

• *Old Testament sacrifices – a 'shadow' of the gospel*

The ritualistic sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant were almost useless. They did nothing more than present a 'shadow' of the gospel to the people of Israel. It was altogether different when the Lord Jesus Christ came. His sacrifice had immense spiritual power. Our writer tells us why by referring to Psalm 40. The Hebrew of Psalm 40:6–8 may be translated like this:

Psalm 40:6-8

⁶It is not sacrifice and offerings that you desire,
but you have given me an opened ear.
It is not burnt offering and sin offering
that you have asked for. ^{¶1}

⁷Then I said, 'Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me. ^{¶2}

⁸I desire to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.' ^{¶3}

• *The Hebrew*

The Greek Old Testament expounded this as follows:

Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me.
Burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have not required.
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written about me.
I have desired to do your will, O my God,
And your law is in my heart.'

• *The Greek Septuagint*

• *The Greek is an expository translation*

It is to be noted that the Greek is not **simply** a translation. It is also partially an **exposition**. Often the translations in the Greek Old Testament should be called **expository** translations. They translate but they also try to bring out the meaning in the way in which they translate. Here we notice the Hebrew says, 'you have given me an opened ear'. It is partly a reference to being able to hear God's voice ^{¶4}. But it also seems to allude to Exodus 21:6 in which a person would have his ear pierced as a sign of wanting to be the permanent servant of his master. The Greek Old Testament expanded and expounded this point. It means that David was wanting to be totally dedicated to God in attitude (with an open ear) and dedication (having a pierced ear like a slave). The person who wanted to be the permanent servant of his master would even dedicate his body to be pierced at one point as a sign of his commitment to his master. David wants to belong to God with this kind of physical dedication.

• *An open ear – hearing God and being totally dedicated to God*

All of this is seen even more in our Lord Jesus Christ, so our author quotes Psalm 40 in his own way, making use of the Greek Old Testament. ⁵So when Christ comes into the world, he says, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me. ⁶In burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷Then I said, "Behold I have come – in the scroll of the book it is written about me – to do your will, O God.'" The Lord Jesus Christ was even more **physically** dedicated than David or the slave of Exodus 21. He came in a prepared body. He was born of the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was given a genuinely human body.

• *The author of Hebrews applies Psalm 40 to Jesus who came in a specially prepared body – genuinely human*

• *Further comments – a people sanctified once and forever*

Our writer adds some comments. ⁸As mentioned above, he said, 'You have not desired and you have not taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (and these were offered according to the law). ⁹Then he said, 'I come to do your will.' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰By that will of God we have been sanctified once and for ever through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.

¶1 Hebrew text
40:7
¶2 Hebrew text
40:8
¶3 Hebrew text
40:9

¶4 see Isaiah
50:5

• *God's deepest and more permanent wish was not for sacrifices and ritual but for yielded-ness in body*

Christ's sacrifice

1. *He was obedient in the flesh*

2. *His self-offering was the end of all ritual sacrifices*

3. *He fulfilled God's will*

4. *His righteousness becomes ours*

• *Sanctified once and forever – an accomplished fact – a secure position for us*

In the psalm (and also in places like Isaiah 1:11; Jeremiah 7:21–22; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:24–25; Micah 6:6–8) the various writers are extremely critical of the sacrificial system. Of course they do not deny that it was part of a God-given system of legislation. The negativism is not to be taken as if the law were demonic (Isaiah 1:15 mentions prayer and God was not against praying!). It was misuse of the law rather than the law itself that is in view in the denunciations of the prophets. Yet that is not the whole of the story and, taking his point from Psalm 40, Hebrews goes further than the prophetic denunciations! His point is not that the law was demonic or **never** God's will at all. Rather his point is that God's deepest and more permanent wish was not for sacrifices and ritual but for yielded-ness in body such as Jesus demonstrated in his death upon the cross.

1. **Christ was obedient in the flesh.** When Christ came he fulfilled the law not by being a Mosaic priest but by total obedience to God in his body. The life he lived in the flesh he lived in total dedication to God. It is this dedication that was never achieved by any animal. Christ lives the life that we should have lived in a way that could never be done by any animal in any ritual. In Isaiah 50 the prophet mentions obedience not only in the ear but also in the tongue, the back, the cheeks, the beard and the face^{☞1}. The Saviour gave his very body to God in life and in death.

2. **Christ's self-offering was the end of all ritual sacrifices.** They are no longer needed at all. At best they were only symbolical, nothing more. The real sacrifice was Christ's. Now that the perfect sacrifice has come the first category of sacrifice (Mosaic law) is abolished.

3. **Christ fulfilled God's will.** 'In the scroll of the book it is written'. This could refer to the way Jesus fulfilled the law. Or it could also refer to the 'book' of God's plans and decrees. Whatever it might mean in Psalm 40, any reader of Hebrews would think about both aspects of the matter.

4. **Christ's righteousness becomes ours.** God's will was that Christ should do this work of obedient sacrifice and sin-bearing for us. We who believe in Jesus are 'sanctified once and for ever through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ'^{☞1}. No room is left for doubts and fears about our salvation. We **already** have a secure position in grace that cannot be lost. It is true that there is much that we have to do. The words 'Let us...' come fourteen times in Hebrews^{☞2}. But we do what we do on the basis of a God-given 'sanctification' in Christ that cannot be lost. It is once-and-for-ever. The motivation to go after God's rewards rests on a foundation of a God-given secure position. Christ's perfect obedience is our security because it is that obedience that gives us a sanctified position in an eternal redemption. 'Sanctified' is a single Greek word in Hebrews 10:10. It refers to an accomplished fact. Hebrews does not use this word to refer to 'progressive sanctification' (of the kind we have in Romans 6:19, 22 or 1 Thessalonians 4:3). We who worship Christ are perfected for ever for guilt-free service to God.

☞1 Isaiah 50:4, 6

☞1 10:10

☞2 in 4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22–24; 12:1, 28; 13:13, 15



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