

**A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF “A
PLEASING AROMA**

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Introduction

In this paper, I will trace the biblical-theological theme of “aroma” across the protestant canon, using the major Biblical covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants) and the Prophets as sign-posts, or mile markers in the journey. This will serve to show the progress of this theme throughout the progress of redemptive history as the story of Scripture moves along. An “aroma/pleasing aroma” is a theme that runs through all of Scripture denoting acceptable offerings, gifts, worship, life orientation etc., to God. Most importantly, however, is how this theme intersects and interacts with the biblical-theological concept of atonement. It is a theme worth exploring in more detail.

Defining Terms

To understand the meaning of this biblical theme more robustly, some “word-study” work is necessary. The Hebrew word for aroma is the noun “רִיחַ” (reyach), which has several meanings depending upon the context. The most common definitions are: “scent, odor, and smell” (BDB). רִיחַ occurs 58 times in 55 verses in the Old Testament. It is often (nearly 40 times) accompanied by the noun נִיחֹחַ (nihoah) meaning: “a quieting, soothing, pleasing, appeasing, or tranquilizing” (BDB). The usage of this phrase in the Old Testament is most frequently translated “pleasing aroma”, and occurs predominantly within the context of the Israelite sacrificial system.

The two Greek counterparts to רִיחַ are the nouns εὐωδία (*euōdia*) meaning: “fragrance or pleasing aroma”, and ὀσμή (*osmē*) meaning: “odor, fragrance, or pleasing smell” (DBLG). εὐωδία appears three times in three verses, and ὀσμή appears six times in five verses. The usage of these words in the New Testament, though somewhat minimal, rely heavily on the concepts from their Hebrew companions.

Pleasing Aroma: Creation to the Abrahamic Covenant

From creation in Genesis one to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17) “pleasing aroma” only occurs one time, Genesis 8:21. The context is God’s covenant with Noah after the great flood. The Bible records that wickedness was so bad, that human beings only did evil all of the time, this grieved the Lord, and he determined to wipeout his creation for their wickedness, including the animal kingdom (6:5-7). Noah, however, found favor in the eyes of God (6:8). By God’s grace Noah was spared, with his family, from the flood, by obeying the command of the Lord to build a giant boat to

house himself, his family, and two of each kind of living creature (6:9-20). The “Ark” would be the vehicle in which they would be spared. It is then, after the flood waters have subsided and Noah steps foot on the ground again, that the inauguration of the covenant takes place (8:20-9:17).

In 8:15-19 the “will establish” from chapter 6:17-18 finds its fulfillment nearly 120 years later as we see that the Lord has indeed spared Noah and his family. God tells Noah to leave the ark with his family and to release the animals back into the world. Noah is also given the command to “be fruitful and multiply” (8:17, 1:22, 28, 9:1) harkening back to the mandate given at creation to the first humans in the garden. Noah is being portrayed as a second Adam (9:1) as he steps into a new world. In chapter 8:20-22 we are met with Noah’s response to experiencing the salvation of the Lord (he makes an altar to the Lord and offers sacrifices), and God’s rejoinder to Noah’s expression of gratitude (God is pleased). Noah exhibits the appropriate response to experiencing such a mighty act, the salvation of his family (a precursor to a greater salvation that is still yet to come). God’s determination not to renew the judgment is based on the accepted sacrifices put forth by Noah. Noah’s expression of gratitude, thankfulness, and homage to God, exhibited in the burnt offering, reveals the orientation of his heart. It is God-ward, and thus gains the Lord’s approval. After his approval, God blesses Noah and covenants with him (8:20-9:16). The “pleasing aroma” (רִיחַ נְחִיחִים) in verse twenty-one is the beginning of our theme that runs through all of Scripture denoting acceptable offerings, gifts, worship, etc. to God, and eventually and most importantly, atonement (Ex. 29:18, 25, 41; Lev. 1:9, 13, 17; See Ezek. 16:19; 20:41; 2 Cor. 2:15; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 4:18).

Summary

Up to this point in redemptive history “pleasing aroma” as a theme has only been introduced, and appears in just one text. However, the context in which it occurs has given us some insight into how fallen human beings are to interact with a holy God, how we are to respond to the grace God bestows upon us, and what acceptable sacrifice, worship, and reverence to the creator God looks like. At this point in the biblical narrative, the story has just begun; we are but a few pages in.

Pleasing Aroma: Abraham to the Mosaic Covenant

During this time in redemptive history רִיחַ appears five times in two passages (Gen. 27:27 and Exod.5:21). In both cases רִיחַ is absent נְחִיחִים. In the flood narrative and the Noahic Covenant, Noah’s sacrifice produced a “pleasing aroma” to God. In Genesis 27:27, it is the “smell” of a son, to

his father that is pleasing. וַיִּשְׂמַח appears four times in one verse. The context is Isaac bestowing his blessing on Jacob, how receives it through deliberate plot and deception over his older brother Esau. by tricking his old blind father into thinking he is his brother. Jacob wears his brother's clothes, and with the help of his mother, makes Isaac a delicious meal. A meal like Esau was going to after harvesting some wild game. Jacob slithers in to present this meal to his father, before Esau returns, and steals his brothers blessing. The verse reads, "So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac *smelled* the *smell* of his garments and blessed him and said, 'See, the *smell* of my son is as the *smell* of a field that the Lord has blessed!'" Though וַיִּשְׂמַח does not appear in this passage, the context seems to still indicate that what Jacob smelled "pleased" him. The fragrance that Esau's clothes emitted, conjured up strong emotions within Jacob. The smell of a son to his father does such things (Eph. 5:2). After smelling Jacob saturated in Esau's pleasing scent, Isaac gives Jacob his blessing.

The next occurrence of וַיִּשְׂמַח is in Exodus 5:21. The context is the Exodus narrative. In chapter three the angel of the Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush, tells Moses he has seen Israel's affliction in Egypt, and commissions Moses go deliver His words to Pharaoh. In chapter four Moses is given powerful signs (that he will later show the people of Israel and Egypt as a display of Yahweh's power), meets up with his brother Aaron, and returns to Egypt. The closing verses of chapter four read, "Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped" (v.30-31). In chapter five Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh, and say, "Let my people go..." (v.1) to which Pharaoh responds, "Who is Yahweh, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?" Pharaoh then increases the work load of the Israelites in response to Moses and Aaron and the people in return blame them, "and they said to them, 'The Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us *stink* in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.'" (v.21). The people of Israel have become a displeasing smell, a foul odor to the Egyptians. Just as there are wonderful aromas, there are also unpleasant ones that produce the opposite effect. It seems that to the Hebrew crew chiefs it appeared that Moses and Aaron, had supplied Pharaoh with more reason to continue, even further the violence, oppression, and genocidal tendencies he had toward the Israelites.

Summary

The most notable and significant change or addition to our theme during this time period in redemptive history is the imagery of a pleasing smell of a son to his father resulting in blessing (Isaac and Jacob), and the introduction of a displeasing odor resulting in an anger and punishment (Pharaoh and the Israelites). Just as Noah (the second Adam, Gen. 9:1 {Adam= the son of God, Lk.3:28}) presented an offering to God (the father) that produced a “pleasing aroma”, the smell of Jacob to his father Isaac was pleasing to him as well. Pleasing aromas thus far have been linked to approval and blessing (though here Jacob’s was by deception), and unpleasant odors (though used as a metaphor) denoting the opposite, anger and displeasure.

Pleasing Aroma: Moses to the Davidic Covenant

The bulk of the usage of the phrase “pleasing aroma” (רִיחַ נְיִיחָה) occurs in this time period of redemptive history (37 times with nearly half of those occurring in the book of Leviticus), exclusively within the Torah, and Jewish sacrificial system. The narrative of Exodus sets the stage for the book of Leviticus. Exodus recounts how God redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt in order to fulfill his covenant promises to Abraham, via the blood of the Passover lamb. It’s important to remember at this point that God had redeemed and rescued his people before the covenant at Sinai. Israel, as God’s chosen people, were always elected by grace, not performance or obedience. The idea that the covenant needed to be kept for salvation to be had, denies the theological and redemptive context of the Mosaic Covenant. God establishes his covenant with Moses and delivers the law at Mt. Sinai. Moses is commanded to build the tabernacle so God has a place to dwell with his people. At its completion, “...the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (40:34). Leviticus continues the narrative at this point with God instructing Moses with what he must teach the people about how they are to relate to a holy God who has just taken up residence in their midst.

God’s people are to be holy as he is holy (Lev. 11:44). Therefore, God teaches his people about his holiness (and in turn what will make them/keep them holy before him) by delivering an elaborate system of laws that display the contrast between what is acceptable and holy with what is sinful and impure. In Leviticus we learn that sin does two things to a person: it makes us dirty and in need of cleansing and it is something that leads to death, in which we need a substitute to die in our place (see especially Lev. 1-7; 11-17 paying particular attention to the sin and guilt offerings and atonement

language). It's important to remember that the sin, guilt, burnt, and peace offerings work in concert together. The sin and guilt offerings are always accompanied by the burnt offerings together accomplishing atonement (see Lev. 15:30), and only after these two have been executed is the peace offering to be given (Lev. 1-7). Leviticus 9:22 demonstrates their unity "Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings." They are linked together predominantly through the burning of the substitute that produces a "pleasing aroma" (רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ) to the Lord when done in such a fashion as prescribed by God in Leviticus.

Leviticus one sets the basic pattern for all sacrifices. In the sacrifices and offerings, one is consecrating something, offering something up to the Lord. This is done in recognition that on their own they are incapable of being holy before Yahweh without blood, the animal substitute who is to die on their behalf. God then accepts the substitute in place of the worshiper and the sacrifice provides atonement for the worshiper (cleansing, appeasing God's wrath, restoring right relationship etc.), imputing the consecrated life/death of the substitute to the worshiper, "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him... And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a *pleasing aroma* to the Lord" (Lev. 1:4 and 9b). When this is done according to Yahweh's stipulations, it will be accepted, he will be pleased. When it is not, God will, "...not *smell* your *pleasing aromas*" (Lev. 26:31), meaning he will not accept their sacrifices anymore, they will not be found pleasing to him. This verse is given in the context of punishment for disobedience to the covenant and the Law, and is a theme picked up in the Prophets in particular (Jer. 6:20; See Isa. 1:11–15; Amos 5:21–23). "Pleasing aroma" then in Leviticus 26:31 carries the meaning of acceptableness of all sacrifices as a whole.

In the book of Numbers "pleasing aroma" (רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ) occurs 18 times and is given within the same context as the book of Leviticus (laws about sacrifices to Yahweh). The only difference is that the Promised Land is in mind here. Chapter 15:1-26 demonstrates, the orientation of the commands reflecting behavior once they cross the threshold. Also noteworthy in this passage is the introduction of the ability for a foreigner to be able to offer acceptable sacrifices to Yahweh (v.14-15).

Summary

In this portion of Scripture, the common elements of our theme from all prior time periods of redemptive history still apply here. Predominantly "pleasing aroma" denotes God's acknowledgement

of an acceptable sacrifice or offering to him, and his refusal to smell, an act of judgement on the one offering. There are two important aspects surrounding this theme that are delivered during this time in redemptive history: the provision for the foreigner, and the connection with the profound biblical theological concept of substitutionary-atonement for sins.

Pleasing Aroma: The Prophets

The prophets speak into a bleak time in Israel's history. Israel was unable to fulfill its side of the Mosaic Covenant, and was sent into exile (2 Kings 17:23; 25:11, 21). The Prophets speak from different vantage points during this catastrophic time (some before the exiles by Assyria and Babylon, some during, and others after). Up until this point the highlight of our theme has been mostly positive, but the prophets show us both sides of the coin regarding our theme. "Pleasing aroma" (רִיחַ הַנְּיָחֹם) or just "aroma" (רִיחַ) appears explicitly six times in the latter prophets, but the concepts and ideas surrounding it and giving it meaning from previous eras in redemptive history are present here. For the prophets, acceptable sacrifices to God are black and white. They are either in keeping with God's revealed will and so are pleasing to him, or they are an abomination. Jeremiah seven is a good example of what it was like in the days of the prophets.

Israel's leaders are condemned for not keeping the Torah, neglecting the needy, practicing abominations against the Lord, offering sacrifice to Baal and other gods, then coming into His house and saying, "we are delivered" (v.10). They don't believe God would destroy his own house, however, Yahweh declares that his house has become a "den of robbers" (v.11). His house is full of predators, there is rampant social injustice, and covenant infidelity. Verse seventeen, shows us that it wasn't only the leaders who were practicing injustice. It was so bad, that in Jeremiah's time they were offering their children as sacrifices to foreign deities (v.30-32). And this is totally appalling to God that they could think this would be his will. In Jeremiah, God is upset because they are sinning against him and serving other gods (offering them a "pleasing aroma" instead: see also Ezek. 6:13; 16:19) to their own destruction, but he is also very angry with how Israel is treating their fellow countrymen and image bearers of Yahweh in general. We can forget that sometimes. God cares about how we treat each other, and that we take care of one another. When we fail to do so we fail to reflect his nature and character accurately to the world. Therefore, during this time period Israel's sacrifices were not accepted they were said to be rejected harshly by Yahweh (Jer. 6:20; See Isa. 1:11–15; Amos 5:21–23). He uses words like abomination, displeasure, not listening or seeing, and a trampling of his courts, in these

verses to describe His displeasure. It is obvious that there had been a break down, that the sacrificial system had become utterly perverted. So grotesque that the “pleasing aroma” in Ezekiel 16 and 20 is that of the smoke created by the burning of their own children as sacrifices to other gods. However, the story doesn’t end there, because hope is offered and light shines through even this darkest of days.

What begins to emerge during this time period in redemptive history, in regard to hope, is that of an individual who will be a representative of the many to accomplish what they accomplish for themselves. The volume is turned up on this theme particularly loud in Isaiah, especially in the suffering servant poems (sprinkled through the later chapters of Isaiah). In Isaiah 42:1-9 we read of the commission of the “Servant of the Lord”. The language used here connects this servant with the New David from chapter 11. In verse six Yahweh says he gives this servant as “a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.” This kingly servant will fulfill the covenants, and be a beacon for the nations. No longer will the nations look to a place or people (Jerusalem, Israel, or its institutions), for deliverance, but a person (Isa. 62:10). Chapter 49 says similar things about this servant, but adds that the servant will be a representative for his people to do what they cannot, but will be rejected by his own people in the process. This servant will fulfill the role of Israel to be a light, and the role of God to bring about a restored humanity. So now the servant is identified as being from among Israel (shoot of Jesse, ch.6 and 11), royal (Isa. 7-9,11), and divine (49:8-13) doing what only Yahweh can! In the final servant poem in Isaiah 53 we see that the servant suffers and dies, on behalf of the many, as guilt offering (Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-6). The servant dies for the sins of others on their behalf, but will live again. This is rich with atonement theology (Gen. 22; Lev. 16; Rom. 4:25, 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4, 3:13). Guilt offerings and atonement both involve and cannot be accomplished (symbolically speaking) without burning, which if presented appropriately produces a “pleasing aroma” (רִיחַ הַגִּיחֹתָם) to Yahweh. As the whole picture comes together and we gain more insights into who this Immanuel (see ch.7-8), Shoot of Jesse, suffering, divine, and servant king is; we realize only God himself can fill this bill. This servant is who Israel is to put her hope in.

The whole book of Isaiah and its meaning communicate that the Immanuel child is yet to come, and the further we read along, the further he gets pitched out into the future. The whole point of the stories is to say that Immanuel is yet to come. Others such as Daniel (“son of man” character in ch.7) and Ezekiel (the Davidic shepherd, ch.34) describe this individual further adding more nuances. This is all intimately connected to the “seed” from Genesis three and the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen.

12,15,17), as well as the Mosaic (Exod. 19-24), Davidic (2 Sam.7). Additionally, this individual would usher in New Covenant (Jer. 31 and Ezek. 36), when Israel shall be restored to the Yahweh her God,

I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his *fragrance* (רִיחַ) like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

Summary

The most significant change we see through the redemptive-historical lenses of the prophets is that of the sacrifices offered to Yahweh becoming abominations. Particularly in regard to our theme they became so perverted that they no longer produced a pleasing aroma, but the opposite (Hos. 6:6; Isa. 1:11; Jer. 6; Amos 5). Israel had forsaken and forgotten the significance and meaning behind the sacrifices, that is: obedience, loyalty, covenant fidelity, mercy, justice and righteousness (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Jer. 7:5-7). These things are what make the offerings to Yahweh a “pleasing aroma”. Israel shows herself to be incapable on her own to satisfy the requirements of the Lord, even given the Law with its prescriptions and stipulations. She needs a representative that will produce an everlasting, all encompassing, final sacrifice that will produce the sweetest fragrance to Yahweh, a scent that he will never grow tired of breathing in.

Pleasing Aroma: Jesus and the New Covenant

As we step into the world of the New Testament, we switch from the Hebrew language to Greek. The Greek counterpart to רִיחַ are the nouns εὐωδία (*euōdia*) meaning: “fragrance or pleasing aroma”, and ὀσμὴ (*osmē*) meaning: “odor, fragrance, or pleasing smell” (DBLG). It is most profoundly used in the New Testament to describe work of Christ as perfectly fulfilling the will of the father (John 17:4) even unto his death on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sins (Isa. 53; Phil. 2:8; 1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Jesus’ death was the means of his enthronement and exaltation as he is now seated at the right hand of the Father (Phil. 2:5-11; Hebrew 1:3, Acts 1:9-12), exalted above all creation (Col. 3:1; Eph. 1:20-21). Jesus as ultimate priest, not only does the sacrifice, He *is* the sacrifice, offering himself and his own blood for our sins (Heb. 9:11-15, 13:12, 1 Jn. 1:8) whereas all other priests bring the blood of another (Lev. 5:1-13), Jesus gives his own blood and his own flesh. He is the end of all sacrifice for sin

(Heb. 10:14-18). His death was substitutionary (Isa. 53:5-6; John 1:29; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21) as he suffered the penalty of sin that humanity should have undergone, and in taking man's place, died on the cross as a sacrifice (Heb. 7; 9; 10:10, 12; John 1:29; 36) for the sins of the world. He is the suffering servant and Immanuel from Isaiah. He is Daniel's son of Man. He is Ezekiel's shepherd. Jesus thus fulfilled the demands of God's righteousness and His desire to show mercy, through the redemption and reconciliation of an alienated and fallen humanity unto himself (Isa. 53:4-6; Rom. 3:23-25, 6:6, 8:3; Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 2:24). The shed blood of Christ fully expiated sin (cleansed believers from the effects of sin), and propitiated (satisfied, took away, appeased) God's just wrath (Ro. 1:18; 3:25, 5:10-11; 1 Jn. 2:2; Rev. 1:5; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Col. 1:20-22). Christ's death has ransomed his people from their slavery to sin (Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14, Col. 1:13-14) and delivered them from darkness into light, triumphing over Satan, demons, sin, and death (John 12:31; 1 Cor. 15:24; Col. 1:13, 2:15). In so doing he made possible a renewed relationship with him, a restoration of the purposed relationship between God and man (Isa. 43:21; Mic. 6:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Rom. 5:8-11). In the atonement, Jesus reveals the Father's glory, love, justice, and power (Jn. 12:20-28; Rom. 3:25-26, 11:33-36; 1 Jn. 3:16). Through his life and death, Jesus exemplifies what it means to be truly human; his life is the pattern for the life of every believer (Phil. 2:1-5; Matt. 16:24-25).

Therefore, when the New Testament speaks of a pleasing aroma, it is within this context of the ultimate sacrifice. Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a *fragrant* offering and sacrifice to God". Ideas of substitution, representation, and sacrifice are clearly present. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, smoke from an offering ascended (if done rightly) as a pleasing aroma to Yahweh denoting his acceptance of the offering. The image is employed here by Paul to express God's pleasure in what Christ's death accomplished. The one suffering and dying in the place of the many, as the ultimate sacrifice to restore a people to God and make them acceptable in His sight from the prophets, was fulfilled in Jesus the messiah. In the context of Ephesians four and five, the death of Christ was the ultimate act of obedience by which he fulfilled the Law, as summarized in the command to love. He was the ultimate and final consecrated substitute (Lev. 1-7) who loved purely and completely, expressing his perfection through self-sacrificial service and obedience to the will of the Father. We are then to be imitators of Christ's love in our individual spheres of influence; remembering what has been accomplished for us.

In Philippians 4:18 Paul writes, “I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a *fragrant* offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.” In this passage Paul is highlighting how we do relationships as being worshipful acts to God that produce a pleasing aroma. The Christian no longer offers burnt offerings to the Lord (Gen. 8; Lev. 1-7, 11-17), but that does not mean that we don’t make sacrifices to and for him. Everything received is a gift of God’s grace, and anything we do for another, we do as unto the Lord (Matt. 25:40).

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 Paul picks uses both εὐωδία and ὄσμῃ to describe how our being faithful witnesses of the gospel creates a pleasing aroma to God. The verses read,

“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the *fragrance* of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the *aroma* of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a *fragrance* from death to death, to the other a *fragrance* from life to life...”

The Phrase, “Triumphal procession” (θριαμβεύοντι) occurs only one other time in the New Testament, in Colossians 2:15. It reads, “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by *triumphing* over them in him.” In Colossians, Paul says God leads Satan in triumph, and in 2 Corinthians, Paul says that God leads him in triumph, both as prisoners of war. With regard to Paul it is really twofold. He is both captive (servant/slave to the gospel {see Rom. 1; Gal. 1; Tit. 1). and victor (Col. 1:21; 2 Tim. 4:8) seeing that he is in Christ, however, it seems to me that the idea stressed more emphatically here is that of the knowledge of God and the gospel being spread through the means of suffering. Paul sees his life and the events that make up his personal history as being marked by suffering for the gospel. His life embodies the message of the gospel: triumph through suffering, exaltation by humility, becoming first by taking the position of last, and serving rather than being served (the life of Jesus in the gospels). What is highlighted here, is sacrifice. The Christian life demands all that we have; it is costly. Those who except the gospel, and make the good news known are a sweet fragrance to God. Just as Jesus’ giving his life on the cross was a pleasing aroma to God, Christians are now the “aroma” of Christ to God and the world. Preaching Christ crucified, however, pushes people to make a choice. To those who will accept him the “fragrance” of the message is life, but to those who refuse it, it is the scent of death. The fragrance emitted by the emulation of the love of Christ by a Christian may produce a pleasing smell to the Lord, but not to all of humanity. Both the life and the message of the Christian are used by God to reveal the hearts of humanity. When we allow God to use us to make him known, it is a sweet smell to him.

Summary

The most profound change we see regarding our theme during this point in redemptive history is that the righteous requirement of God has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, who gave himself up for us as, “... a *fragrant* offering and sacrifice to God”. Through his life, death, and resurrection, those who repent and believe in him have Christ’s righteousness imputed to them. When Christians live out the great commission (Matt. 28:16-20) and the great commandment (Matt. 22:36-40) that is now their sacrifice that ascends to God as a pleasing aroma.

Biblical Theological Summary

In the Old Testament we learn that a pleasing aroma denotes the acceptability of sacrifices offered to Yahweh, and how a fragrance in general can evoke strong emotions, feelings, and actions of an individual. Most profoundly is its connection with the atonement for sins. God teaches his people about his holiness (and in turn what will make them/keep them holy before him) by delivering an elaborate system of laws that display the contrast between what is acceptable and holy with what is sinful and impure. In Leviticus we learn that sin does two things to a person: it makes us dirty and in need of cleansing and it is something that leads to death, in which we need a substitute to die in our place. The sin and guilt offerings are always accompanied by the burnt offerings together accomplishing atonement (see Lev. 15:30), and only after these two have been executed is the peace offering to be given (Lev. 1-7). They are linked together predominantly through the burning of the substitute that produces a “pleasing aroma” (רִיחַ תְּנִיחָה) to the Lord when done in such a fashion as prescribed by God in Leviticus. In the prophets, we learn how defiled and perverted this system had become, as Yahweh refused to smell their aromas, bringing judgment upon his people. It was a bleak time, but not without a future hope. A hope that was to be placed on a representative of the many who would accomplish what they could not do for themselves (Isa. 7-9, 11; 49:8-13). Pervasive throughout the prophets (major and minor) is the concept of a royal, divine, suffering, messianic, shepherd king that is to come. (Dan. 7; Hos. 1, 3; Amos 9; Obadiah; Mic. 5; Hag. 2; Zech. 3-4, 12-13; Isa. 11, 42, 53; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23). The prophets know it is going to take a figure who will represent them, that embodies all of these things and does on behalf of Israel what she cannot do for herself. The future hope is in this “New David”. The hope of the world rests on his shoulders.

In the New Testament we learn that the promised seed of Abraham, the Law of Moses, and the ultimate Passover lamb, the “New David”, the “Son of Man”, the “Servant of Yahweh”, and the “Good Shepherd” are fulfilled finally and ultimately in the person and work of Jesus Christ. By giving himself

up as a burnt offering he, became the ultimate, “fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:2), making, “...peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). We no longer have symbolic atonement that must be repeatedly carried out, but rather because of Christ we have actual tangible atonement that was “once for all” (Heb. 10:1-10). Because of what Jesus accomplished we can now offer acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus (Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5). This includes such things as worship, prayer, service, witnessing, giving of resources, devotion to God, etc. (Rom. 15:16-17; 2 Cor. 2:14-16; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:5; Phil. 2:17, 4:18; Rev. 5:8; 8:3). This theme should fuel our desire to offer acceptable sacrifices to God as we meditate and look back in wonder at the work done on the cross by our lord and savior Jesus Christ who gave up his life as a pleasing aroma to his Father, for us.

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