this admonishment in the middle of theological teaching about the person of Jesus and what He has accomplished on the cross. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we pay attention. We need others to help us faithfully hold fast our confession without wavering. We need others to endure in the Christian life. And you and I have the privilege to stir up—encourage—those around us.

It can be easy in times of prosperity or peace to forget our need for one another. But as we see here, it's not a matter of season. We are urged to build each other up “all the more as [we] see the Day drawing near.” We don't know the time or day of Jesus' return, but we know He is coming. It is on that day that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10–11).

One of the miracles of the period of the pandemic has been watching the unique ways the church has been able to connect with one another. In the technology age, most of us are without excuse—we can still connect one way or another. Today, you and I have the privilege to encourage one another. Let's take every opportunity.

REFLECT

1. Have you ever experienced a season when you struggled to see the value of gathering with other Christians? Do you now?
2. Why do you think it's important to "stir up one another up to love and good works"?
3. Where are other places in the Scriptures where we see the value of Christian fellowship?
4. What do you think is the significance of the writer drawing attention to the coming day of Christ's return and judgment? Do you see that urgency in other places in Scripture?

WEEK ONE | DAY FOUR

EXPLORE

Putting Off Sin

READ | HEBREWS 10:26–31

In the previous devotional, we see that there is an urgency for Christians to meet together and encourage one another. That urgency is because the day the Lord returns is drawing near (vv. 24–25). No one knows the time or day of the Lord's return except for the Father (Matt. 24:36). The point is that we live as those expecting to see our Savior—we live anticipating that the day will indeed come.

As we come to verse 26 in Hebrews 10, we see that part of the response to the truth of Christ's return is that we no longer continue in sin.

It's important to note that the author is writing to those who have heard the truth. The person who has heard the truth of the gospel and believes knows all that Jesus has done on her behalf. She understands and yet she continues to deliberately sin. It's a willful sinning. The author does us a service to warn us that God will judge His people (Heb. 10:30). The author is addressing someone who has completely deserted Jesus and the truth of God's Word. He is warning against apostasy (Heb. 6:4–6).

The older I get, the more dear friends I've watched decide to no longer follow Jesus. It is heartbreaking to watch people walk away from the faith. Some leave due to hurt. Others leave because the world and the desires of the flesh are too enticing to refuse. I do not fear this for myself. I believe wholeheartedly in the

promise that God will finish the good work He began in us (Phil. 1:6).⁶ But I also do not believe I am strong enough in and of myself not to fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

Cling to Jesus. Abide—draw close to—Him. He is a keeping God. We have the honor of knowing Him. When you and I sin, we can confess it to the Lord who forgives us and will change us. Deliberate sin is unrepentant, continuing sin. You and I can instead put off sin and receive God’s grace.

REFLECT

1. Why is repentance important if we have Jesus?
2. Have you ever been in a season when you realized you were “sinning deliberately”? What led you to confess and pursue restoration?
3. If not you, have you ever seen a friend go through this time and be restored? How did that encourage you in the faith?
4. How does knowing and understanding truth help us continue in the faith?

6. Theologians are torn about apostasy and whether or not those who are Christians, true Christians, can actually leave the faith or “fall away.” For further study, I wrote about this debate in *Sacred Endurance*. Trillia J. Newbell, *Sacred Endurance: Finding Grace and Strength for a Lasting Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 173–78.

WEEK ONE | DAY FIVE

EXPLORE

Suffering and Faith to Endure

READ | HEBREWS 10:32–39

Suffering has a way of bringing you to your knees before the Lord. We all mourn differently but one thing I consistently see is people asking for prayer. There's something innate in us, whether we know God truly or not, that knows that God exists and only He can handle our circumstances. And for Christians, we can testify that He not only knew about it, He was faithful to us through it.

After warnings and exhortations, the writer reminds his listeners to remember their previous suffering. There's something about remembering how the Lord preserved you through something in the past that can build and renew faith for today. Those who suffered in this context of Hebrews, experienced public reproach (most likely imprisonment for their faith; see Heb. 13:3) and afflictions we may never experience. They were likely persecuted for their faith. But during their suffering, they extended compassion and welcomed their property being destroyed because they had their eyes fixed on a better position—an eternal one (v. 34). Because of this, the writer urges them not to throw away their confidence. The Lord is still with them.

I think we all need to be reminded to remember our past trials when facing new ones. Because of the hope that we have, we can continue in the faith and endure the trials ahead of us. We need patience to persevere. The Lord may come slowly

(at least in our estimation), but we know He is coming. So, we live by faith as we wait; not shrinking back but enduring in faith.

REFLECT

1. Do you remember a time you endured a hard trial? What are some ways you experienced the Lord's faithfulness?
2. How did you respond to that trial and what did you learn?
3. Endurance is a theme in the Bible. Why do you think you have "need for endurance"?
4. The writer quotes Habakkuk 2:3–4, and then declares we are not ones who shrink back. What might it look like to shrink back?

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