Beth Sarim - Home of the Prophets?

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In anticipation of the soon to be resurrected biblical prophets and patriarchs, Joseph Rutherford, president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society commissioned the construction of a house in San Diego, California. This house was to become home for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Samuel and all the rest mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11. However, when the biblical party failed to appear, the embarrassing Beth-Sarim incident had to be repressed.

Beginning in 1920, Rutherford declared, "As we have heretofore stated, the great jubilee cycle is due to begin in 1925. At that time the earthly phase of the kingdom shall be recognized." How would it be recognized? What event would trigger the ushering in of the kingdom?

Rutherford explained, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the Apostle in Hebrews chapter eleven, to the condition of human perfection" (Millions Now Living Will Never Die, pp. 89-90).

This was an exciting prophecy. Jehovah's Witnesses around the world anticipated their cause being justified by the physical manifestation of these biblical patriarchs. When 1925 did come, but Abraham and the rest did not, some of Rutherford's followers left the fold. Others still believed that though they were late in their anticipated time of arrival, the Hebrews 11 crew would be back shortly. Even though it had not occurred by 1929, it was still a topic of much excited anticipation.

For this reason, Rutherford, realizing that when Abraham and company did finally show-up they were going to need a home, he gave instructions to build them a house. In his book, Salvation, Rutherford mentions this house and its purpose for being built.

"At San Diego, California, there is a small piece of land, on which, in the year 1929, there was built a house, which is called and known as Beth Sarim. The Hebrew words Beth Sarim mean `House of the Princes;' and the purpose of acquiring that property and building the house was that there might be some tangible proof that there are those on earth today who fully believe God and Christ Jesus and in His kingdom, and who believe that the faithful men of old will soon be resurrected by the Lord, be back on earth, and take charge of the visible affairs of earth" (p. 311).

With the house now built, there was nothing to do but wait. And wait they did, until 1942.

As Rutherford wrote the last book of his life, he again mentioned Beth-Sarim and Abraham, et.al. He wrote, "…hence those faithful men of old may be expected back from the dead any day now.

The Scriptures give good reason to believe that it shall be shortly before Armageddon breaks.”

"In this expectation the house at San Diego, California, which house has been much publicized with malicious intent by the religious enemy, was built, in 1930, and named `Beth-Sarim,' meaning `House of the Princes.' It is now held in trust for the occupancy of those princes on their return" (The New World, p. 104).

Notice that Rutherford said it was "held in trust." Actually, the deed has several very interesting points. It explains, "¼that (the) kingdom of God will have visible representatives on the earth who will have charge of the affairs of the nations under the supervision of the invisible ruler Christ; that among those who will thus be the faithful representatives and visible governors of the world will be David, Israel; and Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jepthae, and Joseph, formerly the ruler of Egypt, and Samuel the prophet and other faithful men who were named with approval in the Bible at Hebrews the eleventh chapter.

"The condition herein is that the said Watchtower Bible and Tract Society shall hold said title perpetually in trust for the use of any or all of the men above named as representatives of God's kingdom on earth and that such men shall have possession and use of said property hereinabove described as they may deem for the best interest for the work in which they are engaged."

However, there was a conditional clause placed in the deed. Until David, Abraham or someone else arrived, "the said Joseph F. Rutherford in such lease or other paper writing shall have the right and privilege of residing on said premises until the same be taken possession of by David or some of the other men herein named and this property and premises being dedicated to Jehovah and the use of his kingdom it shall be used as such for ever" (deed dated 24 December 1929).

The deed, which was signed by Rutherford, has three noteworthy items in it.

First, Beth-Sarim was built for the express purpose of housing the patriarchs.

Second, though Rutherford could live in the house, he could only do so until someone from Hebrews 11 arrived.

Third, the Beth-Sarim house was to remain in Jehovah's kingdom use perpetually. Thus, the Watchtower would certainly have this property forever.

Perhaps it is not necessary to explain, but no one from Hebrews 11 ever arrived to take charge of the Beth-Sarim property. As a result, Rutherford spent the last years of his life in this beautiful mansion while his followers suffered in poverty during the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Further, a few years after Rutherford's death, the Beth-Sarim house was sold. In 1948 this house was disposed of and the teaching concerning the "¼return of the ancient worthies was quietly

dropped in 1950" (Millions Now Living Will Never Die: A Study of Jehovah's Witnesses, Alan Rogerson, p. 48). Thus, Beth-Sarim's stint in kingdom service was a few years short of perpetual.

There is an epilogue to this story. In 1975 the Watchtower Society published a book which mentioned Beth-Sarim. However, the information contained in its pages only serves to complicate the Jehovah's Witnesses historical credibility. From its very inception, Beth-Sarim was said to have been built for Abraham and friends. This book seems to tell a completely different story.

"In time, a direct contribution was made for the purpose of constructing a house in San Diego for Brother Rutherford's use. It was not built at the expense of the Watchtower Society. Concerning this property, the 1939 book Salvation stated: `At San Diego, California, there is a small piece of land, on which, in the year 1929, there was built a house, which is called and known as Beth-Sarim'" (1975 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses, p. 194).

There are two problems with this Yearbook statement.

First, the Watchtower said that it was built for Brother Rutherford's use when in fact, according to Rutherford himself, it was built for the Hebrews 11 patriarchs!

Second, the writer of the Yearbook articles quotes - or more accurately, misquotes - Rutherford. Thus, making Rutherford say exactly the opposite of what he actually said. The author of the Yearbook quotes the Salvation book, written by Rutherford, which mentions Beth-Sarim. However, the Yearbook author stops just short of the truth. Earlier in this article, the full quote from the Salvation book is given. In comparing the two it will be extremely obvious how the Watchtower has lied.

Though Rutherford claimed to have prophetic wisdom, he made many false prophecies. One of these prophecies concerned his 1925 prediction concerning the return of Abraham and other biblical patriarchs. To compound these problems in recent years the Watchtower Society has, in its attempts to cover-up embarrassing events in their past, turned from false prophecies to outright lying. Perhaps worst of all, is the fact that in so doing, they are now lying to their own followers.

By David Henke