

## EXPOSITIONAL NOTES ON “A SWEET SAVOUR”

The phrase “sweet savour”<sup>1</sup> first occurs in Gen. 8:21 where the two words *nîychôach rêyach* appear together. This first occurrence in Gen. 8:21 of the two words used together provides, in the context, the key to its meaning.

### The meaning of the words

“sweet” – *nîychôach* – Strong # H5207 – From H5117; properly restful, that is, pleasant; *abstractly* delight. This word occurs 43 times in the O.T. In forty-two of those it is found in tandem with *rêyach* (only once does it stand alone – Lev. 26:31, where it is rendered “sweet odours”).

“savour” – *rêyach* – Strong #7381– From H7306; odor (as if blown). BDB – scent, fragrance, aroma, odour. There are 58 occurrences of this word in the O.T., 42 of those in tandem with *nîychôach*.

### No rest for the Creator

The Antediluvian apostasy had grieved the Creator “at his heart” (Gen. 6:6), because “every imagination of the thoughts of his (i.e. man’s) heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). These two verses see the first use of the word “heart” (*leb* – 598 occs.) in the O.T. The next two occurrences are in Gen. 8:21 (another obvious link). Yahweh had no rest and there was no pleasant savour for Him as He wrestled with almost universal wickedness (Gen. 6:3 – “my spirit shall not always strive with man”). This is the lot of the parents of a disobedient child – Prov. 17:21,25 – there is no rest and no sweetness.

A literal translation of these words would be “a fragrance of rest”, i.e. a pleasant period of rest from contention. When men walk in harmony with Yahweh, He has rest from frustration and anger – “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11), hence, “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). Yahweh preserved Noah and his family from the judgements that fell in the Flood.

### The reason why burnt offerings produced “a sweet savour”

Gen. 8:20 – “And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered **burnt offerings** on the altar.”

The next three occurrences of the phrase “a sweet savour” occur in Ex. 29:18,25,41 in relation to the consecration of the Aaronic priests and the institution of the continual burnt offering. All involve burnt offerings.

The next three occurrences are in Lev. 1:9,13,17 in relation to the offering of burnt offerings. Beyond that, the next three occurrences are in Lev. 2:2,9,12 in relation to the meal offering that had always to accompany a burnt offering. This requirement is important in understanding the full extent of what is really meant by the phrase “a sweet savour”.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptural quotations made in this document are from the King James Version unless otherwise stated. The UK English spelling of the KJV is also employed in this document.

Burnt offerings spoke of the desire to dedicate oneself to God. Accordingly, there was a precise order by which the offering was wholly consumed by fire, and some exclusions. The head of the offering was always first on the altar. Yahweh wanted the intellect (the mind = mental powers) of the offeror first; then the fat around the vital organs (the inner man = moral sentiments); followed finally by the inwards and legs (the active parts = physical actions or works) – Lev. 1:8-9. The skin fell to the attending priest (Lev. 7:8). It was not burnt on the altar, Yahweh thus indicating He was not interested in the outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7).

There are another 10 occurrences of the phrase “a sweet savour” in Leviticus, all identified with burnt offerings. Four are in relation to burning the fat of the offerings on the altar, and four to the burning of the meal offering. This has particular significance for what follows.

### **Numbers 15 – An appeal to the generation that would enter the Land**

Numbers 14 records the condemnation of all over the age of 20 to perish in the wilderness in the ensuing 38 years, except for Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14:22-24; 32:11-12). True to the character of Yahweh, He extends to the younger generation an invitation to endure the next 38 years with faith and patience and to enter the Land of Promise. Then He makes an appeal (“speak unto the children of Israel” – Num. 15:2), to do what their fathers did not do – i.e. give Him “a fragrance of rest.”

The phrase “a sweet savour” occurs six times in Numbers 15 – Vv.3,7,10,13,14,24. Verses 1-16 constitute the first section of the chapter. This is an appeal (“speak” V.2, not command as is often the case in the Law).

**V.2** – “When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you.” This is a promise that Yahweh would fulfil His promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:13-16). Some would finally enter the Land promised to Abraham (Heb. 4:6).

### **Voluntary offerings sought**

**V.3** – “And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD” – These are specified as burnt and peace offerings (vow and freewill). Both required a meal and a drink offering to be offered in conjunction with them.

### **A compulsory requirement for meal and drink offerings**

**V.4** – “Then shall he that offereth...” – If one chose to make offerings indicating a desire to dedicate oneself (burnt), or to make commitments (vow and freewill – peace), then they had to also make an attendant meal (flour) and drink (wine) offering. This was compulsory. Why?

### **A fundamental requirement of service**

When an offeror made a burnt or a peace offering under the Law, all that was required was to select an unblemished animal from herd or flock and take it to the priest at the place of sacrifice. He may be required to place his hand on the head of the offering to identify with it, but the priest did the rest. Not a great deal of effort on the offeror’s part was required. However, bringing along a meal and drink offering was quite a different story.

To produce fine flour takes many months of labour. There is ploughing (in cold wet weather); patient maintenance as the crop grows; harvesting in the heat of summer; threshing;

winnowing; grinding; sifting, and preparation of the meal offering from fine flour. Similarly, to produce wine takes many months, and a lot of work. What was Yahweh teaching here?

The obvious lesson was that good intentions and a desire to commit to Him were not enough of themselves. Yahweh wants ongoing dedication in the form of labours and ministration to others, works of faith and commitment to produce fruit. This is consistent with many Scriptural declarations and appeals:

- James 1:22 – “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”
- John 15:1-2 – “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”
- 1 Cor. 15:10 – “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”
- 1 Tim. 5:10 – Concerning widows – “Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.”
- 2 Pet. 3:11 – “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation (manner of life) and godliness.”
- Rev. 22:12 – “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

Numbers 15:13-16 reveal the breadth of this requirement. Not only were Israelites to keep this ordinance, but also “strangers” (i.e. Gentiles) who attached themselves to Israel as “sojourners” (a word used 3 times in this bracket of verses). That is exactly our spiritual position if we are in Christ. The principle applies equally to us.

The meal and drink offerings of old are matched by the bread and wine of the table of remembrance in our experience. In baptism, we identified with the sacrifice of Christ, the fulfillment of all the altar sacrifices. Our responsibility is to daily take up the cross sharing his sacrifice – Luke 9:23 – “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

Hence, the Apostle counselled the Corinthian believers – “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). In so doing, we indicate that we understand the implications of our commitment in baptism and intend to follow through with works of faith and labours of love after our Lord’s example.

### **The necessity of surrender**

None of the above was likely to happen without willing surrender to God’s requirements. Hence, the next section of Numbers 15 (Vv.17-21) introduces the heave offering that was to be made from the same fine flour as their meal offering. A heave offering is exactly what the word suggests. It was lifted up towards heaven with two hands to be surrendered to Yahweh (see Lam. 3:41 – “Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens”). Heave offerings

were sometimes associated with a wave offering which was waved in the hands of the priest. This was to draw God’s attention to the offering (so to speak). It spoke of consecration.

### **Laws about sins of ignorance and blasphemous sin**

Numbers 15:22-31 deal with the treatment and offerings to be made for sins of ignorance. These are based on, and find their source in the stipulations of verses 1 to 16.

Num. 15:24 – “Then it shall be, if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a **burnt offering**, for a **sweet savour** unto the LORD, with his **meal offering**, and his **drink offering**, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering.”

Note that the bullock offered is a “burnt offering.” One feature of a burnt offering is that it also “made atonement” (Lev. 1:4), as well as indicating the desire to dedicate oneself. These two aspects made it “a sweet savour” unto Yahweh. And, as required, both a meal and a drink offering accompanied it. Additionally, a kid of the goats as a sin offering pointed forward to Christ. Gentiles were to do precisely the same as Israelites (V.29), pointing to us.

However, where presumptuous sins were committed despising and reviling the word of God (V.30-31), there was no sacrifice.

Num. 15:30-31 – “But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.”

“reproacheth” – Strong #H1442 – *gâdaph* – A primitive root; to hack (with words), that is, revile.

“despised” – Strong #H959 - *bâzâh* - A primitive root; to disesteem.

This is equivalent to the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit – Matt. 12:31-32. It is a sin against the Spirit which both spoke the word of God through Moses to Israel, and verified in the production of manna six days a week, except for the Sabbath, the very day deliberately and rebelliously chosen by the man found gathering sticks.

### **The man found gathering sticks on the Sabbath**

Numbers 15:32-36 is introduced to illustrate the principles of the preceding laws.

It is fascinating that only two incidents are recorded of the entire 38 years of aimless wandering by Israel in the wilderness in the record between Num. 14 and 20. This incident, and the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (designed to find a captain to lead them back to Egypt). Set side by side, they appear to be somewhat incomparable. Surely the sin of gathering a few sticks on the Sabbath cannot compare with the massive rebellion of Num. 16? However, the sin of this lone man was just as egregious, for he was a microcosm of the entire generation who had just been condemned to perish in the wilderness. He represented all those who despised the promise of rest in the Land (Ps. 95:8-11). The Sabbath pointed to the Millennial rest of the Kingdom – the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and his seed. To despise and revile this is to reject God’s offer of salvation which is what the condemned generation had done. This one rebellious man became a representative of the older condemned generation, but also of the company of Korah who spurned the Land of God’s promise to Abraham and sought to return to Egypt.

## Fringes on the borders of garments

At first it may appear that the way Numbers 15 concludes may have little relationship to what has gone before, but this is not the case. Verses 37-41 confirm the primary theme of this chapter. It is an appeal to willingly surrender to the will of God, and to walk consistently within the bounds of His laws on the journey to the Promised Land.

Num. 15:38 – “**Speak** unto the children of Israel, and **bid** them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue.”

“Speak”, not “command” indicates that Yahweh is seeking willingness to submit and not the motivation of fear, duress or compulsion. This is emphasized by the word “bid” which suggests the same thing.

The focus is normally on the ribband of blue, but it is actually an accessory. It is the “fringe” that is important as careful reading reveals.

“fringe” – Strong #6734 - *tsîytsith* - fringe, tassel, lock. This word occurs only 4 times in the O.T. – three here and in Ezek. 8:3 (“lock”). It is in the feminine form in the Hebrew.

This word is cognate with *tsîyts* (Strong #6731) which first occurs in Ex. 28:36 of the “plate” of pure gold on the high priest’s ‘holy crown’ on which was inscribed “Holiness to Yahweh.” The same word occurs again of that crown in Ex. 39:30; Lev. 8:9 (there are 15 occs. in the O.T.). It is in the masculine form in the Hebrew.

It is not difficult to see the relationship to Christ (our High Priest) and ourselves (his ‘body’ and future bride wandering in the wilderness of life) walking towards the Land of Promise. Our walk must be governed by his mind (Phil. 2:5), and our feet kept within the bounds of his commandments (John 14:15,21; 15:10).

This is why the focus was on the fringe. The ribband of blue used to tie the golden plate to the high priest’s mitre spoke of the binding influence of heaven, but the fringe represented the commandments of Yahweh to His people (Num. 15:39-40). It is evident that the Lord had something similar on his garment during his ministry – Matt. 9:20; 14:26.

## The appeal to us to produce “a sweet savour”

Having made the appeal to the Ephesians to “put off the old man” and by a change of attitude “put on the new man,” a creation of God (Eph. 4:22-24), the Apostle alludes to the principles behind “a sweet savour” in Eph. 5:2. One commentator says, “Christ hath loved us, and given himself for an offering and a sacrifice to God for a Sweet-Smelling Savour;” where the words *οσμην ευωδιας* of the apostle are the very words used by the Septuagint in this place (Clarke).

We are called upon to imitate (V.1 – “followers” – *mimetes* – imitators) our God as was His son who willingly gave himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour and followed through to the death of the cross. He understood the meaning of always making a meal (bread) and drink (wine) offering with burnt and peace offerings brought together in the one great sacrifice that embraced all that was taught by the six altar offerings.

“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).