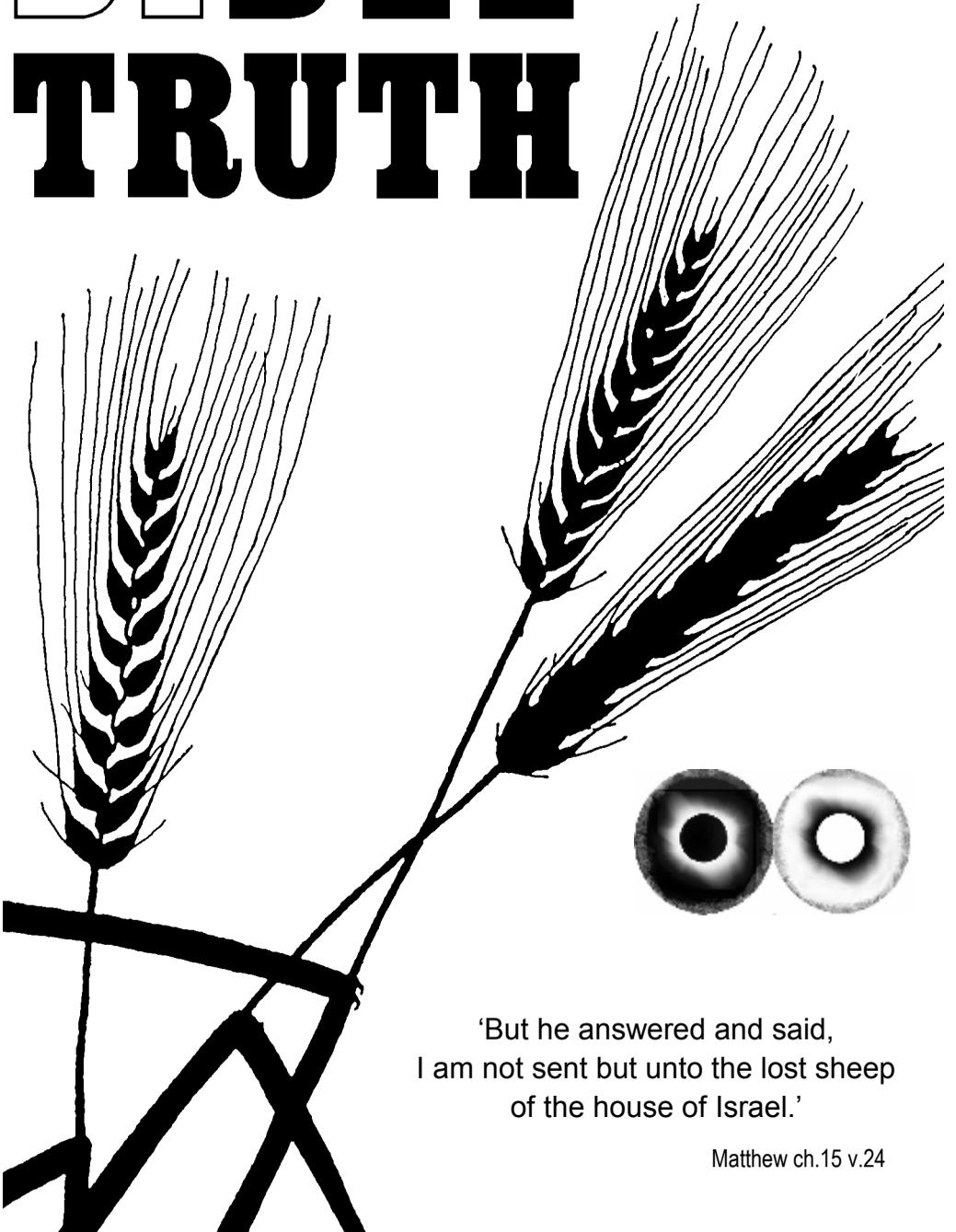


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'But he answered and said,
I am not sent but unto the lost sheep
of the house of Israel.'

Matthew ch.15 v.24

THE GLORY OF BENJAMIN

by Don Robson, Ontario, Canada

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Benjamin had a rather poor start in life. The history is briefly told in Genesis ch.35 vv 16-18.

‘And they journeyed from Beth-el; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin.’

Ben-oni means, Son-of-my-Anguish, but the name Benjamin means, Son-of-my-Right Hand. So, Benjamin began his life without knowing his mother, but he was dearly loved by his father, being the second son of his first love, Rachel.

Now Benjamin, a child of Jacob’s old age, was loved and favoured, and the first time Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy corn, Benjamin remained at home with his father. But Joseph (once the most favoured by his father Jacob), was jealously abandoned by his brothers. Joseph over the following years was appointed governor over Egypt and now unrecognised by his brethren - they thought him dead. Joseph insisted that Benjamin come on the next trip, or he would not deal with the brothers. Then, you recall how he planted the silver cup in Benjamin’s grain sack so that he had a reason to detain him. He was testing his brothers, and Judah begged to stand in for Benjamin, because he knew that returning to Jacob without Benjamin would bring about great sorrow for his father, and probably death. After Judah’s eloquent appeal, Joseph identified himself to his brothers and there was much hugging and weeping. After that incident, Joseph invited his father, with all his household, to come to Egypt to live in the land of Goshen, because the famine would continue for another five years.

So, in the years following, Benjamin’s posterity developed into one of the tribes of Israel. At the time of Jacob’s death, he blessed his children and Benjamin’s blessing is as follows,

‘Benjamin shall ravin [devour] as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil’.

Genesis ch.49 v.27

The next incident, regarding the tribe of Benjamin, is found in the book of Judges, chs 19, 20. & 21. I shall indicate some highlights, but you may read the whole story if you are interested. A Levite was travelling with his concubine and man servant when they decided to stay over in Gibeah, a town in Israel populated by the tribe of Benjamin. After a man had invited him to stay at his house for the night, the sons of Belial surrounded the house and demanded to see the Levite so that they might abuse him. This is reminiscent of Lot's visitors when he lived in Sodom! In his stead, his concubine was offered and abused all night long and died in the morning on the householder's threshold. The Levite therefore cut her body into twelve pieces and sent them to the twelve tribes.

The tribes were incensed and demanded that the sons of Belial be turned over to be put to death. The tribesmen of Benjamin would not agree, and civil war ensued. In the first two battles, Benjamin was successful; for the record, he fielded 26,700 men of battle. There is an interesting verse which relates that,

'Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss'.

Judges ch.20 v.16

The third encounter had a different outcome however, when the men of Israel employed the same tactic that was used to subdue the men of Ai; namely an ambush. When the men of Benjamin saw the smoke rising from Gibeah, they turned and fled but they were surrounded. A blood bath ensued and only 600 men escaped.

There were regrets that the tribe had been decimated, and two different strategies were followed to provide the men with wives. After that, the men of Benjamin returned to their cities and rebuilt them. So the tribe was purged of evil and prepared for the role that would be assigned to them by the Lord in the time of king Rehoboam. As he prepared to fight the ten tribes to re-establish his kingdom, Shemaiah, a man of God, gave him the following message,

'Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD, [some members of the other tribes lived in Judah where Jehovah was worshipped], Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. ...'.

1 Kings ch.12 vv 23-24

'Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen. ... And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there.'

1 Kings ch.11 vv 13 & 36

So civil war was averted, and Benjamin was confirmed as a part of Judah, so that there may be a light always before God's servant, David.

Next came Sennacherib from Assyria and captured all the fenced cities of Judah (see 2 Kings ch.18 v.13) and deported about 200,000 citizens to join the ten tribes deported about eight years earlier. He was defeated trying to take Jerusalem by the Angel of the Lord and that conquest was left to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The scriptures relate, the twelve tribes never returned to the Holy Land, but some of those deported to Babylon did return to rebuild the city and the temple, making it ready to receive the Messiah. The Benjamites, within that group, settled in Galilee enabling Jesus to select from them eleven Galileans to be disciples.

After the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, the Apostles felt that one should be appointed in his place, and they chose Matthias. To my knowledge, his name never appears again in the Bible and we do not know how he participated. But Jesus chose the twelfth apostle as Saul made his way on the road to Damascus. In his letter to the Romans, Paul professes to be a Benjamite.

'I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.'

Romans ch.11 v.1

So, there we have it; the light bearing tribe! twelve Benjamite apostles, men who had seen the risen Christ and carried His Gospel to all the twelve tribes scattered abroad, throughout Asia minor and into Europe. But there is more!

'And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

Luke ch. 22 vv 29 & 30

And I will suggest that that is the glory of Benjamin!
