

ROOTS OF AZUZA REVIVAL FIRE

The greatest earthquake to shake America came in April, 1906 in San Francisco, California. The 800 mile long San Andreas fault had shifted, causing massive property damage and leaving 700 people dead. Another massive quake struck Los Angeles, California in 1906. It is called the Azusa Street Revival. Its aftershocks are still being felt more than 100 years later due to that mighty outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.

Jesus had told his disciples that it was better that he go away. He was right. The influence of Jesus would no longer be confined to his physical body. His Spirit would be unleashed through a new bodyhis ecclesia, his called out ones, otherwise known as the body of Christ. She was not only his bride who loved Jesus her bridegroom, but she was also an army, called to invade the spiritual darkness around the globe with the fiery light and power of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom. The Holy Spirit energized the church for a few centuries despite the efforts of Satan to hinder its presence, purity and power through persecution. It backfired. The church kept multiplying in the fires of opposition.

Satan tried a new tactic. Why not make Christianity popular! It started with Emperor Constantine in 312 A.D. He claimed to have a conversion to Christ after seeing a vision of the cross in the sky and these words over it; In This Sign Conquer. The next day he won a great military victory 'In the name of Christ'. In 313 he made an Edict of Toleration which favored Christians in every way. He even promoted the construction of many church buildings. On the surface, this seemed like a good thing, but it would begin to weaken the church. Instead of the church being a counter-culture movement, it became more about buildings and monuments.

Constantine seemed to have orthodox Christian beliefs, but that alone does not make a person a Christian. There must be a regeneration/ conversion of the heart which leads to Christlike character. After his alleged conversion, Constantine murdered his brother-in-law Licinius, sentenced his 11 year old nephew to death, killed his eldest son Crispus and brought about the death of his second wife. Despite all of this, he was canonized by the Greek church and celebrated as 'equal to the apostles'. He even spoke and presided over the Council of Nicea, which produced an orthodox Christian Creed. Perhaps he should have spent more time meditating on the Sermon on the Mount.

It got worse under Emperor Theodosius at the end of the 4th century. He made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire and made church membership compulsory. This was one of the worst tragedies in church history. The churches were now filled with counterfeit unregenerate Christians. The early church had previously conquered the Roman Empire with its divine love and power. Now Rome's military and political spirit had overtaken the church. The church was now diluted in its influence much like adding large amounts of water to a pitcher of milk makes it no longer real milk but just a cheap imitation. The church grows when it faces opposition, much like a weightlifter grows muscles as he increases the resistance against his muscles. The church had now entered a 1000 year period known as the Dark Ages. The Papal church became a proud formal hierarchy, preoccupied with position, power and prosperity.

(References: **Halley's Bible Handbook**....info about Constantine and Theodosius in church history section.

Christ of the Mount by E.Stanley Jones - info about Constantine's murders and Crispus etc.

There were scattered showers of the Holy Spirit in a few places among small groups of remnant believers in Jesus during that period. There is a book about them called 'The Pilgrim Church'. Whereas the early church was persecuted, now the predominate Papal church became the persecutors. It was not until the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation in the 1500s did God move in a dramatic way. Once again the Bible began to take priority over the traditions of men. The Reformation had begun after Luther locked himself into a monastery in Germany for a **period of prayer and intense study of the Bible**. Over the next few hundred years, God gradually began to restore the church to look more like the one in the book of Acts. Something big was about to happen at the beginning of the 20th century.

Charles Parham was a clubfooted Bible School student in Topeka, Kansas in 1898. One night as he hobbled around the campus, he looked up at the stars and marveled at God's creation. He had a deep faith and just knew that God through Jesus Christ could make his foot normal. Charles prayed with simple faith and felt a surge of warmth go through his feet. Jesus had healed him! That increased his faith for other things that Jesus had done 1900 years before. At age 16 he became the youngest ordained Methodist minister in the nation. The Holiness movement had begun among the Methodists who sought more of God's Spirit in sanctification. Parham joined them and decided to also reemphasize faith, miracles, the second coming and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. With lots of faith and little money, he started Bethel Healing Home for the poor who were ill or crippled. Many were healed through prayer.

In October of 1900 he started Bethel Bible College. The students were taught that God's Word was practical and dependable. They learned about Salvation, Sanctification and Healing. (sounds a little like the Supernatural School at Bethel Church in Redding, California, where I have been three different times for Healing Conferences) Parham asked the students to find the Bible evidence for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. He likely knew the answer, but wanted them to make the discovery themselves. They came back with their answer: 'speaking with tongues as the Spirit gives utterance'. (Note: for a more complete study of such things, go to our section on Life in the Spirit which covers a broad spectrum of Holy Spirit activity)

It was December 31, 1900 in Topeka at the Bible School. 40 students and 70 visitors **gathered in an upper room to pray and seek the Lord** as they awaited the beginning of the 20th century. Parham had been away on a speaking engagement and came into the room and gasped in surprise! The room that was lit only by coal oil lamps was now brightly lit as **tongues of fire danced above the heads of the students!** Agnes Ozman, age 30, had been on a spiritual odyssey and was hungry for God. She had already spoken a few words in another language but she asked Parham to lay hands on her to receive the fullness of the Spirit. He told her that he could not, as he had not yet received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit himself. She asked him to please do it anyway, 'In the Name of the Lord'. He then laid hands on her and asked God to baptize her in the Holy Spirit. God answered. Suddenly, **a halo of light formed around her head** and a stream of exotic words came forth. For the next 3 days she spoke nothing but Chinese! - Source: Fire On Azusa Street by A.C. Valdez /out of print.

(author's note: 2014 was a great revival of prayer by a few of us at small country church in NY State. One night while praying alone at home, I began to speak in several different languages and one sounded like Chinese and another an African dialect. I sensed it was intercession for those people.)

After Parham prayed for Agnes, he knelt down and prayed for himself: 'God, let the husbandmen first be partakers of the fruits'. Almost instantly he began speaking in a foreign language. He described his experience: 'Right then and there came a slight twist in my throat, a glory fell over me and I began to worship God in a Swedish tongue, which later changed to other languages'. - Source: The Azuza Street Revival by Roberts Liardon page 75

All of the students then prayed and soon most were speaking in tongues which they had never known or studied. Reporters came from all over the State. Agnes Ozman could not stop speaking in tongues, so they asked her to write the language she was speaking. Her pencil moved in an unusual manner. Out came Chinese characters, which was verified by experts. God was blessing hungry believers and smiling from heaven. It is was just like the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. However, newspaper reporters and organized religion had a different reaction (just like in the Book of Acts).

They ridiculed and persecuted Parham. He was no longer welcome to preach in churches. He had to preach in parks and on the streets. These on fire believers were treated like lepers. In March 1901, his youngest child Charles died. Later that year the Bible School was sold out from under him. He was broke and depressed. The average person would have quit, but Parham found strength by **keeping his heart tender towards God**. God was not finished with him yet.

Source: The Azuza Street Revival page 76

He moved with his family to Kansas City and began to preach about the Holy Spirit fullness. By late 1903 he had moved to Galena, Kansas and began large camp tent meetings. He saw growing numbers getting saved, healed and filled with the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal movement fire was spreading. Parham received an invitation to come hold 3 weeks of meetings in Houston, Texas and later in 1905 he started a Bible School there. At this time in the South there was segregation between blacks and whites, even at the Bible School. One spiritually hungry black man did not let that deter him. Parham saw his zeal for God and allowed him to sit outside the classroom and listen to him teach about the things of God's Spirit. The man's name, William Seymour. Seymour could only see out of one eye, but in the coming years, he would see more than most people ever will.

One day in January 1906, Seymour went to Parham to discuss an invitation he had to go to Los Angeles, Calif. to preach. Parham wanted him to stay, but Seymour finally convinced him otherwise. Parham gave Seymour the money for the train trip and laid hands on the kneeling Seymour to bless him on his way. Only God knew of the great fire that was about to be lit as Seymour headed to Los Angeles. He began a small group in his home which grew so large that they had to expand to the porch area. The floor collapsed so they were forced to move to a building. They found one formally used as a livery stable at 312 Azuza Street. In just a few months a blazing fire was burning at the 2400 square foot 2 story building in a poor part of downtown Los Angeles. The 40 by 60 foot facility with 8 foot ceilings had previously been used as a warehouse, lumber yard, tombstone shop, and lastly as a horse stable with rooms for rent upstairs. The floor was covered with sawdust. The seating area was made of wooden planks and the pulpit was two large wooden crates. Seymour was hungry for God, but also very humble and obedient to the Spirit. God led to put one of the crates over his head and pray until God released him to remove it. The crate would be on his head from 10 minutes to an hour. Once he removed it, God's Spirit would begin to move in powerful ways.

When the glory of God was there, dramatic miracles took place. One man had come with an artificial arm. He asked for prayer as he was in a lot of pain. He removed the arm and one could see into the empty cavity by his shoulder. God went to work with a creative miracle (the same God who spoke the whole universe into existence in Genesis 1) The bones of an arm began to grow out several inches and then the tendons, muscles, ligaments and skin were formed until the whole arm had grown back! Needless to say, there was a whole lot of shouting and praising going on after that! Just as in the book of Acts, there was action. People did not need to be told to witness for Jesus. They could not stop talking about what Jesus was doing. What is a witness? A **witness**: Someone who tells what they have **seen** and **heard**. (sidroth.org At the TV archive scroll down and search for Tommy Welchel. He knew some of the survivors from Azuza when he was a boy)

The western church has become soft, mostly chocolate soldiers who melt under just a little bit of criticism or correction. Too many leaders fear displeasing people than displeasing God. The church has become more a church of Facts rather than being a church like in the book of Acts. Too often we are satisfied with hearing the facts of the Bible without experiencing the dynamic presence of God that was so typical of the early church and revival movements in church history. The average Christian is not doing much witnessing because they have not heard or seen much. During the summer of 2014 I could not stop excitedly telling others of what God was doing in my life and others during our Tuesday night prayer gatherings.

Charles Parham had his faults and failures, but God used his ministry to contribute to over 2 million conversion to Christ. His lasting legacy was his influence over William Seymour who went on to spearhead the Azuza Revival. Parham planted the seeds, Seymour watered them and God gave the increase - 1 Corinthians 3:5-8. Each of us has a role and assigned task from the Lord. Right now I feel my task is a little similar to that of Frank Bartleman, a journalist and intercessor who played a role in spreading the testimonies about the Azuza happenings.

The Azuza Revival has brought over 600 million people into the kingdom of God since it began and the ripple effects continue as over 50,000 people a day are coming to the Lord around the world through the Holy Spirit fire. The word **Azuza** means **Blessed Miracle**. Revival occurs when God's sovereignty meets man's hunger, humility and availability. They all met together over 100 years ago at 312 Azuza Street.

- John Beckerink 2014

