

“Upon the Lampstand”

“After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead the person puts it upon the Lampstand so those who come inside may see the light.”—Jesus of Nazareth, Gospel of Luke 8:16-17.

Question: *Why does the Greek text of the New Testament book of Hebrews 10:5 use “body” in its quotation of Psalm 39:7/40:6, when the Hebrew Masoretic Text of the quoted Psalm uses “ears,” not “body”?*

Answer: Because the Greek Septuagint (LXX) text of Psalm 40:6 (listed as 39:7 in modern printed copies of the Greek LXX), like the Greek New Testament book of Hebrews 10:5, uses “body” (σῶμα, *soma*) not “ears.” However, as you rightly point out the approximately 10th century CE Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) uses “ears” (אָזְנַיִם, *‘aznayim*) in Psalm 40:6, not “body.”

Therefore, it is right to ask about the two different readings in order to try and find out which is correct or, in this case, original to the quoted source from the book of Psalms. Clearly, the writer of the letter to the *Hebrews* had a text before him which used “body,” not “ears.” On the other hand, it may also be that in this case “body” and “ears” are closer to each other in meaning, indicating that a person has been made fit for a specific role or purpose.

Here is a summary of the best available, textual evidence supporting the reading “ears” as original to Psalm 39:7/40:6:

Support for “Ears” in Psalm 39:7/40:6

<u>Middle-2nd century CE:</u>	Origen’s Hexapla – Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aquila;• Symmachus;• Theodotion;• <i>Quinta</i> and <i>Sexta</i>.*
<u>Late 4th century CE:</u>	Latin Psalterium Gallicanum – A Re-revision of an earlier Latin “Psalter” (= a collection of Psalms for devotional use) prepared by Jerome.
<u>9th / 10th century CE:</u>	Greek Codex Sangermanensis - A 9 th /10 th century CE transcript of the 6 th century CE Greek Codex Claromontanus.
<u>10th Century CE:</u>	The Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT).

* Though meaning “fifth” and “sixth,” respectively, *Quinta* and *Sexta* here refer to what are believed to be the seventh and eighth versions of what was originally a six-fold/column “Hexapla” by Origen. *Quinta* and *Sexta* are two additional Greek translations of the Old Testament which were added later, that is, after the first six versions of Origen’s work were completed.

The Hebrew text of Psalm 40:6 is not preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The earliest support for the Hebrew Psalm’s reading of “ears” comes from the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) tradition, which as shown on page 1 is dateable to about the 10th century CE.

However, in the middle of the third century CE Origen (185 CE to 254 CE) prepared what at one point came to be a six-column presentation of the Old Testament including:

- 1) A text of the Hebrew Old Testament which Origen believed was accurate to use when quoting the OT to Jews and for use in churches;
- 2) a transliteration of the same Hebrew text into Greek characters (apparently Origen’s means of helping establish the correct reading of the Hebrew text when the pronunciation appeared uncertain);
- 3) a Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation used during his day, and perhaps much earlier, along with three other Greek translations of the Old Testament made by:
- 4) a Jew named Aquila who lived around the early to middle second century CE;
- 5) by a Jew or Jewish Christian (Ebionite?) who lived around the early to middle third century CE;
- 6) and by “Theodotion,” a Greek convert to Judaism or possibly also an Ebionite who lived from around the second century CE and who revised an earlier Greek translation of the Old Testament which came to bear his name (in particular, for the book of Daniel).

As noted in the summary on page 1, the reading “ears” is in each Hexaplaric witness except for Origen’s copy of the LXX, which appears to have read “body.”**

Therefore, if we go by the evidence from the witness of the Hexapla then by this time (mid-second century CE) it would appear the existing Jewish Hebrew text and the Greek translations of it by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion all four read “ears.”

In addition to the evidence from Origen/the Hexapla, the reading “ears” is supported by the Greek Codex Sangermanensis, a 9th/10th century CE transcript of the 6th century CE Greek Codex Claromontanus, and it is also found in the Psalterium Gallicanum, a late 4th century CE revision of an earlier “Psalter” (= a collection of Psalms for devotional use) prepared by Jerome in the late third century CE.

Concluding the support for the reading “ears” is the reading from the “Targum of the Psalms,” which according to David Stec was not “widely known, or at least not widely used, until a relatively late date.” Stec goes on to write:

The only reference in the Talmud to an Aramaic translation of at least part of the Psalms is in *b. Meg.* 21b: ... Rashi seems not to have known of a Targum of the Psalms, and there is no clear and unambiguous reference to it in the works of Qimhi, Ibn Ezra, or Nahmanides. The first medieval work to quote extensively from TgPss

** See page 151 of Fridericus Field’s 1875 (but still standard today) edition of the text of Origen’s Hexapla in his *Origenis Hexaplorum*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875).

[= the Targum of Psalms] is the *Arukh* of Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome (1035-1110). Several of the midrashic and aggadic additions of TgPss as compared with MT have parallels in *Midrash Tehillim* (*Midr. Teh.* [which dates to the 11th century CE]). This could mean that TgPss is later than *Midr. Teh.*, or it could suggest that the two works draw upon a common body of aggadic [= non-legal, rabbinic] traditions. ... The date of the composition of TgPss remains very uncertain. A very tentative suggestion would be fourth to sixth century C.E., but this is little more than guesswork. It is possible and even likely that it contains material belonging to more than one period.^{***}

Depending to some extent on the date of Theodotion’s text, the earliest date to which we might confidently assign to the reading “ears” is the middle to late second century CE. However, on its own and by comparison with the support for the reading “ears,” the support for “body” is very strong. Consider first the following summary for the reading “body” in Psalm 3:

Support for “Body” in Psalm 39:7/40:6

<u>2nd /3rd century CE:</u>	P ⁴⁶ - An early second to possibly third century CE New Testament Greek text produced by a professional scribe from an even earlier, “excellent exemplar” [Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, <i>The Text of the New Testament Greek Manuscripts: New and Complete Transcriptions with Photographs</i> (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 2001), page 207].
<u>Middle-2nd century CE:</u>	Origen’s Hexapla – Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LXX.
<u>2nd – early 4th century CE:</u>	PBodmer 24 (Rahlfs 2110).
<u>4th century CE:</u>	Codex Ⳉ (Sinaiticus) – LXX.
<u>4th century CE:</u>	Codex B (Vaticanus) – LXX.
<u>5th century CE:</u>	Codex A (Alexandrinus) – LXX.

To the above may also be added the readings from one who lived from the late fourth century to around the middle fifth century CE, Theodoret of Cyrus, from his *Dialogues* 1.^{****} And we can also add the support of Athanasius, who was born near the end of the third century CE but who wrote during the fourth century.^{*****}

In view of the preceding review, it is somewhat strange to find “ears” (Greek ὠτία, *ōtia*) as the main text reading in the 1935, 1979, and in the revised 2006 editions of Rahlfs’

^{***} David M. Stec, *The Targum of Psalms, The Aramaic Bible*, Vol. 16 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), pages 1-2.

^{****} See NPNF 3, Second Series (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004 [1892]), page 169; online here: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf203/Page_169.html (last accessed October 7, 2019).

^{*****} See the *Letter of Athanasius*, Letter VI, NPNF 4, Second Series (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004 [1892]), page 522; online here: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204/Page_522.html (last accessed October 7, 2019).

LXX.***** Similarly, the Greek for “ears” is also the main reading in Rahlfs’ 1931 and 1979 Göttingen editions (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) of the LXX in 39:7. The reason for the consistency in the main texts readings of these different LXX editions appears clear: Rahlfs.

In Rahlfs’ Göttingen editions, in his note to Psalm 39:7, Rahlfs first cites “La^G” (= the 4th century CE Latin Psalterium Gallicanum) and “Ga” (= the 9th/10th century CE Greek Codex Sangermanensis [a transcription of the 6th century CE Greek Codex Claromontanus]), and *then* Rahlfs cites the support for the reading “ears” from Origen’s Hexapla’s LXX and from the Hebrew Masoretic Text. The Göttingen editions’ note to this text ends with a reference to reading “body” in the textual tradition of Hebrews 10:5. But no references are given to the three LXX editions Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, all of which also support the reading “body.” PBodmer 24 (also now known as Rahlfs 2110) was not available to Rahlfs when he worked on these editions of the LXX.

By contrast, in Rahlfs’ Stuttgart editions his note to Psalm 39:7 refers only to “Ga,” the 4th century CE Latin Psalterium Gallicanum, in support of the main text reading “ears.” Then his note cites the alternate reading “body” along with its support, now not only from Hebrews 10:5, but Rahlfs also here cites the three LXX witnesses Vaticanus (“B”), Sinaiticus (“S”), and Alexandrinus (“A”).

While the three LXX witnesses cited in the above paragraph are significant, it is the reading in Hebrews 10:5 which helps establish further which reading is more likely to have been original. The reason for this is not because Hebrews 10:5 is preserved in P⁴⁶, but because the New Testament book of “Hebrews” is written *to Hebrews*. Whether at one time Jewish or now Judeo-Christian in their faith, this audience would surely have checked the accuracy of the quotations. This is even more likely the case if appeal was being made to well-known, often-sung Psalms and then applied to controversial figures such as Jesus. As Martin Karrer rightly observes after studying the quotations in the letter to the Hebrews:

There is good evidence that our author appreciates written *Vorlagen* [texts] where he has them. Above all the quotations from his favorite books, Psalms, the Pentateuch, and Jeremiah are not only frequent, but also very extensive. Jer 38 (MT 31):31-34 in Heb 8:8-12 provides the longest quotation in the Christian literature of the first century on the whole. Heb 3:7-11 (LXX Ps 94:7-11) stands out in length when compared to citations of Psalms in other writings of early Christianity. So the conclusion is almost certain that the author possessed and used scrolls of the Psalms and Jeremiah. [Martin Karrer, “The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Septuagint,” in *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures*, Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden, eds. (SBLSCS 53; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), page 342 (underlining added)].

Given that the author of Hebrews almost certainly “possessed and used scrolls of the Psalms” (Karrer), the reading in P⁴⁶ helps establish another likelihood or near certainty:

***** A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft).

When Hebrews was written in the first century CE the author had available to him a Greek text of Psalms which contained the reading “body.”

In light of the best available evidence, the reading “body” should be preferred over “ears” in the text of Psalm 39:7/40:6 based on the LXX of Origen’s Hexapla (*circa* late 2nd century CE), the 4th century CE LXX texts of Sinaiticus (Ⲛ) and Vaticanus (B), as well as the 5th century CE LXX text of Alexandrinus, the 2nd to 4th century CE text of PBodmer 24 (Rahlfs 2110), and the first-century text of Hebrews 10:5 according to the text of P⁴⁶ (2nd to 3rd centuries CE). “Body” is not supported by better textual witnesses overall and it has better circumstantial support, that is, the use of it by the author of *Hebrews*. This is because it is unlikely at this time, with acceptance or rejection from the synagogues a risk, those to whom the author wrote would have received a misquoted text from the Psalms as evidence in support of the author’s belief. However, Jerome’s use of “ears” along with the Masoretic Text reading should not be ignored.

In Hebrews 10:1-22 there is mostly literal language used for comparisons with Old Testament, physical offerings all the way up to the literal use of “body” [τὸ σῶμα, *to soma*] in verse 22. Hebrews 10:5 appears to refer to the actual, physical “body” which Christians believe Jah the Father prepared for an actual spirit being who came to the earth and who lived as a real human, in the likeness of “Adam.”—Genesis 1:26-31; John 1:1-14, 18; 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:45; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 1:1-6.

In a literal sense, if Hebrews 10:5 refers to a “body” of “flesh” which is also described in John 1:14, for example, then by this is meant a “body” or “flesh” without sin, given like a real offering but worth far more as the “the voluntary offering of the body [τοῦ σώματος, *tou somatos*] of Jesus Christ once, and for all time” (Hebrews 10:10). In a related sense, even the reading “ears” in Psalm 40:6 fits with the unique claims by Jesus as the Messiah according to New Testament texts such as John 7:15-17, 8:26-30, and 12:48-50. Either reading, then, can be used as support for the pre-Christian belief the Messiah (if spoken of in Psalm 40:6) would have his “ears” or “body” made ready for what he “heard” from Jaho(h)-ah.

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Revised on October 7, 2019: On this date I corrected “ears” to “body” on page 5, line 1 of the first full paragraph and revised some of the paragraph’s style. I also revised part of the third full paragraph on page 4 and I revised the final paragraph on page 5.