

In the mind of many Christians, the purpose for the incarnation was simply to facilitate the work of atonement: Only a human being can be a suitable vicarious sacrifice for human beings. Moreover, that individual must be free of all personal corruption and guilt – that is, he must be unique among human beings if he is to be an effectual substitute. This has led to all sorts of conclusions regarding the distinctions between Jesus and all other humans. Some, for instance, have argued that the very fact of incarnation proves that Jesus was a different sort of human being – not a true son of Adam, but the unique God-Man. One offshoot of this view is that Jesus’ shed blood had atoning efficacy because it was *divine* blood; it was the blood of God Himself. But the truth is that any attempt to distinguish Jesus’ humanness from all other human beings actually undermines a right understanding of His atoning work and its basis and goal. The propriety and efficacy of Jesus’ atonement depends utterly on His being a true son of Adam.

This point is central to the Hebrews writer’s argument here, and it comes into sharp focus in the balance of the chapter (vv. 11-18). In the previous verses, he spoke of Jesus’ human identity in connection with His sacrificial death, but his focal concern was the goal of that death, namely bringing many sons to glory. Jesus’ death as man was for the sake of mankind, and not simply that human beings would be saved from condemnation. Rather, Jesus’ atonement had man’s created destiny – his *sonship* – in view. But not human sonship as distinct from His own, but the sonship He enjoys as True Man.

- c. God’s design in the death of His incarnate Son was that the beings He created in His own image and likeness should become sons in truth – sons who share the likeness of the One who is the True Image-Son. Put the other way round, Jesus’ goal – the goal of His incarnation, death and resurrection – was that His Father should become the same Father of other human beings: Those set apart to the Father and the One who set them apart are “*all from one*” (v. 11; cf. John 20:17). This phrase has to do with source or origin, and so, in context, the writer might have meant one *Father* (NAS) or one *human stock* (NIV). In the end, each implies the other, so that the overall meaning remains the same: Jesus was born a son of Adam to fulfill His Father’s intent to have many children.

But if the children and the Son share the same Father and same human origin and nature, it follows that they are *brethren* – not hypothetically, or in some remote or abstract theological sense, but truly and fully. This is the subject of verses 11-13.

Contemporary readers can easily get side-tracked with such questions as the eternal sonship of the Logos, or how the Father’s relationship with His unique Son differs from His relationship with other human beings, but the writer’s concern here was the solidarity between Jesus and the human race, as both are children of Adam and children of God. The *man* Jesus was the Son of God, not as eternally divine, but as truly and fully human. So He is glorified and enthroned as the truly human Son (note again the writer’s citations in 1:5-13), and this Father/son relationship is what the Hebrews writer had in mind when he spoke of the Father bringing many sons to glory (v. 10). This is the framework for understanding how these children of God are Jesus’ brethren.

Once again, the Hebrews writer turned to Israel's scriptures to show that this was God's goal all along. The two passages he cited from are Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8.

- 1) Psalm 22 is another messianic psalm, and the fact that it's referenced several times in the New Testament shows that the early Christians recognized it as such (cf. Matthew 27:39-46; Mark 15:24-34; John 19:37). But, whereas the psalms previously cited highlight the regal aspects of Messiah's person and work, Psalm 22 is a psalm of rejection, dereliction, humiliation, and cruel suffering. This emphasis alone connects the psalm with the present context, for the Hebrews writer has stressed Jesus' suffering and death as the means by which God restored His image-bearers to Himself so that they should become children in truth. And yet, the author didn't draw from portions of the psalm that speak to Messiah's suffering. *Rather, he cited a verse (v. 22) that has the sufferer proclaiming Yahweh's name to his brethren.*

In the context of the psalm, verse 22 speaks to this person's confident testimony in the midst of his rejection and abandonment: *What he was enduring was according to Yahweh's faithfulness and good purpose.* The sufferer understood – and those observing his ordeal needed to understand – that his dereliction would see the nations returning to his God to serve Him with a sincere heart, lauding Him for His righteousness and power in accomplishing such a marvelous and unexpected work (vv. 25-31). His travail, which seemed so clearly to argue against the messianic triumph and kingdom, was actually the triumphant means of its inauguration.

This is the meaning of verse 22 in its own context, and the Hebrews writer didn't depart from it. Rather, he simply shifted the perspective somewhat. In the psalm, verse 22 presents the sufferer's declaration concerning Yahweh, his God, while in Hebrews the citation focuses on the sufferer's *brethren* who hear that declaration. So also, in the psalm those brethren appear to be fellow Israelites, while in Hebrews the brethren are those – Jew and Gentile – who are children of God in the Son; those who are part of the renewed covenant household Jesus is forming in Himself (cf. Romans 8:9-17; Galatians 3:15-29; Ephesians 2:11-22).

But, in both contexts, the statement highlights the same core truth that God ordained the dereliction and death of His messianic Servant to accomplish His good purpose to banish the curse, establish His everlasting kingdom, and populate it with true image-children. *Yahweh would acquire sons and daughters through the Servant's travail, and the Servant would acquire true brethren.* Thus the Lord would fulfill His promises to Abraham, David and Israel to become King over all the earth and Father to all tribes, tongues, nations and peoples (ref. again Isaiah 53-54; cf. Genesis 17:1-8; Exodus 25:1-8; Isaiah 9-12; Jeremiah 24:1-7, 31:1-33:26; Ezekiel 34, 37; Hosea 1-2; Zechariah 2, 8:1-8; Revelation 21-22).

- 2) The other passage the writer drew from is Isaiah 8. The first quote closely corresponds to the Septuagint of 8:17b, and the second reflects the first part of 8:18. This passage has a very different context and concern than Psalm 22, but the early Christians regarded it as messianic as well. They saw references to Jesus in Isaiah 8 itself (cf. Isaiah 8:14-15 with Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:8), but the messianic quality of this particular chapter is greatly enhanced by the wider context that spans chapters 7-12. This larger section promises the preservation of David's house and kingdom in connection with the future reality of *Immanuel* (7:1-16).
- The historical setting was a threat to Judah and her king, Ahaz, by the allied forces of Israel (the separate kingdom formed when ten of the Israelite tribes renounced Rehoboam and embraced Jeroboam I as their king) and Aramea (Syria). Fearing for his life and throne, Ahaz pursued his own alliance with Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria, in the hope that this would enable him to finally prevail in the ongoing conflict that had already taken a heavy toll on Judah (cf. 2 Kings 16:1-9; 2 Chronicles 28).
  - It was in this context that Yahweh sent His prophet Isaiah to Ahaz to tell him what his seemingly shrewd alliance was going to yield. The Assyrian king and his armies would indeed deliver Jerusalem from the Israelite-Aramean forces, but the result would be Assyrian occupation of Judah and Assyrian authority wielded over Ahaz' dominion. The Gentile power Ahaz so eagerly embraced to deliver David's throne was going to overshadow it (8:1-8).
  - What King Ahaz needed to understand – what Isaiah was sent to affirm – was that his fears were unfounded; *no attempt to destroy David's throne would succeed*. The Israelite-Aramean alliance wasn't going to accomplish this, and neither would the Assyrian presence in Judah – either through Tiglath-pileser or his grandson Sennacherib (Isaiah 36-37). All such efforts would fail, not because of Judah's might or powerful alliances, but because of the promise of *Immanuel* (8:9-10). David's throne and kingdom would endure because they were Yahweh's throne and kingdom; Judah, with Jerusalem as its crown jewel, was Immanuel's land.
  - Thus Yahweh charged Isaiah to guard against being drawn into the people's fears and unbelief; he was to fear the "Lord of Hosts" – Yahweh, the God of the armies of heaven and Israel – and trust His faithfulness, and so find Him to be his sure sanctuary. For their part, Israel and Judah would continue to stumble over their God until their stumbling reached its climax in the day when He returned to Zion in His messianic Servant (8:11-15).

- Yahweh had determined to preserve David's kingdom for a season, but desolation and exile were coming to it as well. This judgment was well deserved and not to be averted (ref. Ezekiel 23-24), and it would stand until the promise of Immanuel was fulfilled and Yahweh again rose up to deliver the captives, restore David's throne, and establish His everlasting kingdom (8:19-9:7). At that time, He would cleanse the unfaithful children and destroy the powers that had subjugated them (9:8-10:34), raising up the Davidic Branch to achieve this triumph, renew the habitations and restore His presence among His people (11:1-12:6).

This is the prophetic context the Hebrews writer drew from, and the verse he cited plays a significant role in it. For, overarching the terror and uncertainty that Judah was enduring, and would endure in the coming centuries (cf. 2 Chronicles 28:1-27, 32:1-22, 36:1-21; Jeremiah 7:21-34; Lamentations 1-2), was the abiding obligation to trust the God of Abraham and David and His unwavering promises.

The people of Judah saw conspiracy, threat and danger on every hand (even from the prophets sent to them – cf. Jeremiah 1:1-19, 7:1-27, 18:1-28:17, 37:1-38:28), and their reaction was to look anxiously around them for remedy, rather than trusting the Holy One of Israel and His faithfulness (Isaiah 41:1-20). But Isaiah and his children and disciples, who were signs to the unbelieving and fearful in Israel (ref. 7:3-4, 8:3-4, 16-18), were to continue in patient, watchful, and hopeful trust (8:16-18). Their discipleship as faithful brethren would one day be fully realized when the object of their faith formed a new brotherhood in Himself.

Again, it's important to emphasize that the Hebrews writer didn't select these two citations arbitrarily because they happen to mention the concept of brotherhood. They *do* speak to this topic, but as part of a larger surrounding context. He cited these particular statements with a view to their scriptural and prophetic contexts, and it is those contexts that contribute to his argument.

- The excerpt from Psalm 22 highlights the Son's role as *testifier*. He proclaims His Father's name to His brethren and solicits their collective praise. It's true that the Son Himself deserves and rightly receives glory and honor from His brethren as the pioneer of salvation – the One who led them into His Father's house. But He receives all honor and praise as having carried out His Father's glorious design. His glory is His Father's glory, and thus He leads His brethren in proclaiming the Father's name and singing His praises. In worship and praise, too, He is one with them.
- The citation from Isaiah 8 also emphasizes the idea of testimony, but from a different angle. Here it is the testimony, not of proclamation and praise, but of manifested *faithfulness*. This is the faithfulness first shown by the Son in trusting Himself to His Father and His good purpose, and now replicated in His brethren – those who have become faithful sons in Him.