



STATEMENT DJ-566

BETH-SHAN AND THE RETURN OF THE "PRINCES": THE UNTOLD STORY

by Edmond C. Gruss and Leonard Chretien

Summary

Beth-Shan, named only once in Watch Tower publications, gives another significant insight into the history and teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Predictions made concerning the resurrection of the pre-Christian "princes" failed, and the teachings concerning them over the years are in obvious self-contradiction. Positions taken and doctrines promoted in the 1940s have either been rejected by the Witness leadership or have been proven wrong by history. Beth-Shan, supposedly held in trust awaiting the "princes" return, was sold. Contrary to the Watch Tower Society's claim, the testimony of history proves that this organization is not God's chosen channel of communication.

With the publication of *Jehovah's Witnesses — Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (1993), many Jehovah's Witnesses were introduced for the first time to Beth-Sarim ("House of Princes") in San Diego. It was identified as the winter residence of Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society president Joseph F. Rutherford.¹ As some reviewers have concluded, the coverage on the mansion in this official Jehovah's Witnesses' history is less than candid.² Beth-Sarim, built in 1929 and sold in 1948, is pictured and mentioned a number of times in older Watch Tower publications. An adjacent Society property, known as Beth-Shan ("House of Security"), however, is mentioned by name only once — in the *Consolation* of May 27, 1942 — as a second location for Rutherford's burial. The request for a permit for interment below Beth-Sarim was not approved (see figure 1).³ The article explains:

[The] new location for interment was in almost the center of the property known as Beth-Shan, which is roughly 75 acres of canyon and mesa land, adjoining Beth-Sarim but separated by a half-mile width of canyon. This property, also belonging to [the] WATCHTOWER, has one small and one large dwelling upon it and a few out-houses, and consists of some fruit trees and other cultivated patches in aggregate about seven acres, and about 65 acres of unreclaimed brush, either too steep, or rocky, or inaccessible for development.⁴

This request for interment on Beth-Shan was also denied.

Research reveals that Beth-Shan, in its own way, compares with Beth-Sarim in significance, but it has received little attention. Predictions concerning the return of the "princes," sometimes connected with these residences, and related teachings, are important in evaluating the Watch Tower's claim of being God's chosen channel of biblical understanding. The subjects of Beth-Shan and the "princes" are the focus of this study.

MORE PROPERTY FOR THE "PRINCES"

By citing Watch Tower publications and the deed to the property, it can be shown that Beth-Sarim was built and held in trust as a residence for the soon-to-be-resurrected "ancient worthies" or "princes."⁵ While not generally

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known, the Beth-Shan house and the property improvements had the same purpose. This is shown by the deed that transfers the property to the Society.

The Beth-Shan property was purchased on February 3, 1939 by William P. Heath, Jr., who was a Watch Tower Board of Directors member, and Rutherford's confidant and secretary.⁶ The deed dated May 20, 1940, by which this property was conveyed to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, reads in part,

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD IN TRUST FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES, to wit: Whereas the grantor herein W. P. Heath, Jr., was entrusted with the duty and obligation of improving the premises hereinbefore described, and a number of persons who are wholly devoted to the great THEOCRACY under Christ Jesus the King, furnished the money for the purpose of improving said premises, and WHEREAS the said W. P. Heath, Jr. acting in his own behalf and in behalf of other persons so interested in improving said premises, has *erected a house and other improvements* thereon to be used for the purpose hereinafter stated, and WHEREAS the grantor and the other parties interested, and who have contributed towards the improvement of said premises, *thoroughly believe and expect the return of faithful men to earth who are hereafter named, and who according to the Scriptures (Psalm 45:16 and Isaiah 32:1) shall be made the visible rulers on earth, and desire to prepare said property for them.* NOW THEREFORE *this trust is created and the said trustee shall hold the title to said property in trust for the use and benefit of the following named persons, whose names appear in the Bible at the Book of Hebrews,* chapter eleven, verses one to forty, to wit: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sara, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David, Samuel, Until such time as the aforementioned persons return and identify themselves to the legal representatives of the said WATCH TOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY and by the consent of said Society take possession and control of said premises, the President of the WATCH TOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY shall have the right and be duty bound to direct the management and use of said premises hereby conveyed and to determine who shall be in possession and have the active management thereof. (emphases added)⁷

Heath and his wife resided in the house mentioned in the deed.

Preparing the Beth-Shan Property

During the construction of the Beth-Shan house and other improvements in 1939, 20-year-old Fred Eason, while searching for Young's Cave (which was on the property),⁸ made his way into the area and discovered by accident what was taking place there. The Watch Tower project was being built on a remote mesa accessible only by a steep private driveway, which was gated and guarded. The approach to the driveway was by Mission Valley Road (renamed Montezuma), which was not paved at the time. Being rebuffed by several men on horseback, Eason went up to the top of the isolated mesa from another side (Fairmount Avenue) and observed some of the activity taking place that was obviously secretive and well-protected. In fact, a number of workmen were building the project. While he did not know it at the time, this would not be his last contact with the property.⁹

In April of 1945, Fred Eason met Bruster ("Bud") Gillies, who had moved to San Diego in 1944 to work for Ryan Aircraft. Gillies was looking for land, and he and his wife, Betty, bought the Beth-Shan property and adjacent acreage, which totaled 250 or more acres.¹⁰ Eason visited the large Watch Tower house shortly after the Gillies purchase in 1945. Eason and Gillies then became good friends and business partners. He recalls, "During this period I became well acquainted with Bud's fabulous home and its amenities. At this time nothing had been changed, everything was original."¹¹

In 1962 Eason bought about 30 acres of the property, which included the Watch Tower house and other improvements. Originally he anticipated tearing down the house in his subdividing and major grading of the land, but decided that the house was worth saving (figure 2). It had top quality furnishings and a lot of fine cabinetry. "It was not a tract house by any stretch of the imagination." It also had a basement that will be described later.¹²

"A Great Famine Is Certain...in the Very Near Future"

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The *Watchtower* of November 15, 1941, communicated a warning of impending disaster: "A great famine is certain to afflict the many nations of the earth in the very near future. The United States is also in line for much suffering....The United States is faced with world disaster now impending and about to fall...." At this time it was believed that the war in Europe would lead to Armageddon.¹³ Would this explain some of the features of the Beth-Shan property? For example, the house had a basement, which is not unusual. But what was unusual was that the access to the 10 x 20 foot underground room was through a secret trapdoor and stairway. Unless someone was shown where it was, he or she would never know it was there. It was also lined with shelves for the storage of food and other necessities.

Beth-Shan also had several out buildings: a caretaker's house, a horse barn and stable, a goat barn, and an equipment shed. There was a 4,000 gallon underground tank for diesel fuel, a diesel-powered electric generator, and a workshop. Water was provided by a well 425 feet deep, and it was connected to a 2,000 gallon pressure tank and a 10,000 gallon redwood storage tank. There were two fire hydrants and water was piped to the house and barns. "They had their own self-sufficiency. They could go for months without city utilities" (see figure 3). It is obvious that Beth-Shan was a little-known Witness "Refuge Farm."¹⁴ But there was one feature, discussed below, that surprised Eason more than anything else.

"FALSE REPORTS"? "We Trust in the Lord for Protection."

Under the heading "FALSE REPORTS," the June 1, 1940 *Watchtower* (see figure 4) declared untrue a rumor that the Society was enlarging Beth-Sarim "as a place of security."¹⁵ In fact, during Heath's testimony before the County Superior Court, April 1-8, 1942, Judge Arthur L. Mundo asked William P. Heath, Jr., "Suppose the Japs were to level that property during an air raid, what would happen then?" Heath answered, "We submit, your honor, that...we trust in the Lord for protection."¹⁶

This "false report" concerning Beth-Sarim conflicts with what was actually happening on the Beth-Shan part of the Watch Tower's "100-acre estate." And Heath's response, "We trust the Lord for protection," was disingenuous in light of what was constructed at Beth-Shan shortly after its purchase in February 1939. How so?

The Bomb Shelter

Betty Gillies and Fred Eason both speak of the *bomb shelter*, separate from the house, which the Witnesses had constructed on the Beth-Shan property. Fred Eason, who saw it shortly after the Watch Tower sale of the property in 1945, explains that about 250 feet from the house there was a "building that was called the 'goat barn' which was used to stable their goats. To enter the shelter one would go to the small bathroom area at the rear of the building, open the medicine cabinet, and pull a concealed lever inside. A section of the wall would swing open, revealing a stairway down into what can only be identified as a bomb shelter — a room about 30 feet x 15 feet, with a 10 foot high ceiling. The walls were lined with storage shelves. The cement ceiling of the room was *3 feet thick!*"¹⁷ Eason goes on to relate how someone could go into the bathroom and never know the shelter was there. When a house was built on the property in 1967, it was placed on the lot so as to keep the shelter intact, and it still exists today.

THE "PRINCES"

Repeatedly, Watch Tower publications and representatives stressed that, according to the Scriptures, the "princes" were due to return shortly. As already stated, two large residences and their grounds were prepared and held in trust for their use upon their return. The *Consolation* of May 27, 1942, went so far as to claim: "It therefore appears that the return of the princes is a fundamental teaching of the Scriptures. It is as certain as the truth of God's Word. Judge Rutherford gave much of his life in endeavoring to bring this vital matter to the people's attention."¹⁸ Predictions on the resurrection of the "ancient worthies" or "princes" were boldly and frequently made during the early 1940s, all but disappearing by the mid 1940s. As it turned out, this so-called "fundamental teaching of the Scriptures...certain as the truth of God's Word" was "adjusted" in 1950, and the return of the "princes" was safely postponed until *after* Armageddon.¹⁹ Watch Tower teachings connected with the resurrection of these Old Testament believers demonstrate what happens when human opinion replaces sound interpretation of Scripture.

Contradictory Teachings on the Princes

Beyond the multiple erroneous speculations on the predicted return of the "princes," a brief survey of contradictory pronouncements concerning them, which is typical of Watch Tower teachings on other subjects, is enlightening. These statements are all taken from Watch Tower publications. They can easily be reviewed in a question and answer format.

1. Will the "princes" be changed from human to spirit beings?

Yes: "The Scriptures show, they [the Ancient Worthies, 'princes'] will be changed from human to spirit beings at the end of the Millennium."²⁰

No: "Nor is there any Scriptural reason to conclude that Abraham and the other faithful men of old shall ever be changed from human to spirit creatures, as was once thought."²¹

2. Will the "princes" be resurrected as perfect, tested men?

No: "They will not have perfection of character when they come forth from the grave....The final test...will be imposed at the end of the Millennium...."²²

Yes: "It is reasonable to expect that these faithful men will be brought forth from the tombs as perfect men, possessing perfect bodies and perfect minds. They were tried and tested before they died."²³

3. Will the resurrection of the "princes" take place only after the church is glorified?

Yes: "Our opinion is that the ancient worthies will not be resurrected until every member of the Church is gone."²⁴

No: "From the Scriptures it appears to be absolutely certain that some of the remnant [church] will be on the earth when those faithful men appear...."²⁵

Yes: "Some of the anointed remnant have thought of surviving and living on to welcome back such resurrected faithful ones who died before Pentecost 33 C.E. Will the anointed be thus privileged? This would not be necessary."²⁶

4. Did God's favor return to Israel and did this indicate the soon return of the "princes"?

Yes: "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and the prophets will be brought forth and be made leaders of the people. We may expect their return soon, because the favor of God has begun to return to Israel."²⁷

No: "By the publication of Volume 2 of the book *Vindication* that year [1932], Jehovah's witnesses came to see that such a 'back to Palestine' movement was by the spirit of Jehovah's archfoe, Satan, who has deceived the entire inhabited earth."²⁸

5. Will the "princes" return to Jerusalem when resurrected?

Yes: "We should, therefore, expect shortly after 1925 to see the awakening of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob....These will form a nucleus of the new kingdom on earth. One of the first things necessary will be to put Jerusalem in condition to be the capital of the world."²⁹

No: "It is confidently expected that in God's due time some of the faithful men mentioned in Hebrews 11...will find an abode in that house [Beth-Sarim in San Diego] while carrying on the work the Lord will give them to do."³⁰

6. Will the "princes" be resurrected before Armageddon?

Yes: "Those faithful men of old may be expected any day now. The Scriptures give good reason to believe that it shall be shortly before Armageddon breaks."³¹

No: "For years, Jehovah's people thought that faithful men of old times, such as Abraham, Joseph, David, would be resurrected *before* the end of this wicked system of things."³² "This view was adjusted in 1950...those earthly forefathers of Jesus Christ would be resurrected after Armageddon."³³

7. Is Psalm 45:16 to be applied only to the pre-Christian "princes"?

Yes: "In Psalm 45:16 it is written: 'Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.'...This prophecy, therefore, shows that Christ the King will make those faithful men the princes or visible rulers in all the earth."³⁴

No: "Those to be made princes according to this text [Psalm 45:16] were long understood to be the faithful witnesses of ancient times before Christ who were to become the children of Christ the King by being resurrected from the dead."³⁵ "To our great delight, prospective princes are in our very midst."³⁶

8. Are the "princes" of Isaiah 32:1 the same as mentioned in Isaiah 45:16?

Yes: "The new earth will consist of righteous men who in times of old proved their integrity toward God and who the Lord shall 'make princes in all the earth,' which princes shall rule in righteousness under the direction of the righteous Lord (Ps. 45:16; Isa. 32:1)."³⁷

No: "Because Isaiah 32:1 mentions princes and connects them with the King of the new world it was thought that these princes were the same as mentioned in Psalm 45:16. ...However, from and after 1947 the columns of *The Watchtower* have not been quoting Isaiah 32:1 and applying it in that way."³⁸

9. In addition to "ancient worthies," are there also "modern worthies"?

No: "In its issue of January 15, 1920 (pages 21-28)...*The Watchtower* discussed the question of 'modern worthies' according to the information and facts then available and said *No!* to such a class."³⁹

Yes: "Since they manifest a similarity of faith, there is nothing that Scripturally argues against his taking as many of these 'other sheep' as he requires and making them 'princes in all the earth.'"⁴⁰

10. Will Beth-Sarim be held for the perpetual use of the Lord's people and the "princes"?

Yes: "When David and Joseph or some of the other ancient worthies return they will have it."⁴¹ "The title to that house is in the Society, and is held in trust for the perpetual use of God's faithful ones."⁴²

No: "The Society's board of directors had voted unanimously to dispose of Beth-Sarim."⁴³

WRONG AGAIN

Watch Tower publications and William P. Heath, Jr., who stated that he "was in charge of the estate," not only were wrong on their teachings concerning the "princes," but they were also wrong in many additional matters. Two examples should suffice.

1. Before the San Diego Planning Commission on February 28, 1942, Heath argued that the Beth-Shan "property cannot be sold because it is held in trust for the ancient witnesses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob et al....As a consequence, it is impossible that this property will ever be sold to anyone else...."⁴⁴ The deed conveying this property to its new owners, "B. Allison Gillies and Betty H. Gillies, husband and wife, as joint tenants" is dated March 29, 1945, and the grantors are William P. Heath, Jr., and his wife Bonnie.⁴⁵

2. "The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors contended that the [Beth-Shan] property could be conveyed and subdivided," whereas the Witnesses argued that "under the law and the deed it cannot. It therefore became necessary to show that the deed contained a reasonable and legal trust."⁴⁶ Heath, who participated in the creation of the trust, "testified as a witness and explained to the court that the trust was for real men and was altogether reasonable and certain of performance."⁴⁷ Heath himself initiated the demise of the trust and made the certainty of its performance impossible, when it was sold. The property was subdivided, and the prediction that was made in 1942 by realtor G. A. Forbes that Beth-Shan was "beautiful residential land with view sites" that "will undoubtedly be developed into high-class homes"⁴⁸ was realized.

What can be said concerning the Watch Tower record? Joseph F. Rutherford summarized it well: "Jehovah never makes any mistakes. Where the student relies upon man, he is certain to be led into difficulties."⁴⁹

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Note: Because of space limitations many details and related issues could not be included in this study. A full book on the subject, *Jehovah's Witnesses — Their Monuments to False Prophecy* (1997), is available from Witness Inc., P. O. Box 597, Clayton, CA 94517.

NOTES

¹*Jehovah's Witnesses — Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1993), 76.

²David A. Reed, "Proclaimers" *Answered Page by Page* (Stoughton, MA.: David A. Reed, 1994), 11; Randall Watters, "Review of the New Watchtower book: Jehovah's Witnesses Proclaiming [sic] God's Kingdom," *Free Minds Journal*, September/October 1993, 3.

³6-8.

⁴9.

⁵R. J. Martin, "The Truth about the San Diego House," *Golden Age*, 19 March 1930, 405-7; "San Diego Officials Line Up against New Earth's Princes," *Consolation*, 27 May 1942, 3.

⁶Book 873, 282-84, San Diego County Recorder.

⁷Book 1075, 42-43, San Diego County Recorder.

⁸In 1916 W. R. Young began to dig a series of tunnels in the canyon located near the N.E. corner of Montezuma Road and Fairmount Avenue.

⁹Two telephone interviews with Fred Eason on 3 December 1996 and letter dated 12 December 1996.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³"Demon Rule Ending (Part 5)," *Watchtower*, 15 November 1941, 343. "Those That Forget God," *Watchtower*, 1 July 1941, 202; "Europe's Need of the Theocracy," *Consolation*, 29 October 1941, 11; *Revelation — Its Great Climax at Hand!* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1988), 246.

¹⁴Eason's interviews and letter. A "Refuge Farm" was a place of seclusion where Jehovah's Witnesses would be protected from the soon-coming destruction of Armageddon. For full details see Duane Magnani, *The End of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Clayton, CA: Witness, 1997).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁶*Consolation*, 27 May 1942, 15.

¹⁷Eason's interviews and letter. Telephone interview with Betty Gillies on 9 December 1996.

¹⁸*Consolation*, 27 May 1942, 14.

¹⁹"Beginning the New World Society," *Watchtower*, 1 November 1950, 414-17.

²⁰"Questions and Answers," *Watch Tower*, 15 January 1925, 23.

²¹J. F. Rutherford, *Jehovah* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1934), 37.

²²*Watch Tower*, 15 January 1925, 23.

²³J. F. Rutherford, *Deliverance* (3.58 million ed.; Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1926), 324.

²⁴*Watch Tower*, 15 January 1925, 23.

²⁵J. F. Rutherford, *Salvation* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1939), 310.

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- ²⁶"Remaining Organized for Survival into the Millennium," *Watchtower*, 1 September 1989, 20.
- ²⁷J. F. Rutherford, *Life* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1929), 191.
- ²⁸"Modern History of Jehovah's Witnesses (Part 10)," *Watchtower*, 15 May 1955, 296.
- ²⁹W. E. Van Amburgh, *The Way to Paradise* (Brooklyn: International Bible Students Assoc., 1924), 224.
- ³⁰*1931 Year Book* (Brooklyn: International Bible Students Assoc., 1930), 36.
- ³¹*The New World* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1942), 104.
- ³²*1975 Yearbook* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1974), 213.
- ³³*Jehovah's Witnesses — Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 76.
- ³⁴J. F. Rutherford, *What You Need* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1932), 8.
- ³⁵"Princes Shall Rule in Justice," *Watchtower*, 1 December 1951, 717.
- ³⁶*Watchtower*, 1 September 1989, 22.
- ³⁷"Righteous World," *Watchtower*, 15 November 1938, 339.
- ³⁸*Watchtower*, 1 December 1951, 717.
- ³⁹"Beginning the New World Society," *Watchtower*, 1 November 1950, 416.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 417.
- ⁴¹Martin, 406.
- ⁴²*1931 Year Book* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1930), 36.
- ⁴³"All Nations Expansion' Assembly," *Watchtower*, 15 December 1947, 382.
- ⁴⁴San Diego Planning Commission Minutes, 28 February 1942, 240.
- ⁴⁵Book 1853, 260-61, San Diego County Recorder.
- ⁴⁶*Consolation*, 27 May 1942, 13.
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸Minutes, 242.
- ⁴⁹J. F. Rutherford, *Prophecy* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower, 1929), 67-68.