



Clanking Chains: The Sacred Incense: Onycha: The Crushed Operculum is a Type for the Cross; Its Smoke for Propitiation and Intercession; Isa 53:10-12

Isaiah 53:7 - He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet he opened not His mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.

Isaiah 53:10 - Yet, it pleased the Father to crush [דָּכָא] *dakka*: to crush and pulverize into dust] Him [Christ] putting Him to grief [**“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (Matthew 27:46)**]. When you shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Father shall prosper in His hand.

The verb “to crush” is the Piel infinitive of **דָּכָא *dakka***. The Piel stem denotes both intensity and repetition and in our context is used figuratively to dramatize the sufferings of our Lord while being identified with our sins and the repetitious judgment imposed upon Him for each of them.

The idea of His being crushed under this burden is brought out by the crushing of the mollusk’s shell which when burned produces a “sweet savor.”

The pleasant aroma that is considered “sweet” to Yehwah is a figurative way of teaching the doctrine of propitiation.

Isaiah 53:11-12 builds on the intensity of God’s substitutionary judgment of Messiah and then provides the dénouement of the cross: glorification, salvation, and intercession.

Isaiah 53:11 - As a result of the anguish of His [Messiah’s] soul [the burden brought by the judgment of the cross], He [**God the Father**] shall see it and be satisfied [propitiation]. By knowledge of Him [the gospel of salvation], the Righteous One [impeccability], My Servant will justify the many [those who express faith alone in Messiah alone] as He will bear their iniquities [substitutionary sacrificial spiritual death on the cross].

The animal sacrifices which took place on the Brass Altar contained types pointing toward the cross. The animal without spot or blemish was a type for our Lord’s impeccability which qualified Him—the Righteous One—to be our substitute. The fire under the altar that consumed the animal’s carcass was a type for the judgment of the cross. The physical death of the animal is a type for the spiritual death of Christ which propitiated the Father. As the sins of the Israelites were covered by the physical death of the animal, the sins of the world were judged by the spiritual death of Messiah.

The results of the Lord’s victory at Calvary are addressed next in:

Isaiah 53:12 - Therefore, I [**God the Father**] will distribute to Him [Christ] the spoils of victory [the resurrected saints of the dispensations of the Church and Israel]. He will divine the booty with the great ones [escrow blessings to Church Age sophisticates]. He poured out His soul to death [substitutionary & spiritual], and was numbered with the transgressors [identified with our sins on the cross]. Yet He Himself bore the sin of the many [unlimited atonement], and interceded for the transgressors [the office of Intercessor as our great High Priest].



From Isaiah's account we can grasp the image of our Lord's crushing judgment during the three hours of the cross. It is this trauma that is captured by the ordeal imposed on the two daily sacrifices. Both at morning and at evening, according to Exodus 29:41, an animal was offered on the Brass Altar and the smoke from these burnt offerings was considered a "sweet savor" to the Father.

Thus the rough, shelly operculum of the mollusk's shell, called onycha in our passage, has two concepts:

- (1) When crushed it is a type for the judgment of our sins in Christ as characterized by Isaiah 53:10 where it reads, "it pleased the Father to crush [דָּכָא] **dakka: to crush and pulverize into dust**] Him putting Him to grief."
- (2) When burned it is a type for the Intercessory prayers of Christ who as High Priest processes the prayers of the saints at the right hand of the Father.

The Father was propitiated by the crushing, and therefore He is responsive to the intercession.

Therefore, the onycha being crushed points to the cross and the sacrificial spiritual death of Messiah. The onycha being burned as part of the incense points to the intercessory office of the glorified Messiah.

- (3) **Galbanum:** Hebrew, חֶלְבֵּנָה **chelbenah**; Greek, χαλβάνη, **chalbanē**.

Galbanum is the brownish gum or resin of the plant, *Ferula galbaniflua*, a Mediterranean perennial. It has thick stalks, yellow flowers, and fern-like green foliage. The gum exudes from the lower part of the stem.

Galbanum, when collected, is in both irregular and symmetrical drops. It may be yellowy-green or lightish brown, and has a musky, pungent smell. The particular value of galbanum is the fact that it "holds" the scent of a mixed perfume, and allows for its "distribution" over a long period.

Chelbenah, the Hebrew word for galbanum, is an *hapax legomenon*, i.e., a word that appears only once in a manuscript. The Greek and English words are not translations but rather transliterations from the Hebrew, therefore, its meaning must be derived from its etymology.

Chelbenah, is a derivative of the root word, חֶלֶב **chelev**, and means "fat." This word is often used figuratively to refer to the best part of anything, such as "the fat of the land."

It has this same application regarding the burnt offering. The Hebrew word for "burnt" is more familiar to you than you might think: עֹלָה **olah** means burnt offering whose smoke goes up and ascends to God. Further details are provided by:

Harris, R. Laird (ed.). *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*. (Moody Press, 1980), 2: 667:



Alone among the Israelite sacrifices the *ola* is wholly burned, rather than partially burned. Thus, the whole animal is brought up to the altar and the whole is offered as a gift in homage to Yahweh. Whole offering would be a better rendering in English to convey the theology of the *ola*.

The Greek word that communicates the idea of *olah*, or “whole burnt offering” is, **ὅλοκαύτωμα**, *holokautōma*: *holos*, “whole,” plus the verbal adjective *kautos*, “to burn,” therefore, “to burn whole.” From this we get the English word *holocaust*, defined by *Webster’s Ninth* as “a sacrifice consumed by fire; the genocidal slaughter of European Jews by the Nazis during World War II.”

The daily offerings were burnt offerings which recognized the principle of substitutionary sacrifice. The entire animal was burned on the altar as a type for the judgment of our sins in Christ. The smoke was a “sweet savor” to God indicating propitiation.

The fat portions of the animal were considered to be “the best part.” Its significance is discussed by:

Thieme, R. B., Jr. *Levitical Offerings*. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1973), 57-58:

In the burnt offering, fire referred to judgment and “fat” to the outer purity and overt righteousness of the humanity of the Messiah. The fat also represented the best portion. Christ is the best—absolute perfection in His deity and humanity; He gave His best—Himself—as He was judged for us. The best was given for the worst, for sinful mankind. That is grace!

The fact that **חֶלְבֵנָה** *chelbenah*, the Hebrew word for galbanum, is a derivative of **חֶלֶב** *chelev*, the word for “fat,” gives us a clue then as to the typology meant by this extract’s inclusion in the sacred formula for incense.

We know that when galbanum is burned alone it has a pungent, even repulsive odor. Yet when blended with the other ingredients of the incense it softens the aroma helping to produce the exact fragrance that is well-pleasing to God.

For the sinner, the “best part” of our Lord’s sacrifice was that part of Him that no one else could give and that was His perfection. Because He was the perfect substitute, He was qualified to take on the bitter, pungent, acrid, and repulsive sins committed by the entire human race. His perfection was His “fat portion.” The gum resin called galbanum was the best that the plant, *Ferula galbaniflua*, had to give. When blended with the other ingredients it contributed to the sweet smelling aroma but was a reminder of the suffering our Lord had to endure to become our Savior.

Galbanum is said to have the power to drive away vermin and reptiles. The impact of the Lord’s perfect sacrifice is that the power of the sinful nature is broken for those who believe in Him and the power of *cosmos diabolicus* is broken for those who learn and apply the Word. That old serpent, Satan, is driven away.



When the gum resin of galbanum is added to the other ingredients of the incense, it enhances the scent of each. It gives endurance to the incense so that it maintains its fragrant aroma throughout the day.

Because the Lord gave His best part, His perfection, our sin problem is solved, and thus we now have the unique privilege as royal priests of directing our prayers to God the Father in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ, Who serves us as our High Priest and our Intercessor. And we can do it anytime of day.