

Hugo Bouter

There will be one flock and one Shepherd

John 10:10-16; 11:50-52

The prophecy of Caiaphas

The words of the high priest that one man should die for the people indicate the secret of Christ's substitutionary death for Israel. But also the unity of the new people of God, the church of Christ. Christ would go into death first of all for the people of Israel, lest the whole nation be lost. The survival of the people of God was at stake, but the death of Christ as their Substitute and true High Priest guaranteed a new future. His death grants eternal life to all those who believe. They are the sheep of the one flock of the Good Shepherd. And as the Risen One, He is likewise the Great Shepherd of the sheep (John 10:16; Heb. 13:20).

On the Great Day of Atonement, various sacrifices were offered annually to perpetuate the relationship between God and His earthly people. Without sacrifices and without the mediation of the high priest, there was no future for Israel at all. The special thing about Christ's sacrificial death is that the true High Priest offered the sacrifice of His own life, a unique sacrifice that never needs to be repeated. This subject is discussed in detail in the letter to the Hebrews. Christ, as a merciful and faithful High Priest, accomplished the work of redemption for the sins of His people here on earth (Heb. 2:17). His blood is the basis of the new covenant, whereby God promised: "I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me

a people" (Heb. 8:10). He is the one true Sacrifice, whose blood was carried in the heavenly sanctuary and who also suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem. He did this, "that He might sanctify the people with His own blood" (Heb. 13:12).

The blood of Christ, the true High Priest and the true Sacrifice, set apart the believing part of the people of Israel and preserved them from judgment. In the book of Acts we see how this happened in practice through the repentance and conversion of a remnant of the Jews and through their baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:37-41). The new people of God, however, would not consist only of converted Jews. This had already been announced by the evangelist John in response to the prophecy quoted above. The Lord, through His death, would also gather together in one "the children of God who were scattered abroad". These are the "other sheep" that He had to bring in and that would hear His voice. So one flock would be formed under the leadership of the one, great Shepherd of the sheep.

A people for His name

In the book of Acts, the door of faith is also opened to believers from the nations. This happened first with the Samaritans and then with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). Then Cornelius, a Roman centurion came to believe, along with his kinsfolk and trusted friends (Acts 10). From this, the church in Jerusalem rightly drew the conclusion that "the Gentiles had also received the word of God" (Acts 11:1). The preaching resulted fairly quickly in the formation of the first assembly outside the Promised Land: the one in Antioch, which consisted largely of Christians from the nations (Acts 11:19-26). The converted Gentiles did not have to join the Jewish people through circumcision. There was now taken a people by God even from the Gentiles "for His name" (Acts 15:14). However, they had to keep the Noahite commandments, which are still universally valid.

Thus, the apostle Paul was able to continue his work among the uncircumcised and could carry the gospel further among them (cf. Gal. 2). The converted Gentiles were accepted by God as His people. "I have many people in this city," the Lord said to Paul when he was working in Corinth (Acts 18:10). God's promises of blessing to His ancient people even applied to them: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Lev. 26:12; this is quoted in 2 Cor. 6:16). God dwells and walks in the midst of His people, that is gathered around Him. They are called by grace. They are also "vessels of mercy," prepared by God for glory. He has called them, not only from

among the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. As Hosea had already prophesied, "Not-My-people" has been changed to "My people." Those who were not loved are now God's beloved. We have been brought near and we have become sons of the living God (Rom. 9:23ff; 15:8-13; 1 Pet. 2:10).

As a people for God's name, we are His "own special people," a "holy nation," that we might proclaim the virtues of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). We are His own special people, "zealous for good works" (Tit. 2:14). God's intentions for the old priestly people at Mount Sinai are being fulfilled in His new heavenly people, brought close to the Father's heart (Ex. 19:4-6).

Future perspective: they will be My people

There are also promises for the future. First, the covering that lies over the heart of natural Israel will be removed when it will return to the Lord (2 Cor. 3:15-16). In the end time, the prophecy of Hosea will be fulfilled for a second time. Israel's adoption will mean "life from the dead" (Rom. 11:15). The restored city of Jerusalem will be the center of all the nations here on earth, just as the heavenly Jerusalem – the glorified church – will be the throne of God and of the Lamb.

After the millennial reign of Christ, the eternal condition will begin. In the eternal condition, there is no longer any distinction between Israel and the other nations on earth. Mankind is then no longer divided into nations. For the tabernacle of God "is with men" (Rev. 21:3). In the present age there are still three groups: Jews, Greeks, and the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32). The church consists of all believers who have been called out of Judaism as well as paganism, to form together a new entity: one flock, one people, one house, one body. What a privilege!