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PERSEVERANCE THROUGH SUFFERING: 
A spirituality for mission

ABSTRACT

The suffering of Christian believers on account of hostility, disparagement or persecution, 
especially due to their faith in and confession of Christ, is a global phenomenon and the 20th 
century has seen more Christian martyrs than any previous century. This was anticipated by the 
two most prominent figures in the New Testament, Jesus and Paul, e.g. in 2 Timothy 3:12: '... 
all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.' Hebrews 11:39-12:3 deals 
with this difficulty by exhorting Christian believers not to quit their faith in Christ during such 
times, but rather to persevere in their faith. In these verses the author motivates why and 
explains the how. God has provided 'perfection' for those who 'persevere' in their faith. In order 
to accomplish this successfully the author exhorts in a negative sense to lay aside any obstacles 
that can languish their faith in and confession of Christ and in a positive sense to run this race 
(a metaphoric description of the Christian life) with perseverance.

INTRODUCTION

On the west front of Westminster Abbey in London, above the West Door, 
there are ten niches, containing statues of ten martyrs who died for their 
Christian faith in different parts of the world during the 20th century. This is 
intended to convey the message "that the twentieth century has seen not only 
more innocent suffering but also more Christian martyrdoms than any other 
period in history, greatly exceeding, for example, those of the great persecu-
tions of the early centuries of the Church" (Harvey 1998:xii). These ten 
figures were chosen to be representative of all the other victims of a particular 
area of persecution, and who are recognised as such both by compatriots and 
by the world at large: "Standing together in their niches, the statues are 
intended to represent the whole gamut of this ultimate Christian witness 
across a wide range of denominations, cultures and continents" (xii). 2

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1 This article is an edited version of the paper presented at the 2005 SAMS congress held at 
the John Wesley College in Pretoria. It was presented in a joint ‘forum’ session, together with 
the paper by Dr Victor Molobi.

2 The ten figures are the Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia, Manche Masemola of Sekhu-
khuneland, Maximilian Kolbe of Poland, Lucian Tapiedi of Papua New Guinea, Dietrich 
Bonhoeffer of Germany, Esther John (Qamar Zia) of Pakistan, Martin Luther King of the USA,
This is a graphic reminder that faithful Christian witness (of various forms) has often led to suffering and death in a wide range of contexts across the world in the 20th century. It is becoming clearer by the day that the world is not a safer place after the fall of the Berlin Wall than it was before or during the Cold War. Christians – as well as followers of various other religious groups – have suffered persecution in the 20th century, sometimes for attempting to spread their respective faiths, sometimes for the mere fact of belonging to a specific religious community that differs from a dominant religion. The main contexts in which Christians have suffered persecution for being Christian in the recent past have been in some post-communist, secularist, Muslim and Hindu contexts. Since September 11, 2001, with the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York, "the clash between Islam and the West" has intensified, leading to incidents of anti-Muslim violence in some predominantly Christian contexts and of anti-Christian violence in some Muslim contexts. The American-led response to the Islamist terror attacks has intensified hostility to Christians in many Muslim societies. The West's "War on Terror" continues to be seen in the Muslim world as a "War on Islam" and is bitterly resented. Hence, a spate of anti-Christian violence around the Muslim world against both Western targets and Christians (cf. Sookhdeo 2005:8). Due to the rise of the Hindutva ideology, violence perpetrated by Hindu nationalists against Christians and Muslims has also increased in India (see e.g. Aleaz 2002).

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO PERSECUTION

In the light of this context of martyrdom, this paper makes an in-depth study of one New Testament passage, Hebrews 11:39-12:2, which addresses the question of courage and perseverance in the midst of persecution. Its purpose is to investigate what it comprises, according to Hebrews 11:39-12:3, to persevere in faith during times of suffering and persecution. But before doing


3 Consult the "Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32" (The Persecuted Church, 2005) for a detailed discussion of Christian persecution in the above mentioned contexts.

4 Consult Sookhdeo (2005:72ff) for an extensive bibliography and internet addresses on Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom. An internet search on the topic "Christian Persecution" with the Google search engine produced 4,310,000 hits. These sites contain information of contemporary developments worldwide in Christian persecution and suffering. It also supplies the latest results of academic research in this area.
an exegesis of the passage, it is necessary first to give a picture of the broader New Testament message regarding Christian responses to persecution and suffering, so as to provide a framework for the interpretation of this passage.

The "burning bush" pattern

Christian faith is no magic charm to prevent suffering. It is also not an 'escape mechanism' from the sterner disciplines of life. Christians hold onto the promises in Scripture that God is remarkably present amongst them in times of persecution and distress, but not in granting them complete exemption from the common lot. Frequently, faith is itself a cause of suffering. So it was with the prophets. So it has been with Jesus' disciples and those who were martyred for their faith throughout the history of the church. Christians have been warned that '... all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (2 Tim 3:12). According to the Fourth Evangelist (16:2f), Jesus taught his disciples: 'They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God' and in 17:14: '... the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world'. The crowd's attitude to Christ is still, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' (John 19:15). Therefore, his followers should expect attacks from the same quarter.

No sooner had the Christian enterprise been launched at Pentecost than the apostolic leaders Peter and John were summoned before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1–22). Soon the opposition had produced the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Acts 6:8–8:1). Before his conversion, Paul persecuted Christians to death (Acts 9:1ff). The Jerusalem community as a whole was both perse-
cuted and spread by persecution (Acts 12:1–25). On the missionary journeys that fill the remainder of the book of Acts persecution constantly recurred, with Paul and his associates being pursued from city to city.

Other books of the New Testament reveal this same “burning bush” pattern: the church is always in the fire of persecution but is never consumed. In 1 Thessalonians (1:6), Paul reminded them, "... you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution ..." Paul sent Timothy to them ‘so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for’ (1 Thess 3:3).

The last book of the New Testament is an apocalyptic encouragement for a suffering church that is yet to be avenged and delivered. Typical are the souls ‘... under the altar ... of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed’ (Rev 6:9–11).

A theology of persecution

The Bible not only presents the church as suffering but develops a theology of persecution as well – in source, aim and effect. The source of persecution is sinful humanity’s hatred of God. Paul calls unreconciled people God’s ‘enemies’ (Rom 5:10). The love of the world is enmity to God. ‘No one can serve two masters’ (Mt 6:24). ‘The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil’ (Jn 3:19). ‘The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot’ (Rom 8:7).

If the source of Christian persecution is hatred of God, its aim is to destroy Him. Although Saul in persecuting Christians did it ignorantly and in unbelief, he nonetheless was persecuting Jesus in persecuting His followers (Acts 9:4). Christ assures his followers that the disciple is not greater than his Lord. ‘If they persecuted me, they will persecute you’ (Jn 15:20). Christ sends his followers out as lambs among wolves, exposed to their rapacity (Lk 10:3). Every day they are accounted as sheep for the slaughter (Rom 8:36).

If the aim of such persecution is to destroy Christians, the effect will be suffering. It is no coincidence that the New Testament word for witness, μαρτυς, becomes our word for martyr. Witnesses are martyrs. They do not count their lives ‘of any value’ (Acts 20:24). They love Christ more than their own souls. And yet such principled suffering could have a further (unintended)
effect: Through their resolute faithfulness "unto death," Christians attract more people to their community. At times the saying of Tertullian proves to be true, viz. the greater the persecution, the faster the growth of the church. In his *Apology* (50,13), an impassioned and hard-hitting 'open letter' to the magistrates of the Roman empire to stop persecuting Christians, he wrote:

But carry on, good officials: you will become much better in the eyes of the people if you sacrifice the Christians for them. Crucify us – torture us – condemn us – destroy us! Your iniquity is the proof of our innocence. For this reason God permits us to suffer these things.... Yet your tortures accomplish nothing, though each is more refined than the last; rather they are an enticement to our religion (*secta*). We become more numerous every time we are hewn down by you: the blood of Christians is seed [*semen est sanguis Christianorum*] (Arbesmann et al.:125).  

The Roman persecutions, which reached dreadful proportions in the 3rd century, have hardly been paralleled until the twentieth century. Once again true Christians may be revealed as what they in spirit always are – martyrs.

*Suffering as a means of refining faith*

The above examples from the early church history suggest that faith in Christ brings unavoidable suffering in different areas of life. Christ defined a disciple indeed as one who continued in His word (Jn 8:31), one who endured to the end (Mt 24:13). According to 1 Peter, suffering is allowed as a means of proving and refining faith: 'In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you

6 However, this adage should not be taken as universally true. Hurtado (2003:25) tries to prove that any assumption of a unilinear development of the Christian movement should be avoided, and allow for the greater likelihood of more complex patterns and unpredictable phenomena involving, for example, multi-linear 'trajectories,' parallel or regressive developments, and even patterns that they may be closer to an explosion than any orderly progression. See also Dowley (1995:66) about the rapid spread of Christianity in its early expansion and Manschreck (1974:205ff) on the 'explosive expansion' of Christianity after the start of the reformation by Luther. Also consult the two extensive volumes of Latourette (1975; also Latourette 1953) on the expansion, diverse character (also Ehrman 1999:1) and growth of Christianity over two millennia to become a dynamic world religion.

7 See Daniélou (1964:223) for references how the pagan Roman Empire made a last attempt, more violent than ever before, to wipe out the Christian religion. This took place in A.D. 303-4 in the persecution of the Christians under Diocletian. See also Manschreck (1974) for his contribution on Christian 'persecution' and 'uncertainty'. Consult Latourette (1975, 2 Vol) and Schaff (1997, 8 Vol) on the spread, triumphs, martyrdom and persecution throughout 'The history of Christianity'. Bruce (1981:266ff) also gives a detailed discussion of persecution in early Christianity.
have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed’ (1 Peter 1:6f). Faith is perfected through suffering. But suffering should not limit the believer’s horizon. In most cases, suffering is manageable. When the believer is hemmed in on every side, it is faith that sees a path through. When the best efforts seem to bring only failure and only wilderness is faced, it is faith that endures ‘as seeing Him who is unseen’ (11:27b). Faith in Christ sees the victory ahead and consequently creates and gives meaning to life, which helps to sustain believers in their sufferings (cf. Macauley 1978:204ff).

HEBREWS 11:39-12:3

In Hebrews 11:39-12:3 the author gives guidance to believers on how they should act in circumstances of suffering due to their faith in Christ. Christians are encouraged to persevere in faith. This perseverance is metaphorically explained and described as participating in running a race (12:1). To ensure the success of such a race, certain recommendations are spelled out.

The method followed in this main section of the paper is first to explore the socio-historical circumstances of the hearers of the letter; then to make a discourse analysis of Hebrews 11:39-12:3 in order to determine the structure and focus areas of the passage; and finally to make a more detailed exegesis, which will be carried out with consideration of the possible hypothetically-structured circumstances of the readers that constitute the setting in which this text is embedded and has to be understood.

The social context of the readers

The socio-historical circumstances of the Epistle to the Hebrews are notoriously difficult to determine. However, even though the identity of the author and the readers, and location in time and space cannot be determined, a few facts about the social and religious circumstances of the readers can be gleaned from the epistle.

In the so-called parenetic sections throughout the letter a series of interlocking dangers is exposed. Five warnings occur to warn the readers about their spiritual dullness and degeneration: the danger of neglect (2:1-4); the danger of unbelief (3:7-4:13); the danger of not maturing (5:1-6:20); the danger of shrinking back (10:26-39); and the danger of refusing God (12:25-
29). This was probably due to the effect of hardship and persecution⁸ on the community (Gordon 2000:16-19; also Lane 1991a:lviii; Wilson 1987:218; Salevaio 2002:165).

Hebrews 10:32-6 contains the most reliable description of the socio-religious circumstances of the community to whom this epistle was written.⁹ The author appeals to the readers' past endurance as a basis for continuing endurance (ὑπεμείνατε, v.32; ὑπομονὴν... ἔχετε χρέαιν, v.36). Their perseverance through an earlier crisis showed courage and confidence that should not be abandoned in their present circumstances. This also reflects the nature of their relationship with the larger community.¹⁰

In 10:32 the readers are called to remember 'the former days in which they were enlightened' (τὰς πρότερον ἡμέρας, ἐν αἷς φωτισθέντες). The reference to τὰς πρότερον ἡμέρας (the former days) could refer to any previous period in the existence of the community. Conjoined with the verb φωτισθέντες (enlightened) it probably denotes the time immediately following their receiving of the gospel message (cf. 6:4). Presumably the affliction described from 10:33 onwards was prompted by their conversion to Christ reflected in the reference to their 'enlightenment' (v 32, φωτισθέντες) (cf. Bruce 1981:xxx). In those former days of Christian existence they 'endured

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⁸ The verb πάσχειν (2:18; 5:8; 9:26; 13:12 ) and the noun πάθημα (2:9, 10; 10:32) are translated in Hebrews respectively as 'to suffer' and 'suffering'. All these references, with the exception of 10:32, refer to Jesus' suffering. Only 10:32 refers to the suffering of Jesus' followers and occur in the pericope 10:32-6 which describes the socio-religious circumstances of the community to whom the epistle was written. Lane (1991a:lxvi) discusses in his commentary whether the persecutions under Claudius were the possible circumstances to which 10:32ff refers. According to him 'Hebrews, of course, addresses the community at a later point in time. A new crisis has emerged, confronting the members of a house church with a fresh experience of suffering. Reference to enslavement through the fear of death (2:15), to loss of heart (12:3), and to the fact that the audience had not yet contended to the point of bloodshed (12:4), climaxing a section summarising the experience of men and women of faith who endured torture, flogging, banishment, chains, and execution (11:35–12:3), suggests that the situation now facing the community is more serious than the earlier one under Claudius.' Although scholars differ on this point it is not unreasonable to think of the suffering endured by Christians in Rome under Nero (Tacitus, Annals of Imperial Rome 15.32-47 in Grant 1959:349ff). Some Christians experienced loss of life, and not simply of property. See Salevaio (2002:95-169) for a thorough discussion of the socio-historical situation of the readers.

⁹ Lindars (1995:4-15) endeavours to base the reconstruction of the situation of the readers entirely on an integrated reading of chapter 13, which he interpreted in the light of hints elsewhere in the letter.

¹⁰ Different opinions exist among scholars about the addressees in Hebrews. According to Bruce (1981:xxx) the readers were probably a group of Jewish Christians in a larger community of Christians. Kuss (1967:24; also Lane 1991a:lviii) refers to them as a possible 'house church'.

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a hard struggle with sufferings’ (v 32, πολλὴν ἀθλησιν ὑπεμείνατε παθημάτων). This clause relates to the text which will be investigated and when they are compared, the following three things emerge: 1) the theme of endurance (ὑπεμείνατε) which is central to 12:1-3 and occurs in all three of these verses; 2) the imagery of ἀθλησιν (contest), which refers especially to a contest of athletes and therefore also prepares the readers for 12:1-3; and 3) although suffering is not mentioned explicitly in 12:1-3, the community’s experience of suffering is suggested in these verses (cf. 12:2).

The notion of suffering, inferred by the phrase ‘endured a hard struggle with sufferings’ in 10:32, is elaborated on in 10:33f. Two aspects of this contest are referred to: some Christians suffered reproach and abuse and reference is made to exposure to public scorn that involved both verbal and physical ill-treatment. Others became partners of those who suffered; they suffered along with fellow members who had been imprisoned. In addition, they suffered the confiscation of their property, which they surrendered with joy, confident of a superior, lasting possession that could not be taken from them (Croy 1998:163).

From 13:3 it seems that the community’s past experience of abuse, imprisonment and despoliation, prompted by their initial acceptance of the gospel, was an ongoing reality (Smith 1984:19). Salevao (2002:165), in his search for a solution, also concludes that the socio-historical situation of the readers was nothing less than a crisis – ‘dramatic, traumatic, demanding, even overwhelming.’ For the readers it was a time to endure and persevere during hostility, alienation, marginalisation and persecution. Therefore, we can deduce that this community’s ongoing struggle with a hostile environment was no doubt the source of their fatigue and disenchantment, a malaise that the epistle hopes to remedy (cf. Bruce 1981:xxx; Smith 1084:19).

On the positive side, to strengthen the readers’ faith in Christ, the author strongly emphasises the superiority of adherence to Christ, compared to adherence to the old Judaic system. He sets before them magnificent promises (Smith 1981:21f). They will obtain eternal salvation (2:10); be in God’s house (3:6); enter God’s rest (4:10); receive mercy (4:10); they will draw near to the throne of grace (4:16) and see the Lord (12:14); etc. To achieve this he frequently uses the words ‘better’ (καλύτερον, see fn 22), ‘perfect’

11 See Lane (1988:159) for a discussion on the relationship between faith & suffering.
13 See Rissi (1987:35-44) for a discussion of the various metaphoric expressions of ‘Die himmlische Welt’ in this epistle.

Although the circumstances of Christians today differ from those of the early Christians, they still experience physical, emotional, spiritual suffering and social ostracism and abuse due to their faith in Christ. Circumstances determine the nature, intensity and duration of this suffering, as pointed out in the introduction. Emotional suffering occurs in situations where and when Christians are criticised or condemned for their beliefs and their personal relationship with God through Christ. Their interpretation and understanding of the kerygma are dismissed as ridiculous or naive. Even doctrinal differences between Christians cause friction, discrimination and condemnation. Social ostracism and abuse occur where devoted Christians are rejected by the community because of their dedication and devotion to Christian discipleship.¹⁴ Such negative experiences lead to discouragement or infidelity.

A discourse analysis of 11:39-12:3

The discourse analysis on p.338, which is discussed and explained below.

Verses 11:39-40

These two verses form three substantival sections which closely relate through the genitive preposition περὶ (A - B), and the subordinate conjunction ἓνα (B-C) to constitute a consecutive structure. The participle, προβλεφαμένου (having foreseen, B), explains why these exemplars of faith did not receive the promise (A), even if they had been attested through their faith. Section C explains the purpose for not having received the promise in section A: God designed it in such a way that their perfection is to be realised in future with those under the new covenant. From this brief discussion it is evident that 11:39-40 forms a structural unit (cf. Rhee 2001:212) which links with 12:1-3 through the coordinating inferential conjunction particle Τοιγαροῦ (so therefore).¹⁵

¹⁴ Although the various areas of suffering are distinguished, they overlap in many ways.

¹⁵ The exemplars of faith who died without receiving are juxtaposed to 'us,' the Christian community for whom God had planned something better. The connection between the two sections is underscored by the effective use of linking terms: [11:39 μαρτυρηθέντες, 'attested witnesses' / 12:1 μαρτυροῦν, 'witnesses'] and [11:40 ἡμῶν, 'us,' ... ἡμῶν, 'us' / 12:1 και ἡμεῖς, 'we ourselves']. The climactic comment in 11:39-40 provides the basis for the moving appeal addressed to the community in 12:1-13. It achieves this by summarising the chapter succinctly and by tying the audience's experience to that of the attested witnesses who have preceded...
11:39-40

A Καὶ οὕτω ἠμῖν κρεῖττον τι προβλεψάμενον, (Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised) (11:39)

Β τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἡμῶν κρεῖττον τι προβλεψάμενον, (since God had provided something better) (11:40a)

C ἵνα μὴ χαρῖς ἡμῶν τελειώθητι. (so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect) (11:40b)

12:1-3

A Τοιοῦτοι καὶ ἡμεῖς τοσοῦτον ἐξουσίες περικείμενοι ἡμῖν νέφος μαρτύρων, ὅγκον ἀποθέμενα πάντα καὶ τὴν ἐνεργίαν ἀμαρτίαν. (Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us (also)* lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,) (12:1a)

Β δὲ ὑπομονής τρέχομεν τοῦ προκείμενον ἡμῖν ἁγία (and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,) (12:1b)

C 12:2

1 ἀφοριστές εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἄξοναν καὶ τελειώτην Ἡσυχίαν, (looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of (our)* faith)

2 δὲς ἄντι τῆς προκείμενης αὐτῶς χαρᾶς (who for the sake of the joy that was set before him)

3 ὑπέμενεν σταυρὸν (endured the cross)

2' ἀλοχόνης καταφρουήσας (disregarding its shame)

1' ἐν δεξίᾳ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ κεκάθικεν (and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.)

B' ἀναλογίσασθε γὰρ τὸν τοιαύτην ὑπομενομένον ὑπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν εἰς ἑαυτόν ἀντιλογίαν, (Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners) (12:3a)

A' ἵνα μὴ κάμπτη ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ἐκλυόμενοι (so that you may not grow weary or lose heart) (12:3b)

them. Recapitulating the substance and vocabulary of 12:2, the author declares that all those whose response to God has been celebrated in the preceding verses received attestation from God because of their faith (προβλεψάμενος διὰ τῆς πίστεως). As such, they serve as examples for later generations of believers, especially for Christians, who have been called to face 'the last great hour of testing' (Michel 1966:421, with reference to 12:9-13). The parallel with 12:2 suggests that πάντες (all), in 11:39 has reference to the entire list, and not simply to the exemplars of faith to whom the author referred in 11:32-38 (Lane 1991b:392). See also Danker (2000:1009 and Hagner (1983:194) who agree with Louw & Nida to interpret and translate it as: 'a particle introducing an inference, for that very reason, then therefore.'

16 The two asterisks (*) indicate words that are not part of the Greek text.
Verses 12:1-3

The presence of a chiastic structure in 12:1-2 is recognised by some scholars such as Horning (1978:40f), while the most convincing chiastic structure of 12:1-3 is proposed by Rhee (2001:225) which is supported in this analysis.

A-A': These two sections complement each other conceptually. Section A' shows the reason for the description in section A. In A a positive statement (let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely) is made while in A' a negative statement (not grow weary or lose heart) occurs concerning the perseverance of faith.

B-B': This relatedness may be demonstrated in two ways: Both sections are related to each other by the idea of endurance (ὑπομονή/ὑπομεμενηκότα) which is the main idea here. The thought of 'contest' (ἄγωνα in B) is also parallel to 'opposition' (ἀντιλογίαν in B'). The phrase 'the contest which lies before' in B refers to the hardships the readers were facing at the time of writing the letter (cf. 10:32-34). The 'opposition' in B' refers to the persecution and the hardship which Jesus endured during the Passion week. This explanation is supported by the explicit mention of σταυρός in 12:2.

Through these parallel thoughts the author indicates that believers must run the race with endurance (B) as they consider Jesus, who endured such hostility by sinners against himself (B'). Hence, sections B-B' may be regarded as an appeal for the readers to imitate Jesus who had run the race before them. In this sense, Jesus is regarded as the model of endurance for believers.17

C: In section C the author focuses on Jesus and his accomplishment (endurance). After the exhortation to fix their eyes on Jesus, the author proceeds to describe who Jesus is, and what he has done for believers. The vivid race metaphor, referred to in this passage, links the phrase καὶ ἡμεῖς τοσοῦτον ἐχόντες περικείμενον ἡμῖν νέφος μαρτύρων (A), which refers back to chapter 11, also with section C. The phrases νέφος μαρτύρων (A) and ἀφορῶντες εἰς ... Ἰησοῦν (C) offers two incentives for Christian perseverance in faith.

Thus, from the above structure we can deduce the following synopsis:

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When one reads this text (11:39-12:3), it becomes evident that for Christian believers a higher or a deeper meaning exists in life. This must always be borne in mind during times of suffering due to one's faith in Christ – the promise of eschatological perfection (11:40). Such perfection is put into perspective by the author in his reference to the heroes of faith during the history of Israel, that is mentioned in Ch 11 and is explicated in 12:1-3. The heroes of faith are those who exercised faith in the face of death. Almost all these examples are in some way or another linked to the experience of death. Those of the heroes who did not die for their faith were exposed to severe trials or jeopardy because they were faithful to God. Therefore, the ability to endure suffering and death presupposes a vital relationship to the divine, the heavenly world. This dimension of the life of the heroes indicates that this message has been carefully composed to address a crisis of faith in the life of the Christian community. The addressees had already experienced...
adversity, humiliation, loss of property and imprisonment (10:32-34). This list of forebears was designed to strengthen them in their firmness to be faithful to God, even when they experience martyrdom (Lane 1988:159). According to Hebrews 11:40, God’s aim is that his followers ‘be made perfect’ (τελειωθῶσιν). Although 'perfection' is not defined, the heroes of faith, referred to in 11:39f, help to shed light on what it means.

The heroes of faith did not receive what was promised

Despite ‘having gained approval through their faith’, the heroes of faith21 ‘did not receive what was promised’ (11:39, οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν). Peterson (1982:156; Bruce 1981:343) points out that although they experienced the fulfilment of certain promises (e.g., 11:11, 33), they did not obtain the ultimate promise of eternal inheritance (cf. 9:15). The parallel expression in 11:13 (μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, ν 13 / οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, ν 39) views their expectation in a number of promises, which were seen from afar. When the author then describes their goal as the heavenly (better) ‘country’ or ‘city’, all the promises are comprehended (νν 14-16, cf. ν 10). The failure of these heroes of faith to experience the promised eternal inheritance was because God, with the followers of Christ in mind (περὶ ἡμῶν), had provided a better plan (κρείττον τι προβλεψαμένου). According to Miller (1971:383) the verb προβλεψαμένου22 (had provided – aorist, middle, participle,) refers to more than foresight. ‘It is pro-vision; what God foresaw, He made provision for.’

20 See Peterson (1982) for a thorough investigation on the theme of ‘Perfection’ in Hebrews.

21 In his references to ‘the heroes of faith’ the author had two objectives in mind. The first one, coming from 11:39f is that his readers must not only concentrate on the circumstances at present, but must surely bear in mind the outcome that God has provided in the eschatological future which is pregnantly described in the verb τελειωθῶσιν (be made perfect, 11:40b). The second objective occurs in 12:1 in the reference to νεφός (cloud). Here the author encourages his readers to bear in mind the ‘heroes of faith’ to persevere in not losing their faith.

22 Arndt and Gingrich (1957:710) explain and translate προβλεψαμένου as ‘select or provide something, for someone.’ Liddell and Scott’s (1974:587) explanation includes both foresight ‘to foresee’ and provision ‘to provide for one’. Louw & Nida’s (1988:363) semantic explanation is ‘to choose or select in advance of some other event – “to choose beforehand, to select in advance”’ Therefore, they translate it as ‘... because God had chosen ahead of time an even better plan for us ...’ Danker’s (2000:866) explanation agrees verbally with that of Arndt and Gingrich’s. Together, these explanations support Miller’s understanding and explanation.
God has provided something better – perfection

For the author of Hebrews Jesus was this 'pro-vision' of God – he was the focal (centripetal) point in God's plan of salvation (cf. Salevao 2002:221). Hence, the salvation that came through Jesus (death and resurrection) is also retroactive. The believers under the old covenant remained in the shadows, their full salvation waiting for the birth, death and resurrection of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, in whom their faith is fully rewarded (Macaulay 1978:208; Lindars 1995:116). The author has argued that the sacrifice of Christ secured all that is necessary for the enjoyment of the eschatological blessing of τελειωματις (perfection, 10:14; cf. 6:1).

In Hebrews it has a strong theological orientation (Hagner 1983:193): a definitive putting away of sin (8:12; 10:12, 17; cf. also 1:3; 2:17; 7:27; 8:12), consecration to the service of God (10:16), and glorification (2:10). It is therefore clear that the perfecting of faithful men and women under the old covenant depended upon the sacrificial death of Jesus; the promised eternal inheritance that was offered to them has become attainable by virtue of Christ's sacrifice (solus Christus, cf. 9:15). But now that Christ has accomplished his high-priestly ministry, these heroes of faith, and also the believers of the Old Testament, together with the followers of Christ, will share in its blessings. Gordon (2000:1451) sums it up: '... in effect, that the perfecting of these pre-Christian faithful (v. 40) could not be achieved 'apart from us' because it could not be achieved apart from Christ.'

According to the author, Christ is the mediator of a better covenant. The theme of 'perfection' occurs 14 times throughout the epistle: verb τελείω (2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23), the adjective τελείον (5:14; 9:11) and the nouns τελειοτης (12:2), τελειοντης (6:1), τελειωματις (7:11). Hagner (1983:29) defines the verb τελειω in a quality perspective to generally carry the idea of 'bringing to perfection' in the sense of fulfilment or completeness. Danker (2000:996), on the other hand, defines it from a 'temporal' perspective: 'to complete an activity, complete, to bring to an end, finish, accomplish.' Schippers (1976:64) couples the two above perspectives. According to him did the heroes of faith not reach 'perfection', for this was alone given by Christ (10:14).

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24 Bruce (1981:344), argues that these 'heroes of faith' now enjoy the same privileged status as Christians.

25 The adjective κατ'του (better) occurs 13 times in Hebrews: 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 (bis); 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24. The inauguration of the New Covenant of God has indeed brought into effect the provision of his 'better plan' for mankind with its better revelation (1:4), better salvation (6:9), better priesthood (7:7), better hope (7:19), better covenant (7:22), better promises (8:6), better sanctuary (9:1-11), better sacrifices (9:23), better possessions (10:34), better home (11:16), better resurrection (11:35), better perfection (11:40) all through a better...
(7:22) ... ‘founded on better promises’ (8:6, ἡ τις ἐπὶ κρείττοσαν ἐπαγγελίαις). The comparative adjective κρείττον (better) is used to describe the superiority of the new covenant to the old (which was good). Twice the author cites Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant (8:8-12 [see Jer 31:31-34]; 10:16f [see Jer 31:33f], according to Nestlé-Aland 2001:573, 578). He tries to indicate that under ‘better promises’, the church should understand full forgiveness, deep knowledge of God, and an obedience to his commandments. From the content of Hebrews it can be deduced that these promises also include the eternal, eschatological salvation, spelled out metaphorically as the unshakeable kingdom (12:28), the future city (13:14), and a Sabbath rest for the people of God (4:1-13) (Hoffmann 1978:73f).

The consequences are that the fulfilment of the promises is drawing steadily nearer (10:25, 37). It is, therefore, decisive to remain steadfast during the short time of suffering that remains (cf. 6:11f) (Hoffmann 1978:74). The privileged status of Christians, as those who have shared in the fulfilment of God’s promise, should motivate them to be more willing and equipped to endure suffering, the testing of faith, than were their predecessors, all of whom received attestation from God through their faith. It seems clear that Hebrews 11:39-40 functions as the motif for the exhortation spelled out in 12:1-3, which is to persevere in faith.

THEREFORE, PERSEVERE IN FAITH

Now that the reader knows about God’s higher plan and what ‘perfection’ comprises, the author describes the manner in which perfection can be obtained. The author instructs his readers to ‘lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us’ (12:1) ‘so that you may not grow weary and lose heart’ (12:3). At the same time he exhorts them to run with (a holy) perseverance (perseverantia sanctorum) the race that is set before them – looking at Jesus. Hence, the role of the runner is to make special preparation for the race and to run it with special concentration (Miller 1971:387). This will now briefly be discussed.

Mediator (12:24)! Miller (1971:382) summarises all these statements when he quoted Dods who comments: ‘The κρείττον τι is that which the epistle has made it its business to expound, the perfecting (τελειωθόντα) of God’s people by full communion with Him mediated by the perfect revelation (1:2) of the Son and His perfect covenant (7:7-13) and His better sacrifice (9:23).’

26 Peterson (1995:73) argues that Hebrews 11 points out that ‘faith gives a different value system, with different priorities, leading to a profoundly different lifestyle.’
Let us (also) lay aside (ἀποθέμενον)

Giving to the participle ἀποθέμενον (to put off, lay aside) a hortatory nuance, the writer directs his intended audience to ‘lay aside all excess weight and the sin that so easily distracts us’ (12:1). Hence, the special preparation is two-fold: 1) Christian believers have to get rid of all natural encumbrances (δυκόν ἀποθέμενον) and also 2) the sin by which they are hindered (τὴν εὐπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν) (Miller 1971:387; Westcott 1984:392).

The formulation recalls the usual preparation of stripping for a race. Contestants removed all of their clothing before running so that nothing could impede them during the race. Greek runners ran naked (Smith 1984:156; Lane 1991b:409; Du Toit 2002:209).

... every encumbrance that clings so closely

1) The noun δυκόν (bulk, encumbrance) occurs only here in biblical Greek.

27 The word rendered ‘lay aside’ (ἀποθέμενον, 12:1), according to Danker (2000:123), figuratively means to ‘lay aside, rid oneself of...’ Liddell and Scott (1974:95), in accord with Danker, also defines the ‘middle mode’ in which ἀποτίθημι occurs as ‘to put from oneself, put off; lay aside.’ They refer only to the act of ‘lay aside’. Its use elsewhere in the New Testament cast more light on its semantic meaning. It refers i.e. laying aside carnal qualities (Rom 13:12; Eph 4:25; cf. James 1:21; 1 Pet 1:21), even one's whole being insofar as it lies under the power of the former age. ‘Put off the old nature’ (Eph 4:22; cf. Col 3:9) so as to ‘put on the new nature’ (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10; Gal 3:27; cf. Rom 6:4f) (Weigelt 1975:315; also Danker 2000:123). Where ἀποθέμενον is used in 1 Pet 2:1 ‘Explicit exhortation is given to put away every form of such anti-social evil, particularly those forms in which it commonly first begins to find expression, i.e. in heart, attitude and motive, in casual utterance, and in unreal and unworthy participation in outward fellowship’ (Stibbs 1973:95). In 1 Pet 3:21 ἀποθέοσε is used for the removal of dirt, and in 2 Pet 1:14 for the putting off of the earthly body, i.e. death.

28 Miller (1971:387) refers to these encumbrances particularly as ‘the things that are indulged in by many – uncontrolled appetites, binding habits, questionable pleasures, unwholesome associations, inordinate affections, and suchlike.’ Westcott (1984:392) contextualises the meaning of the noun δυκόν. He points out that it occurs only here in the whole NT and is used for ‘bulk of body’, for an arrogant bearing, and for a burdensome load. He (1984:393) is less specific than Miller. According to him ‘The writer seems to have in his mind the manifold encumbrances of society and business which would be likely to hinder a Christian convert.’ Philo (Leg. Alleg. III.VII.(21), in Yonge 1993:52) also helps to shed some light on its meaning. According to him: ‘You would not have sent away things which were at variance with one another, for if you have sent them really away, and had emancipated the soul, you would have removed from it all bodily sounds, and such as affect the outward senses; for in this way the intellect is emancipated from evil and passions.’ cf. Mt 23:4).

The formulation recalls the usual preparation of stripping for a race. Contestants removed all of their clothing before running so that nothing could impede them during the race.
It refers most naturally to the weight of a long heavy robe, which would hamper running (cf. Kuss 1967:110; Michel 1966:429); it may apply equally to superfluous bodily weight (Bruce 1981:349). Just as athletes have to get rid of superfluous and flabby flesh through disciplined training and diets, Christian athletes should 'lay off all spiritual hindrances' if they want to complete this race. According the Wilson (1987:219), the phrase ὀγκον ... πάντα (every weight) is anything that might prove a handicap or hindrance, and is immediately amplified by the following phrase καὶ τὴν εὑπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν (and the sin that clings so closely).

The qualifying adjective πάντα, 'all,' indicates that the writer did not have any particular consideration explicitly in mind (Seesemann 1967:41). The combined expression covers any encumbrance that would handicap a runner, and by analogy anything that would interfere with responsible commitment to Jesus Christ. This might have reference to the love of wealth, attachment to the world, preoccupation with earthly interests, or self-importance (Lane 1991b:409).

2) The second part of the preparation is to get rid of the sin that easily entangles (εὑπερίστατον). In the context of the metaphor this adjective is used here 'to see sin as binding, hampering on every side, entangling; in short, it is pictured by the trailing garments which the runner must strip off. No specific sin would be preferred to, since the article designates sin abstractly and generally' (Miller 1971:387).

In conclusion, this covers any encumbrance that could handicap a runner, and by analogy anything that would interfere with responsible commitment to Jesus Christ (cf. Du Toit 2002:209). By giving the participle ἀποθέμενον (Du Toit 2002:209). In the phrase ὀγκον ἀποθέμενον πάντα (lay aside every weight) the emphasis falls upon the initial noun ὀγκον, (excess weight). Here it refers most naturally to the weight of a long heavy robe, which would hamper running (Michel 1966:429); it may apply equally to superfluous bodily weight (Bruce 1981:349). The qualifying adjective πάντα, (all), indicates that the author did not have any particular consideration explicitly in mind (Seesemann 1967:41). In their vagueness, Louw & Nida (1988:165; also Danker 2000:689; Hagner 1983:195) opens the door for any possible encumbrance by interpreting the noun ὀγκον semantically as 'that which serves to hinder or prevent someone from doing something - "hindrance, impediment"' and therefore translate ὀγκον as '... setting aside everything that serves as a hindrance.'

Louw & Nida attached a double meaning to the verb εὑπερίστατον. They first define it as (1988:354) 'pertaining to easily detracting one's thinking - "easily distracting, that which keeps from continuing to think about something."' to translate it as '... the sin that so easily distracts us ...' Secondly (1988:472), they define it as 'pertaining to the exertion of tight control - "being in control of, controlling tightly."' in order to translate it as '... the sin which controls (us) so tightly.' Danker (2000:410) adds another perspective, that of 'easily ensnaring, obstructing, constricting, of sin.' Liddell & Scott (1974:286) explains it as 'easily besetting'. These explanations are unanimous in that it carries the idea of 'easily entangles.'
(12:1a, to put off, lay aside) a hortatory nuance, Christians are to divest
themselves of every association or concern that would limit their freedom for
Christian confession.

... so that you may not grow weary

The exhortation in 12:1 to 'lay aside every weight' (ἀποθέμενοι πάντα) is made explicit with the purpose clause of 3b: ἵνα μὴ κάμπτε ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑπὸν ἐκλυόμενοι, 'so that you may not become weary and lose heart.' Believers who failed to lay aside the encumbrances that would handicap them, would become weary (κάμπτε)30. The formulation is consistent with the athletic metaphor. The author was concerned pastorally that the men and women he addressed might 'become weary and lose heart' prior to completing the race. The tendency of the community, however, was to become fatigued. Their courage and readiness to identify themselves with Jesus and confess him faltered. Seeking to avoid suffering, they could fall. What is called for is stamina and the determination to 'go the distance' in order to attain the goal (Lane 1991b:417).

Let us run the race with perseverance

When the Christian athletes' special and necessary preparation have been completed, these runners have to run with special concentration, with their eyes fixed on Jesus and looking away from anything else. Therefore the author exhorts his readers to run (τρέξωμεν)31 the race (ἀγώνα)32 of faith with

30 The phrase κάμπτε ταῖς ψυχαῖς is an idiom and literally means 'to become tired in spirit' (Louw & Nida 1988:320). It means 'to become discouraged, to become tired of' and is defined by Louw & Nida as 'do not let yourselves become discouraged or give up.'

31 Louw & Nida (1988:209) describes the verb τρέξωμεν as 'to run, with emphasis on relative speed in contrast with walking — to run, to rush'. They translate the phrase δι' ἑπομονής τρέξωμεν τὸν προκείμενον ἵματι ἀγώνα as 'let us run with determination the race that is set before us'. According to Danker (2000:1015) it refers 'to make an effort to advance spiritually or intellectually, exert oneself ... exert oneself to the limit of one's powers in an attempt to go forward, strive to advance ... 'the emphasis is entirely on the effort that the person makes; cf. 1 Cor 9:24c, 26; Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16.' Two complementary characteristics of running a race stand out: 'speed' (Louw and Nida) and 'effort' (Danker). To run a marathon is an effort to keep the pace to finish in time. This implies continuous and determinative exercise.

32 In the Graeco-Roman world, races were well-known. The most important was the Olympic Games. Secondly, there were the Ismic Games in Corinth. Each city had its own competitions. Greek moralists often used the athletic image to encourage people to persevere in life. In the
perseverance\textsuperscript{33} that is a recurring idea in 12:1-3 (ὑπομονή\textsuperscript{3}, ν 1; ὑπέμεινεν, ν 2; ὑπομεμενηκότα, ν 3). The writer calls for a display of perseverance through faith. Although 'faith' continues to be the underlying theme (cf. 12:2), it is faith as it is realised in endurance and submission under discipline (Michel 1966:426). This initial paragraph sets forth the tenor of the exhortation and its basis in Jesus’ own endurance of hostile opposition in the world. The admonition to run the prescribed race δι’ ὑπομονή\textsuperscript{34}, (with endurance), makes explicit the element of struggle that is integral to mature commitment (cf. 4 Macc 17:13 in Emmet 1918:71). There must be firm resolve not to drop out of the contest but to exert every effort to cross the finish line despite hardship, exhaustion and pain.\textsuperscript{35}

The exhausting character of this race suggests that a marathon is used as metaphor here (Attridge 1989:355). Therefore, the recipe of Hebrews for not-becoming-spiritually-exhausted and drop out (12:3) comprehends the following ingredients: This has to be their purpose in life. With such a clearly spelled out vision believers will feel that there is a goal to strive towards, or that there is something to live for, that life has purpose and meaning. When believers experience such meaning they will feel directed towards the future.

\textit{corpus Paulinum} this athletic image is used frequently (1 Cor 9:24-27; Phil 3:13-14; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7-8) to emphasise ‘purposefulness’ (Phil 3:13f) and ‘endurance.’ Both these motifs, especially the second, plays an important role in Heb 12:1-3 (cf. Du Toit 2002:208).

\textsuperscript{33} The term ὑπομονή, (endurance), which is the linking word throughout the paragraph, is accented in verse 1 by its literary position at the beginning of a long phrase. See the following texts on perseverance: 1 Chr 16:11; Job 17:9; Ps 37:24, 28; 73:24; 138:8; Prov 4:18; Jer 32:40; Hos 12:6; Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 4:3-8; 13:13.; Luke 10:42; 22:31, 32; John 6:37, 39, 40; 8:31, 32; 10:28, 29; 15:4, 5, 7, 9; Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:21, 22; Rom 2:6, 7; 8:30, 33-35, 37-39; 11:29; 1 Cor 1:8, 9; 15:1, 2, 58; 16:13; 2 Cor 1:21, 22; 5:9, 15; Gal 5:1, 10; 6:9; Eph 4:14; 6:13, 18; Phil 1:6, 27; 3:16; 4:1; Col 1:10, 22, 23; 2:7; 1 Thess 3:8, 13; 5:21; 2 Thess 2:15-17; 3:13; 2 Tim 1:12, 13; 2:1, 2, 12; 3:14; 4:18; Tit 1:9; Heb 2:1; 3:5, 6, 14; 4:14; 6:1, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18; 10:23, 35, 36; 12:1-13, 15; 13:9, 13; James 1:4, 12, 25; 5:10, 11; 1 Pet 1:4-7; 5:8; 2 Pet 1:10, 11; 3:17, 18; 1 John 2:19, 27; Rev 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 25-28; 3:5, 11, 12, 21; 14:12; 16:15; 21:7, 8; 22:11.

\textsuperscript{34} According to Miller (1971:384) denotes the prepositional διά phrase ‘manner’. It indicates how they are to run: with endurance.

\textsuperscript{35} According to Salevao (2002:300) the focus of the race is to reach the end of the race. It rather seems as if the focus is on the present endurance (ὑπομονή\textsuperscript{3}, 12:1, 2, 3). The focus to reach the end of the race is to help to persevere. Danker (2000:1039) defines it as ‘the capacity to hold out for or bear up in the face of difficulty, patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance.’
Considering the examples of faith

This vivid race metaphor offers two incentives for Christian perseverance in faith and obedience towards the prescribed goal.

... Consider the cloud of witnesses

The first incentive is the certainty of being surrounded by 'a host of witnesses' (νέφος μαρτυριῶν, 12:1). These 'witnesses' are the men and women of Ch 11 who have been acknowledged by God because of the constancy of their faith (11:2, 4, 5, 39). They are presented in Scripture as witnesses to the character and validity of committed faithfulness, whose lives provide evidence of the possibilities of faith for subsequent generations. They are examples of successful runners, everyone of them already a winner (cf. Hagner 1983:194).

The emphasis in 12:1 thus falls on what Christians see in the host of witnesses, rather than on what they see in Christians (cf. Miller 1971:386; Wilson 1987:219). The appeal to their example is designed to inspire heroic Christian discipleship. Christians can benefit from the testimony of these Old Testament witnesses to the validity of faith as they exert themselves in the race of faith prescribed for them. They persevered, also under difficult circumstances, in running the race to the end. Their endurance has to motivate believers today to endure.

The audience is summoned to intense perseverance in faith, as exemplified by those who preceded them. Their unwavering fidelity should encourage and inspire Christians to emulate them, enduring trials similar to their own.

... Consider him who endured

The second incentive evokes the endurance of Jesus in his Passion (cf. 1 Pet. 2:19–23) as is made explicit in verses 2 and 3. In providing a paradigm of the desired behaviour, the author employs a technique derived from ancient rhetoric and philosophy. If the readers are to run their race mindful

36 Grässer (1965:156) senses that 'Das vorbildliche Leiden Jesu Christi war zu allen urchristlichen Verfolgungszeiten ein starkes paragnetisches Motiv.'

37 The most important ancient rhetorical handbooks that discuss the use of examples (παραδείγματα, exempla) are Aristotle's Rhetoric, Quintilian's Institutio Oratoria, and two anonymous treatises, Rhetorica ad Alexandrum and Rhetorica ad Herennium. A lengthy discussion of what each of these rhetoricians says in regard to exempla has already been done
of the example of these 'witnesses' to faith, they must focus on Jesus who has himself triumphed and was exalted to the heavenly throne. The appeal in verse 2 is for a focused attention that turns away from all distractions, with eyes firmly on Jesus. The phrase ἀφορωτέσ' εἰς ... Ἰησοῦν, 'looking away from (other considerations) to Jesus,' demands the same focused attention for which Moses was commended in 11:26. The language used in Hebrews 12:1-3 aims at more than a conventional, competitive metaphor of the life of faith as a race on foot. Jesus is explicated as the supreme example of faith who has successfully completed the course and serves as a model for those still engaged in the race. Contemplation of Jesus offers paramount encouragement to Christians in their struggle. As previously in this epistle (2:9), it is Christ who is held up as the inspirer and sustainer of his followers' faith. In this context Christ is placed at the same level as the heroes in Ch 11 (Gordon 2000:149); Never-

by Cosby (1988:93ff). The question concerning the use of 'examples' as rhetorical devices was whether παραδείγματα (exempla) had a probative or an illustrative function.

38 De Silva (1998:76) points out that while the examples of endurance of martyrs (i.e. referred to in 4 Maccabees) confirm that devout reason can master the passions, the eulogistic handling of these figures will certainly have the rhetorical effect of rousing emulation within the readers, leading them to imitate the heroic commitment to virtue seen in these exemplars.

Aristotle (Rhetoric 1.9.35-36 in Parsons 1836:71f) notes that 'praise and counsels have a common aspect', since what one praises (ἐπαυνεῖν) is generally what one would advice and vice versa. Pseudo-Cicero (Rhetorica ad Herennium 3.4.7 in Caplan 1977:169) notices that 'The Praiseworthy is what produces an honourable remembrance, at the time of the event and afterwards.' While virtue is itself desirable, if it can be shown that praise accrues, the desire to strive after the right is doubled.

39 Louw & Nida (1988:354; also Danker 2000:158) define the verb ἀφορῶω as 'to keep thinking about, without having one's attention distracted - "to think about, to fix one's attention on"' to translate the phrase ἀφορωτέσ' εἰς τὸ ... Ἰησοῦν as: '... let us fix our attention on ... Jesus.'

40 4 Macc 17:9-14 (in Emmet 1918:70f) eulogise on the Maccabaean martyrs who engaged in a 'divine' contest, with the world and the human race as spectators, endured torture 'even unto death' to receive the price of 'immortality and endless life (Hadas 1953:235). De Silva (1998:147) agrees that the addressees of Hebrews are called to maintain their faith and endurance (12:1, ὑπομονῆσ' by 'looking to Jesus' (ἀφορωτέσ' εἰς τὸν ... Ἰησοῦν, 12:2), just as the martyrs are able 'looking to God' (εἰς θεὸν ἀφορωτέσ') to endure 'torture even to death'.

41 According to Thucydides (Histories 2.35.2 in De Silva 1998:47f) the praise of others was only acceptable insofar as the hearers or readers believed themselves capable of the same achievements. Therefore, we can deduce that the author's praise of Jesus' achievement will rouse emulation in the hearts of the readers, reaffirming for them the way of following Jesus (rather than the path of compromise) may indeed be the surest path to fulfil their highest ambitions.
theless, the examples of faith culminate in him (cf. Kuss 1967:227), because he alone inaugurated the fulfilment of God's eschatological plan of salvation. He also carried it through in his own person (Lindars 1995:112). Therefore, he is described by the author as both 'the pioneer and perfecter of faith' (τὴν πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν, 12:2). With this reference he probably means something like 'the one with whom faith begins and ends' (Gordon 2000:148f). The noun τελειωτὴν is a simple substantivising of the verb τελειοῦν which means "to complete, finish, accomplish, perfect, or fulfill" (Trotter 1997:142; Hume 1997). 42 According to Trotter (1997:142), this noun has been coined for at least two reasons. First, to echo the author's favourite verb he uses particularly in 11:40 to speak in an oblique way of the perfection of Christians. That perfection realises through Christ's actions and is thereby able to bring his followers to perfection as they persevere in running the race with their eyes set on him. By substantivising the verb the authors asserts that Christ is the very essence of that perfection. He is the perfecter who accomplishes perfection for his followers through his enduring of the cross. 43

The second reason has to do with the first aspect (ἀρχηγὸν) of the pair, ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν (the pioneer and perfecter of faith). Lane (1991:411) pointed out how the expression τὸν ... ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν recalls prior instances in Hebrews where the author juxtaposed the roots ἀρχ- and τέλ- for rhetorical effect. 44 'Taking a clue from the writer's interest in the notions of origin and completion, beginning and end, the predicates ἀρχηγὸς and τελειωτής suggest that Jesus is the initiator and head of the rank and file in the order of faith, just as he is the one who brought faith to its ultimate expression. He ... expressed unqualified obedience to the will of God in a fallen world consigned to death, and so displayed the goal of faith as well as its paramount power (5:8; 10:5-10). The predicates express the conviction that from first to last Jesus exercised faith in an essential sense and brought it to its triumphant completion' (Lane 1991:411).

42 Louw & Nida (1988:658; also Danker 2000:997) defines it as 'one who makes possible the successful completion of something — one who completes, perfecter.'

43 At this stage it is appropriate to look back at a few earlier passages: 2:10 speaks of the pioneer of salvation being made perfect through suffering; 5:8-9 points out that although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him; 7:8 contrasts the earthly high priests with a Son made perfect for ever. This perfection was attained through struggle, through faithful endurance as we are reminded in the following words of the present verse, 'who ... endured the cross, despising the shame.'

44 3:14b: τὴν ἀρχὴν ... μέχρι τέλους; 7:3: ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν ... ζωῆς τέλος.
The author was well aware of the disheartened condition of his readers and was genuinely concerned that they might abandon their faith in the face of the struggles confronting them (cf. 10:32–35). He invites the readers to compare their experiences with that of Jesus and in verse 3a specifies a further consideration in the endurance of suffering by Jesus. In contrast to τρέχωμεν, 'let us run,' in verse 1, the aorist imperative verb, ἀναλογίσασθε (consider), is addressed more directly to the readers. The verb, which occurs only here in the New Testament (cf. 1 Clem 38 in Roberts 1997: ECF.1.1.1.1.0.36), contemplates a process of comparison and reflection. Its import can be conveyed in the appeal, 'Allow Jesus to be an example to you' (cf. John 13). As in the author’s appeal in 3:1–2 (where κατανοήσατε, 'observe,' is used), the emphasis is placed upon the exemplary conduct of Jesus. He did not allow weariness, despair or discouragement to deter him from obedience. His endurance of opposition has exemplary value for the congregation and missionaries (cf. Seesemann 1967:33f).

Another aspect that compliments the above discussion occurs in 6:20 where Jesus is designated as a πρόδρομος (forerunner). This is also an athletic term that is entirely appropriate to the metaphor of the race. Πρόδρομος is a relative term implying a sequence of other runners who must follow the pace-setter to the completion of the course. According to Hagner (1983:80; also Wilson 1987:118) this noun is similar in meaning to ἀρχηγόν (2:10; 12:2 which the NRSV translates as 'pioneer') and conveys the idea of one who prepares the way by the work he has accomplished, making it possible for others to follow. Bauernfeind (1972:235) argues that a πρόδρομος draws attention to the race itself as well as to its finish.

Hence, in 12:2 Jesus is presented by the author as both the model and object of faith (Rhee 2001:251).

CONCLUSION

Suffering, inflicted as a result of faith in Christ, is a reality in the lives of Christians committed to work for the realisation of God’s reign in history. Different circumstances and personalities influence the intensity, duration and the type of their suffering. Some pay the ultimate price, becoming “red

45 For Louw & Nida (1988:351; also Danker 2000:67) the verb ἀναλογίσασθε means ‘to think or reason with thoroughness and completeness – “to think out carefully, to reason thoroughly, to consider carefully, to reason, reasoning.”’

46 Bauernfeind 1972:235 points out that πρόδρομος occurs only here (Heb 6:20) in the NT and is deliberately not called ‘our forerunner’ but the forerunner ‘for us’.
martyrs" by witnessing to the point of death. In order to sustain their commitment to God’s will and the coming of God’s reign in the midst of such suffering, believers need to develop a spirituality of perseverance that flows from their faith in Christ. To achieve this, the author of Hebrews (12:1-3) exhorts the readers to ‘lay aside everything that would interfere with responsible commitment to Jesus’ and simultaneously to ‘run the race (of faith) with endurance’. Here the author illustrates the desired qualities by using the example of an athlete who, despite pain and exhaustion, completes the race so that s/he may claim the promised prize. This has to be done while considering the achievements of the heroes of faith (a great cloud of witnesses), and bearing in mind the example of Jesus (Croy 1998:166) and the promise of eschatological perfection (eternal glory, 1 Pet 5:10). The author located his exempla towards the end of his argument, and chose and shaped them in accordance with rhetorical theory. Christian faith, then, finds its essential expression in persevering devotion to Christ and in a lifestyle that reflects consecration to the service of God, while continuing the mission of Jesus to bring God’s liberating reign to those who are “lost” or “perishing.”

Wilson (1987:219) defines it as: ‘Faith is trust and confidence, inspires hope and expectation; but it also involves steadfastness, courage and endurance.’ Christ’s suffering was not an end in itself, but a means to a great end, namely personal perfection, while living and dying “to bring many children to glory” (Heb 2:10). As he toiled to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:15), he became like suffering humanity in every respect, in order to be “a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God” (Heb 2:17). Anointed by baptism into this priesthood of Christ and into the mission of the triune God, Christians incarnate themselves into their communities, identifying with those who suffer and bringing the liberating power of the gospel into their lives. The opposition and pain they encounter on this way are an integral part of their mission, since they do not expect to escape the marks of suffering that characterised their “forerunner”, Jesus Christ. The essential goal for which Christians suffers in God’s mission is the Kingdom of God. Thus Christians await not the end of suffering, but its goal.

LIST OF REFERENCES


