

Cat.7 # 2 The "COVENANT WITH ALL NATIONS", called FAVOUR, BEAUTY, GRACE, TENDER LOVE

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The core paragraph, § 2.5.3, of the book "THE NATIONS CALLED, Theology of the Nations and their Redemption." volume 1 of a planned Trilogy "The City Redeemed." by Pieter Bos.

This study of Zech. 11 is foundational for our understanding of the meaning of the death of Christ not only for individuals but also for nations.

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The passage Zechariah 11:4-13 presents the imagery, drawn from a very familiar scene in the time of Zechariah. Wholesalers of sheep would buy flocks to bring them to the market place, more keen on making money than anything else. Four types of persons are presented in this prophesy: the LORD / the "I" figure, being the chief shepherd / the under-shepherds / the sheep. Quite unexpected in vs. 10 we are informed that the shepherd's staff signifies the (authority of) the "covenant with all nations"! With that clue reading back, we understand that the four persons then are: The Lord God / the "I" figure the Shepherd of the nations, the King of kings / the under-shepherds, the kings and governors / the nations. With this fore-knowledge let us read the whole passage:

" 4 This is what the LORD my God says: "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter. 5 Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Praise the LORD, I am rich!' Their own shepherds do not spare them. 6 For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land," declares the LORD. "I will hand everyone over to his neighbour and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands." 7 So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favour and the other Union, and I pastured the flock. 8 In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them 9 and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh." 10 Then I took my staff called Favour and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. 11 It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD. 12 I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So, they paid me thirty pieces of silver. 13 And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"--the handsome price at which they priced me! So, I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter." (Zech. 11:4-13).

Zechariah may not have understood what he saw or had to write: the parable of the greedy and cruel wholesalers and the landlord who was cheated and treated without respect by his under-shepherds. But the name of the staff is the clue. Our understanding is the following. Jesus is depicted as the chief-shepherd, who identifies as long as possible with the under-shepherds that he employs (vs 5,7). However, after allowing as long as possible the under-shepherds to slaughter, sell, and oppress the flock, and after rescuing the flocks (vs 4,6), he finds out that he is actually detested by the flock. He himself is also heartily sick of the under-shepherds (vs 8).

In reality we can easily picture what the parable is all about. We know of kings and president in our time who suppress their nation, who have discriminative legislation, a secret police force and a cruel prison system and/or huge Swiss bank accounts (vs 5). Also, we know how God in other cases, especially towards Israel after years of unashamed covenant breaking, literally hands his covenant people over in the hands of their enemies (vs 6). We appreciate reading that the chief shepherd "pastures particularly the oppressed of the flock" (vs 7a), pays particular attention to the Amazon Indians and Aborigines, the discriminated blacks, the Peruvian farmers, the pariah's and widows in India.

We understand that the chief shepherd is trying to re-establish law and order, by clearly showing who has the staff, which means: who is in control (vs7b). This leads to the exercise of that authority: kicking out of office "three shepherds": a corrupt president here, a tyrannical king there and a power drunk prime minister somewhere else (vs 8). Then comes the most dramatic passage, not just of this prophecy, but may be of the whole Bible: The longsuffering of the Chief Shepherd comes to an end and he says: "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh." Then I took my staff called Favour and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations (Vs 9-10). Do we hear the heart cry of the Shepherd of the Nations, at breaking this special covenant relationship to these lovely nations?

He had a covenant, a covenant commitment, to all nations and tongues and tribes and peoples and states, a commitment to protect them and prosper them, to rescue them out of the hand of oppressors, to shield them

against attack, to feed them and multiply them; he had a covenant called Favour, called Beauty, called Grace, called, because no translation is sufficient, Friendliness, called Tender Love; he had the most precious covenant relationship promised to all those nations, the coastlands and the faraway tribes, the ruling nations and the nomadic peoples... but their behaviour towards their Chief Shepherd was such that there was only one conclusion possible: the covenant is broken by them 70x7 times, so I will recognise that fact now, and also from my side break it... knowing that the dying will die, and that the perishing will perish and that those who are left will eat one another's flesh, that the Amazon Indians and the American Indians will perish, that the Jews will be pushed into the sea, that the Chechens will be exterminated, that the Moluccan Islands will be wiped empty, that the black communities will be discriminated against, that South Africa will suffer like Uganda, that Northern Ireland will explode again, that the Aborigines will lose hope, that the Serbs will slaughter the Albanians, that the Hutu's will genocide the Tutsi's, that... all the promised and intended and provided Favour, Beauty, Grace, Friendliness and Tender Love will dry up for ever.

This is effectively the end of the family of nations, international chaos, the end of hope... This may well be the most dramatic moment of the universe and of eternity. We will substantiate this later.

It is at that dramatic moment in history, the moment that world history seems to collapse, that the Chief Shepherd does the most unexpected thing (vs 12): "I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." The Chief Shepherd asks for his wages, as if he was an under-shepherd; he asks for an evaluation of his Chief Shepherd performance, to the ones he just kicked out of office; he makes himself vulnerable before those who already explicitly had expressed their disgust towards him. What an utter humility. Why in the world this extra humiliation?

The under-shepherds, hard-hearted as they are, proudly and cruelly express their contempt, and value their lord at thirty pieces of silver, the lowest price for a slave.

There will come a moment in history that the world rulers publicly and unashamed will declare their scorn of Jesus.

At that moment, the moment of utter humiliation and rejection, the LORD God Himself interferes, by saying to his Son: "You do not need to accept this; throw it away; throw it to the potter, "--the handsome price at which they priced not just you, but even Me!"

Is this just a strange end to the dramatic parable? Certainly, Zechariah did not understand at all what he had to write.

But 400 years later, Jesus was betrayed, and the traitor received the standard price for his despicable work: thirty pieces of silver. Judas understands then, in a restricted way of course, the magnitude of his betrayal, throws the money back, and it is invested in the potter's field (Matt 27:4-10). The evangelist Matthew is inspired to make the connection: the betrayal of Jesus was immediately connected to the betrayal of the Shepherd of the Nations. In other words: Jesus shed his blood NOT ONLY to establish a new covenant for the people of Israel (Jer. 31) and so to establish his Bride and so to be the Shepherd of our Souls, BUT ALSO to establish A NEW COVENANT WITH ALL NATIONS, AND SO TO BECOME THE SHEPHERD OF THE NATIONS.

It is only in this light that we can understand all the previous findings about nations! The old, original covenant with all nations called Favour was under threat right from the start, at the time of the tower of Babel. But God choose Abram for a redemptive purpose: to be a blessing to all nations!

When Jesus had risen, he commands his disciples to "make all nations disciple-nations to Him!" When the book-of-the-las-stage-of-history is opened, John is commanded to prophecy to the nations. Throughout history God is thinking of his beloved Virgin Daughter Babylon (Isa 47:1), of his Daughters the Philistines and Syria (Ezek.), of his daughter Edom (Jer., 3x), of his Daughter the Chaldeans (Isa), of his Virgin Daughter Egypt (Jer.), of his Daughters the Nations (Ezek.). God longs for his covenant partners all the time, reaches out to them, sends prophets, shows off through his special people of Israel how great a God he is, wants all the nations to see how generous, righteous and protecting he is.

How beautiful that new covenant with the nations will be. From the letter to the Hebrews we understand that the new covenant with Israel was better than the old (Hebr. 8:6). The same we can expect of the new covenant with the nations. How glorious it will be!