



The Happiness of the Christ: The Heroes Motivate the Privileged Class, Heb 12:1a; Stripping for Action: The Roman Soldier & the Christian Warrior

IV. The Witnesses Motivate the Privileged Class

Hebrews 12:1 -(KJV) Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

1. The chapter begins with a reference back to chapter 11 and specifically its conclusion found in the last two verses. Verse 1 begins with a conclusive particle, a conjunction and a pronoun: **Τοιγαροῦν καὶ ἐγώ, *Toigaroun kai egō***: “For this very reason also we ...”
2. The pronoun refers to believers in the Church Age who have a significant benefit attained by observing the account of the witnesses in Chapter 11. The verb is the present active participle of:

ἔχω, *echō* - “to have”

present: Static; represents a condition which is assumed as perpetually existing or to be ever taken for granted as a fact.

These Old Testament heroes and their deeds are chronicled in the eternal Word of God and thus provide an immutable source of encouragement and confidence for Church Age believers.

active: Church Age saints produce the action of the verb when they consider the confidence of these people and conclude them to be ideal role models.

participle: Concessive; with the pronoun **ἐγώ, *egō*** we have the translation, “For this reason also, since we keep on having ...”
3. A second verb follows immediately which denotes how these witnesses form perimeter of support for the believer. It is the present middle participle of:

περίκειμαι, *perikeimai* - “to surround in the sense of support”

present: Static; these heroes form a permanent battalion of support and encouragement for the royal family.

middle: Direct; members of the royal family participate in the result of the action, i.e., advancing to spiritual maturity under the cover of these combat support units.

participle: Circumstantial; expresses an attendant circumstance, in this case the knowledge of the past victories of Old Testament heroes.
4. These heroes are described next by the demonstrative adjective **τοσοῦτος, *tosoutos***, which indicates the high quality of what is described and is translated “so great.” Then comes the noun:

νέφος, *nephros* - “cloud” Indicates a multitude of people; a numberless throng.
5. ***Nephros*** is used here as a military analogy. The Old Testament heroes are viewed as a battalion which the New Testament saint has just observed march by in a pass-in-review.



6. When we remember that the list of heroes in Chapter 11 is not exhaustive and thus does not represent the entire roster of Old Testament heroes, then the word “cloud” could be enlarged to “army.”
7. However, the impact is greater if we translate *nephros* as “battalion.” This emphasizes the fact that those mentioned in chapter 11 are only a small part of those Old Testament heroes who have gone before us. They are identified once again by the plural noun:
μάρτυς, martus - “witnesses” or “martyrs” (See Hebrews 11:39)
8. This word refers to a person who goes to court and testifies to the truth of a matter.
9. The members of this battalion have given a deposition to the fact that in any dispensation of history, those who advance to spiritual maturity will receive blessings in time and eternity.
10. This sets up the remainder of our study of Hebrews 12:1-2 and thus requires us to review pertinent verses we have studied so far:

Hebrews 10:35 - Therefore, do not throw away as worthless your confidence which keeps having a rich distribution of escrow blessings.

v. 36 - For you keep on having need of perseverance so that when you have executed the will of God [**the sophisticated spiritual life**], you may receive the deposit which was promised to you [**conveyance of the escrow account in time and eternity**].

v. 39 - But we are not of those who retreat to the point of destruction [**sin unto death**], but rather of those who preserve their souls through doctrine.

Hebrews 11:1 - Now doctrine [**πίστις, pistis**] is the assurance [**ὑπόστασις, hypostasis**] of our confidence [**ἐλπίζω, elpizō**] and the evidence [**ἔλεγχος, elenchos**] of things we do not see [**οὐ βλέπω, ou blepō**].

v. 2 - For by means of doctrine did the heroes of old gain approval.

At this point the power of doctrine in the souls of believers under pressure is documented in the lives of over thirty winners from the dispensation of Israel after which the writer concludes:

Hebrews 11:39 - And so, as a result of these witnesses [**Old Testament martyrs**], who having received divine approval by means of doctrine, did not receive to themselves the promise [**cities, harvests, unconditional covenants**],

v. 40 - since God Himself, having decreed beforehand [**in eternity past**] superior preferences and advantages on behalf of us Church Age believers for the purpose that, apart from us, they [**Old Testament saints**] should not be completed [**conveyance of eternal blessings**].

Hebrews 12:1 - For this very reason also since we keep on having the support of such a great battalion of witnesses surrounding us ...

11. This battalion has given evidence for our benefit that in any dispensation, anyone who directs his faith toward the doctrines of the Word and places absolute confidence in their veracity under pressure will conquer the exigencies of *cosmos diabolicus*.



12. As a result they will receive the deposit of rewards and blessings promised to them.
13. But all these Old Testament witnesses can do is provide motivation. We are to take up the colors and follow them into the scrum of the Invisible War.
14. And in order to apply doctrine efficiently we must avoid, ignore, and discard all distractions that might hinder or retard our advance.
15. Such distractions are mentioned next beginning with the aorist middle participle of the verb:

ἀποτίθημι, *apotithēmi* - “having stripped for action”

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| aorist: | Constativ; takes the action of the verb in its entirety and gathers it into a single whole. Application of this idea is one’s consistent attendance at Bible class while ignoring any and all distractions. |
| middle: | Indirect; lays stress upon the Church Age believer as producing the action rather than participating in its results. |
| participle: | Circumstantial; depicts troops preparing for action by the removal of anything that might impede their advance. |

Hebrews 12:1 -For this very reason also, since we keep on having the support of such a great battalion of witnesses surrounding us, having stripped for action ...

16. *Apotithēmi* is a military metaphor. The infantryman discards his nonessential equipment as he prepares to take action. The prefix **ἀπό, apo** means “away from” and the verb **τίθημι, tithēmi** means “to lay aside, such as garments.”
17. The compound *apotithēmi* refers to the military man who takes off all unnecessary encumbrances, whether garments, rations, or equipment, thus stripping to the bare essentials for battle.
18. The Roman soldier was trained daily in the mechanics of the art of war. When on campaign he was required to be virtually self-sustaining. The gear involved is described by:

Watson, G. R. *The Roman Soldier*. (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1969); p. 63:

In his *Jewish Wars* Josephus writes of the Roman soldier on the march: ‘The picked infantry who form the general’s bodyguard carry a lance (*lancea* \lan-kay’ ah): light spear) and a round shield (*clypeus* \kly-pay’ us), as well as a saw and a basket, a bucket and an axe, together with a leather strap, a sickle and chain, and rations for three days.

19. The Colonel elaborates on this subject in:

Thieme, R. B., Jr. *The Christian Warrior*. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1975), 34:

In the field, each Roman infantryman carried approximately sixty pounds of equipment besides his weapons and armor. The equipment consisted of a bronze food box containing three days’ rations, a kettle, a portable hand mill, a length of rope, a chain, a saw, a hook, a shovel and pickaxe and, of course, a type of canteen made from skins.

In addition to his two light javelins (*lancea*), the Roman soldier carried into battle a sword—the *machaira* (**μάχαιρα**), approximately eighteen inches long—and a short leaf-shaped dagger.



His armor comprised his helmet; his belt, from which were suspended thick leather strips that could be fastened in loops to protect his loins; his breastplate, worn over a sleeveless woolen or leather tunic; his boots; and his shield, the *scutum*. In its entirety, the Roman soldier's equipment, which included his weapons and armor, was known as the *panoplia* (πανοπλία).

20. When it was time to engage the enemy, the Roman soldier stripped for battle, retaining only the essentials of the *panoplia*.
21. Abandoned were the useful but unnecessary accessories such as basket, bucket, sickle, food box, rations, kettle, hand mill, rope, chain, saw, hook, shovel, pickaxe, and canteen.
22. All these items are related to logistics and, in the heat of battle, survival is the imperative and thus only one's armor and weapons are pertinent.
23. The spiritual application is that the Christian soldier is to place more emphasis on his preparedness to do battle in the Invisible War than the distractions caused by overemphasis on the details of life.
24. Principle: Spiritual survival takes priority over physical survival.
25. God has promised the believer an unbreakable logistical supply line. We need not worry about the provisions required for temporal survival. Our concern should be focused on fulfilling our duties in the assigned deployments of the angelic conflict.
26. Concern about the details of life distracts the believer from his top priority which is preparation for battle in order to execute under the pressures ubiquitous in one's daily life.
27. Therefore, placing one's trust in the Word produces confidence under pressure. This confidence enables the believer to strip for action for greater efficiency in spiritual combat.