

The Use of Psalm 40:6-8 in Hebrews 10:5-9

An exegetical, theological, & devotional study

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I. INTRODUCTION

How the New Testament (NT) authors utilize the Old Testament (OT) has consumed the thoughts of many scholars. In recent days, the study of the NT's use of the OT has come to the forefront in academics – and rightly so. This arena of study worthily deserves much study, thought, and exegesis. In what follows, I endeavor to briefly examine how 'auctor'¹ uses Psalm 40 to enhance his argumentation in Hebrews 10. It in no way is an exhaustive study, but I hope it will contribute to the ongoing discussion of how the NT uses the OT.

II. TEXT & CONTEXT OF PSALM 40:6-8

Ps 40:6-8 [7-9 Hebrew]

7 זָבַח וּמִנְחָה לֹא־חָפְצָתָ אֲזִנִּים כָּרִיתָ לִּי עֹלָה וַחֲטָאָה לֹא שְׁאַלְתָּ
8 אֲזַ אָמַרְתִּי הִנֵּה־בָאֲתִי בְּמַגֵּל־סֵפֶר כְּתוּב עָלַי
9 לַעֲשׂוֹת־רְצוֹנְךָ אֱלֹהֵי חֲפְצָתִי וְתוֹרָתְךָ בְּתוֹךְ מִעֵי

Author's Translation:

"Sacrifice & offering you have not desired. Ears you have dug for me. You have not asked for burnt offering & sin offering. Then I said, 'Behold I have come. In the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God. And as for Your Law, it is in the midst of my being.'"

Psalm 40, authored by David, consists of a psalm with two distinct sections. In verses 1-10 the psalmist affirms his confident trust in God. He expresses this in a number of ways. He first provides personal testimony of how God delivered, rescued, and helped him out of troubles (vv.1-2). So great was this deliverance that David has a new song in his mouth because of the new redemptive graces that God provided (v.3). He extols the amazing power and greatness of God by speaking of his manifold wonders, his inscrutable thoughts towards His creatures and his incomparability (v.5).

Then in verses 6-8, David shows that God does not delight in merely *external* sacrifices and ritual only. Though God instituted sacrifices, he does not want mere 'religion' and 'rites.' David says that his ears have been 'dug open' which speaks of his ears being opened to hearing, receiving, and then being able to obey what was required of Him in God's Law. David knows that the Law wrote about him as the King (cf. Deut 17) and so he delighted to do God's will for, indeed, he had hidden God's Law in his innermost being. So great is God's grace and deliverance that David proclaims glad tidings in the midst of the great assembly.

The second division of the psalm speaks of David in his troubles and how he knew God's compassions would not fail (v.11). He acknowledged his iniquities (v.12) and he begged God to quickly come to his aid and help (vv.13, 17). He asks God to

¹ I do not subscribe to the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. And because I do not know who the author was, I have affectionately termed him 'auctor' as this title came from my Greek course on Hebrews with Dr. Will Varner at The Master's College.

act quickly against his enemies who rise up against him (vv.14-15) and then seeks all who are godly and who have been redeemed to make their continuous chant that the Lord be magnified in all things (v.16).

III. TEXT & CONTEXT OF HEBREWS 10:5-9

Heb 10:5-9

⁵ Διὸ εἰσερχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον λέγει· θυσίαν καὶ προσφορὰν οὐκ ἠθέλησας, σῶμα δὲ κατηρτίσω μοι· ⁶ ὀλοκαυτώματα καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας οὐκ εὐδόκησας. ⁷ τότε εἶπον· ἰδοὺ ἤκω, ἐν κεφαλίδι βιβλίου γέγραπται περὶ ἐμοῦ, τοῦ ποιῆσαι ὁ θεὸς τὸ θέλημά σου. ⁸ ἀνώτερον λέγων ὅτι θυσίας καὶ προσφορὰς καὶ ὀλοκαυτώματα καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας οὐκ ἠθέλησας οὐδὲ εὐδόκησας, αἴτινες κατὰ νόμον προσφέρονται, ⁹ τότε εἶρηκεν· ἰδοὺ ἤκω τοῦ ποιῆσαι τὸ θέλημά σου. ἀναιρεῖ τὸ πρῶτον ἵνα τὸ δεύτερον στήσῃ,

Author's translation:

Therefore when He entered into the world, He says "sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for Me. Whole burnt offerings and in sacrifices you have not taken pleasure." Then He says, "Behold I have come, in the scroll of the Book it is written concerning me, *that is*, to do Your will, O God." When he said above: "sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and in sacrifices you have not desired nor have you taken pleasure—which, according to the Law they are offered—then He said, "Behold I have come to do Your will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

The theme of Hebrews can ably be summed up in 8:1 where auctor says that the "main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." In other words, auctor has gone to great lengths to show to his audience that Jesus is the great High Priest, the fulfillment of all the Levitical system and He is the Savior they must believe in and cling to for their atonement. Hebrews 10 concludes a lengthy discourse showing the supremacy of Jesus and His once-and-for-all sacrifice over and above all the ongoing sacrifices that took place in the Temple in ages past.

The author shows in 10:1 that the same sacrifices which are offered year after year can never take away sins (vv.1-2). In fact, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:4). Therefore, because of the inadequacy of these perpetual animal sacrifices that the Mosaic Law instituted to take away sins eternally, a man came into the world (10:5a). Auctor attributes the words of Psalm 40 and puts them into the mouth of the Lord Jesus when He says: "sacrifice and offering you have not desired but a body you have prepared for me...in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure" (vv.5-6). Auctor draws from the LXX [Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT] which has the wording: "you have *prepared* for me." The Hebrew has "dug out" for me and it seems as though the idea of the idiomatic Hebrew text is to show the worshiper who is prepared to worship God from the heart and with his whole life. He is prepared, as it were, to follow God.

Auctor does, however, make a significant change. David wrote "ears" you have dug for me and auctor inserted the word "body" in its place. This was a rhetorical feature whereby a writer could speak of a part as if it referred to the whole. Thus, it is an occasion of *pars pro toto* whereby the digging out of the ears is part of the whole or total work of preparing a

body. David's ears were dug out and ready to do the Lord's service. Here in Hebrews 10, it is the Lord Jesus' body that was prepared and ready to do the Lord's service.

Thus, when Jesus obeyed the Lord and did what God had commissioned him to do, he took away the first in order to establish the second. This refers to the taking away of the first ('old') covenant so as to establish the second ('new'; cf. Hebrews 8). And by obeying the Father's will and fully accomplishing the Lord's service, auctor says that we have been sanctified through the offering of the *body* of Jesus Christ once for all. It was not the ears that brought atonement but the precious, spotless, blameless, and unblemished Lamb of God. Jesus Christ came as a holy, innocent, undefiled high priest – separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens who did not need daily to offer up sacrifices like the other priests (Heb 10:26-27).

IV. HOW HEBREWS 'USES' PSALM 40

In seeking to show the perfection of the great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His atoning work, auctor directly quoted from Psalm 40 to show that Jesus did in fact have a body prepared for him to do His Father's will. Not only did he 'do' the will of God but he delighted in fulfilling it.

Quoting from Psalm 40 is entirely appropriate and it fits within the hermeneutical purview of the original context of Psalm 40. One cannot forget that Psalm 40:3 speaks of God putting a 'new song' in David's mouth. God's people sing 'new songs' at the dawn of new eras of revelation and divine grace. This is most fully manifested in glory when saints sing a 'new song' (Rev 5:9-10). When the Lord Jesus clothes Himself with a body that has been prepared for Him (cf. Phil 2:5-12), undoubtedly a new era of special revelation and divine grace has dawned. How true it is that the man who makes the Lord his trust is blessed (cf. Matt 5:3-11). The greatest wonder that God has ever done is clothing Himself in human flesh, taking a human body, and offering Himself as a perfect, atoning sacrifice for guilty sinners (cf. Ps 40:5).

When the Lord Jesus walked on earth, he repeatedly uttered his mission was to fulfill the will of God (John 6:40, 57; Luke 22:42). David delighted in doing the Father's will and how much more did David's greater son delight in doing His Father's will (Ps 40:8). Furthermore, David received duties as to how to live for it was written in the scroll of the book as to how the King should conduct Himself and read the Law (Deut 17) but how much more is the entire Mosaic Law and the OT written to point to Jesus Christ.

Auctor takes the language of David, quotes from the LXX form of Psalm 40 and directly applies the words to Jesus – in fact, coming from Jesus' mouth in His earthly ministry.

V. DEVOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The **Humility of Jesus Christ**. Jesus had a body prepared for Him so that He could in fact live a real life of a man. He knew the limitations, the struggles, the heartaches, and the life-situations of a real man because he was just that – a real human person.
2. The **Obedience of Jesus Christ**. Jesus came to do the Father's will and he came to obey what the Father had commissioned Him to do. He obeyed the Law perfectly. He fulfilled where humans fail. He succeeded where sinners are guilty.

3. The **God-Centeredness of Jesus Christ**. He came not to serve His own purposes but to accomplish the will of the Father. He worshiped God with His life. He offered Himself entirely to the Father. He did not perform mere outward rituals. Nor did Jesus bring about a religious revolution for a time. Rather, he knew what was written concerning Him in the Word and he delighted to do the Father's will and that passionate zeal for following God drove Him through life.
4. The **Atonement of Jesus Christ**. Jesus fulfilled the verses of Psalm 40 when he abolished the entire Mosaic sacrificial system by his once and for all substitutionary death. His atonement sanctifies sinners once and for all who come to Him by faith. He is not like another priest who daily stands ministering and offering animal sacrifices. Rather, Jesus perfected for all time those who are sanctified by one offering. And when there is a full atonement, a complete cleansing, a real forgiveness granted to guilty sinners, there no longer remains any offering needed for sin.

I hear the Savior say,
"Thy strength indeed is small;
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all."

*Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.*

For nothing good have I
Whereby Thy grace to claim,
I'll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.

And now complete in Him
My robe His righteousness,
Close sheltered 'neath His side,
I am divinely blest.

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy power and Thine alone,
Can change the leper's spots
And melt the heart of stone.²

² From the hymn, "Jesus Paid It All" by Elvina Hall (1865).