

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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Question about Hebrews 10:5-7

Question: My Bible has a note that says that **Hebrews 10:5-7** is a quotation from **Psalms 40:6-8**. However, when I compare these two passages, they do not completely match. The Hebrews passage says, "...a body You have prepared for me..." while the Psalms passages reads, "...My ears You have opened...". Why are these different?

Answer: The note in your Bible is correct; the writer of Hebrews is quoting from **Psalms 40**, but he is quoting from the **Septuagint** version (**LXX**) not the Hebrew version. The Septuagint, also referred to as the **LXX**, is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek from about 200 B.C. It was widely used by the Jews in the first century A.D. and is often quoted by the New Testament writers. The Hebrews writer quoted from this version accurately in Hebrews 10.

"6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; **My ears You have opened**. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to

do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.'" **Psalms 40:6-8 (NKJV)**

"6 Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; **but a body hast thou prepared me**: whole-burnt-offering and *sacrifice* for sin thou didst not require. 7 Then I said, Behold, I come: in the volume of the book it is written concerning me, 8 I desired to do thy will, O my God, and thy law in the midst of mine heart." **Psalms 40:6-8 (LXX Brenton's translation)**

The above quotations are both English translations from the Greek, and yet you can still see that the Hebrews writer was using the **Septuagint** as the source of his quotation. This is even clearer when looking at the Greek for both passages.

To understand how the writer of Hebrews is using this quotation, we need to consider the context in which he quotes this Old Testament passage.

"1 For **the law**, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, **can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach**

perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For **it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins**. 5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But **a body You have prepared for Me**. 6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—**To do Your will, O God.**'" 8 Previously saying, '**Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them**' (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, '**Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.**' He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10 By that will **we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**" **Hebrews 10:1-10 (NKJV)**

The Hebrews writer is making the point that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins, **verse 4**. This is why God had no pleasure in burnt offerings and

sacrifices, **verse 8**. In contrast to these ineffective sacrifices, Jesus came to do the will of the Father, and thus He became the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Because He was the perfect sacrifice, it only had to happen once as opposed to the repeated sacrifices of bulls and goats under the Law of Moses. The main point here is the contrast between the ineffective sacrifices of animals that were repeatedly offered under the Law of Moses and the perfect sacrifice of Jesus which was done once and for all.

That perfect, once for all, sacrifice happened through the offering of the body of Jesus who came to do the will of God, **verses 9-10**. That is how we have been sanctified or made holy. That is how we have been made perfect or complete. That is how our sins have finally been forgiven. This is why the first (the Law of Moses) has been taken away to establish the second (salvation in Christ). For this to happen, it was necessary for Jesus to have a body that He could offer first in doing the will of God and second as a sacrifice.

The **Septuagint** version plainly says that Messiah would have a body. The Hebrew version of the Psalm refers to His ears. Of course, if He has ears, He has a body. The point is that the Hebrews writer is not just picking the version that is convenient to his point. The key point he is making is that Jesus had a body, just as it was prophesied that He would. Therefore, He was able to be the sacrifice that we needed for our sanctification. The difference between the **Septuagint** and the Hebrew versions of the Psalms have no bearing on his argument.

Whether the writer of Hebrews made his point by quoting the

Septuagint, which states it explicitly, or the Hebrew, which states it implicitly, since having ears means you have a body, is irrelevant. Either version would support his argument. Similarly, if I was trying to make a point that could be supported by either the **NKJV** or the **NASB**, but the **NKJV** was more direct regarding the point I was making, I would probably use that version for my quotation. Unless there is a difference between the versions such that one supported my point, but the other did not, there would be no reason not to use the one that spoke most clearly to my point.

A similar idea applies to whether you quote from **Romans 5:9** or **Romans 5:10**, depending on whether you are making the point that our salvation is a result of the death of Christ or the blood of Christ. **Verse 9** says that we are justified by His blood while **verse 10** says we were reconciled to God through His death.

"9 Much more then, **having now been justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." **Romans 5:9-10 (NKJV)**

His blood and His death are equivalent ideas here. It was in His death that Jesus shed His blood for us. Therefore, speaking of salvation through His blood or His death have the same idea. You can substitute "death" for "blood" or vice versa without changing the essential idea being expressed. Similarly, we can speak of Jesus having a body or having ears opened when making a point about His being sacrificed for us. Either rendering carries the

essential idea of Jesus having a body.

Furthermore, sometimes the part is put for the whole or vice versa. That is called synecdoche. If we say, "The ship sank and all souls on board were lost," we mean that all lives were lost. While "lives" and "souls" are not strictly equivalent, they are for the purposes of stating how many people died in the shipwreck. In the passages that we are considering here, "body" and "ear" are not strictly equivalent, but they are for the purposes of explaining how Jesus can be our perfect, once for all, sacrifice because He had a body (or ears).

The bottom line here is that the Hebrews writer did not misquote the passage from Psalms, nor did he misuse the intent of the passage. He simply used a translation that was very common and widely used in his time to make his point in the passage he was writing. It is no different than when we quote any widely used translation to make our point in a lesson, sermon, or article. If the portion of the translation that is germane to our point does not misrepresent the original, there is no violence done to the passage, the original, or our point. It remains a fair use of the original passage.

Note: The previous article is an excerpt from *Hebrews* by Terry Carter.