

Pentecostal/Tongues Roots - The Amazing Facts

In a book *'A River Is Flowing'* the author Denis Smith gives a history of the *Assembly of God* (AOG) in Australia. The book traces its roots to the *'Azusa St. Revival'* of 1901 where *'Parham himself and a number of other ministers from various denominations were filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking with other tongues.'* (P.15) The book also mentions the influence of John Dowie but not his end, (he was accused of polygamy and misappropriation of funds. His enterprises eventually went broke). Another early leader of the Assembly of God, Van Eyke, is written of as having *'ministerial indiscretions'*, a rather convenient expression for the serious scandal surrounding this man. Mention is made too of Philip Duncan's address (titled *'God or Gimmicks?'*) to an AOG conference, in which he warned of the *Latter Rain* Movement, commercialising spiritual gifts, prayer cloths, oil on the hands, and casting demons out of Christians. Yet today the current Toronto and Pensacola 'revivals' have their roots and teaching in the Latter Rain movement which ended up in scandals and false prophecies in the 1950's.

What is Pentecostalism? Where did the movement begin?

Dictionary definitions describe the movement as holding to the distinctive teaching that all Christians should seek a post conversion experience called the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' with the receiving of one or more of the supernatural gifts. Some Pentecostals place their roots back to the holiness movement in the late 1800's but the above distinctive teaching is clearly traced to a Charles Parham, and the movement to the 'Azusa St. Revival' of 1906.

In the 1890's there were divisions within the traditional Methodist churches over differing views of sanctification. This perhaps was the background to which Pentecostalism drew when the Azusa St. event occurred. However, *it was Charles Parham who first linked tongues with the 'baptism of Holy Spirit' as a second work of sanctification.* This teaching was never heard of before in 1,900 years of orthodox Christianity. Parham stated tongues was *an* initial evidence but this soon became more *the* only evidence by Pentecostal groups. In the social climate of the day this experience found a release from the problems faced by individuals in difficult times. The importance of this cannot be underestimated and most historians admit the sociological climate to be a vital link in the acceptance of this new teaching. Surprisingly, Seymour the pastor of Azusa St., ultimately repudiated the teaching of 'tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Spirit'.

John Nicol's book *'Pentecostalism'* places Parham as the founder of Pentecostalism, as do most historians. Parham was a leader in the Mid-West of the *'Apostolic Faith'* movement. He organised the first Pentecostal meetings and published the first Pentecostal periodical titled *'The Apostolic Faith'*. He also issued the first minister credentials in the movement.

Some, such as John Sherrill in *'They Speak With Other Tongues'*, write that Pentecostalism had no human founder. The above book is in fact full of undocumented stories and woeful exegesis of Scripture. *The doctrine of 'Tongues' as the 'evidence' is traced and documented directly to Parham in the Topeka 'revival' in 1901.* Still some Pentecostals attempt to bypass Parham as the founder. The reasons for this become obvious further on in this article.

The key to examining the roots of Parham and Azusa St. is the understanding of the *type* of 'tongues'. The following truth should surprise most neo-Pentecostals who hold to *unknown* tongues!: *Parham always believed that the experience of 'tongues' that he encouraged at Topeka and subsequently was evident at Azusa St. was known languages as in Acts 2,10 and 19!* Parham believed the last days revival would be for 'missionary' work in that they would have supernatural gifts including *Zenoglossalia* - (*Zeno* - foreign; *glossa* - known language). He believed that the *known* language only had to be worked out as to what country it was from. However, what actually occurred and is documented in Topeka and Azusa St. was not *known* tongues (languages) but *unknown* tongues! The Pentecostal groups that came out of this did not, and today do not, practise known languages but rather *unknown* tongues! *Parham eventually rejected the unknown tongues at Azusa St. when he sadly realised it was a counterfeit.* This fact is documented clearly in his writings yet ignored by most neo-Pentecostal groups.

A further study of the life of Parham and his writings show clearly a telltale trail that led to the events at Azusa St. Much of what follows is documented in *'Fields White Unto Harvest'* by Goff, a Pentecostal writer and descendant of one who worked with Parham. This work is arguably the most accurate and best documented historical account in existence of the life of Parham and the Azusa St. events.

Parham's claims of numbers of adherents to his mission was often grossly exaggerated. Most experts agree his claimed numbers were double actual figures. He claimed Seymour (the leader of Azusa St.) had attended his school for three months when in fact Seymour attended only five weeks. In Parham's conversion accounts *'there flashed Heaven, a light about the brightness of the sun; like a stroke of lightning it penetrated, thrilling every tissue and fibre...'* (1)

At age seventeen Parham entered the Methodist ministry but failed to complete his training. For a time money became important and he enrolled as a medical student. He claimed to be 'backslidden' during this time and he became very ill. Subsequently he claimed to have been 'healed' although this alleged healing was *'not complete'*. However, he later claimed instant healing. (2) By 1893 his theology had already become controversial and he was considered rebellious within Methodist Episcopal circles. He came to believe that there was another 'Baptism' but not as holiness teachers were teaching in their understanding of sanctification. Parham also denied that Hell was eternal but that it was the *'destruction of the wicked'* (annihilation). He published several works on this view and was influenced by David Baker, a Quaker. Parham later married Bakers' daughter. (3)

When the church refused to ordain him, he eventually resigned his preachers license and went out on his own. He had a growing conviction that he was 'specially anointed'. He became seriously ill and again claimed healing, this time doing away with medicine and doctors, believing it was wrong to use such. He also taught there was no need of Life Insurance.(4)

Parham began to emphasise divine healing and opened a *'Bethel Healing Home'* in Topeka. In emphasising divine healing he found immediate success in his evangelistic campaigns and gave accounts of various healings such as legs being lengthened by one and a half inches. He began to attribute disease to tormenting demons. He also believed in the unscriptural view that in the absence of strong faith, healing may come gradually. In 1899 he suffered a nervous breakdown.

He was constantly appealing for funds and was influenced by John Dowie who derided doctors. Parham was also influenced by Benjamin Irwin who taught other 'baptisms' such as a baptism of 'fire' and 'dynamite', 'lyddite' and 'oxidite'. Irwin later fell in immorality in his own church.

When the healing home began to fail Parham disassociated himself from it for a time, and in 1900 began a Bible school with 34 students. Parham encouraged his students to seek the *same* experience as at Acts 2. In 1901 a student, Agnus Ozman, began to speak in what seemed to be the Chinese language and was unable to speak English for three days. The experience spread to the other students and Parham immediately claimed some of the tongues were 'Swedish'. They tried to automatically write the languages down but it became uncontrollable scribble, yet they still believed it to be 'foreign languages'. (5) Copies of these show examples similar to the following: *'Eurossa, Eurossause, rela sema calah mala kanah leulla saga nalan. laigle logle lazle logle. Ene mine mo, sah rah el me sah rah me.'* These sentences were 'translated' as meaning: *'Jesus is mighty to save', 'Jesus is ready to hear', and 'God is love'*. (6) Parham exaggerated the spontaneousness of it all, as his later accounts prove. Ozman in fact received the 'tongues' experience *before* the 'baptism' experience. Diary accounts show that she had already spoken in unknown tongues before the event at Topeka. (7)

Parham and those who had received the experience mistook their experience for Zenoglossalia (foreign languages)! This mistake was supported by a report and *rumour* that a Bohemian observer had understood the tongues. Parham often claimed validation for the languages from unnamed interpreters yet no documentation ever existed. All known interpreters were to deny any such claims and linguists who attended the meetings were adamant that the tongues were *unknown*. In 1914 a Charles Shumway conducted research on Parham's 'languages' but found none were known. (8) All linguists have since agreed that glossalia as practised by Pentecostals then and now is technically not a language of any sort.

A Samuel Riggins who was part of the initial group with Parham and who defected, wrote: *'I believe the whole of them are crazy...I never saw anything like it. They were racing about the room talking and gesticulating and using this strange and senseless language which they claim is the word from the most high'*. (9)

Soon after, Parham's son died, (16/03/1901). Then in July they were forced to evacuate the property when it was sold. This was despite Parham originally predicting the property would be the training centre to send out missionaries with these 'new languages'. In 1902 he moved to Kansas. His original Bible school is now the property of a Roman Catholic church.

Parham continued to claim several healings and drew increasing crowds. However, on Oct. 23, 1904, a nine year old girl, Nettie Smith, died after her father refused medical treatment due to belief in Parham's teaching. The locals became angry with Parham and his ministry suffered greatly.

Parham taught that tongues was the sealing of the Bride of Christ. Later Parham was to reject the seven day creation and believe that Adam and Eve were not a part of this creation and that others existed outside the garden. He taught that Adam and Eve had souls, but the others were flesh and blood. Parham received much of his teaching from extra-Biblical and personal revelations from God.

Seymour, on leaving Parham's Topeka Bible school was locked out of a holiness church after a sermon considered to be heresy. He began conducting meetings at 312 Azusa St. The 'revival' that followed was almost an exact replica of the modern 'Toronto Blessing'. Pastors went to Azusa St. to receive and take their experiences home to other churches. By 1906 Azusa St. had up to one thousand people in attendance. When Parham eventually came to Azusa St. at the request of Seymour he was shocked at what he saw. (10) Parham strongly denounced the various phenomena as hypnotic and not of the Holy Spirit and he was eventually asked to leave. To Parham the lack of evidence of 'zenoglossalia' (known languages) was an embarrassment. Parham renounced Azusa St. for their '*babbling*' and their co-ercing of such sounds. (11) Had Parham succeeded in gaining control of Azusa St. he could have changed the course of the whole Pentecostal movement, as he would have attempted to address his conviction of counterfeit unknown tongues! However, to this day in Pentecostal/Charismatic circles, the 'glossalia' as unknown tongues continues.

Parham was later charged with the act of sodomy with a J. Jourdan, who had a criminal record for theft. By July 1907 due to lack of evidence, no indictment was ever filed, although several affidavits from witnesses and a confession were reportedly filed. Parham, although initially admitting to the confession, later said it was gained by force. He claimed to be the '*victim of a nervous disaster*' and that he was a '*helpless degenerate physically*'. (12) Certainly Parham's sexual overtones in his sermons were well known. He sometimes asked all females in the audience to cross and then uncross their legs, saying, '*Now you've just opened the gates of Hell.*' (13)

After Pentecostalism was established the '*oneness Pentecostalism*' movement arose which denied the Trinity. Church leaders at the time were adamantly opposed to the Pentecostal movement. Some writers believe unknown tongues is perhaps the greatest spiritual counterfeit of the 20th century! The great G. Campbell Morgan described Pentecostalism and the Azusa St. phenomena as the '*last great vomit of Satan*'. Torrey declared this new Pentecostal movement was '*emphatically not of God and founded by a Sodomite*'. H.A. Ironside described it as '*disgusting delusions...pandemonium exhibitions worthy of a mad house or a collection of holy dervishes*', causing '*a heavy toll of lunacy and infidelity*'. (14) In 1919 the Nazarine Church dropped the word 'Pentecostal' from their name to separate themselves from unknown tongues and Parham.

Parham's followers came under fire when several deaths were reported from false healings and attempts to cast out demons. Parham's ministry then became less prominent although many continued to call him '*father*'. In 1908 he began raising money for an expedition to find the lost Ark of the Covenant but was supposedly 'mugged' in New York with all monies being 'lost'.

Parham was ill most of his life and died relatively young in 1929. All his minister sons also died young, some in their 30's. His predicted mass end-time revival had failed to materialise. Almost all his students believed that the second coming would occur before 1925, (the Jehovah Witnesses had also set this date).

Today most neo-Pentecostal groups see Parham as a champion and pioneer of Pentecostalism. Yet to his death Parham insisted that all authentic speech was 'zenoglossalia' (known languages) and that Pentecostals had a counterfeit experience. The Pentecostal 'glossalia' eventually became known as a 'heavenly language' since it was not known on planet earth and did not match the historic cases of *known* tongues in the New Testament, (Acts 2,10,19). Pentecostals simply altered the definition of tongue speaking to allow for *unknown tongues*, rather than Biblical *known* languages.

Terry Arnold

Recommended reading:

(1) '*Fields White Unto Harvest - Charles Parham & the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*' by James R. Goff Jr. (This is not an anti-Pentecostal book but an historical account)

(2) Parham '*Voice*', P.15

(3) Parham '*Life*', P.11; (4) Parham '*Life*', P.14; (5) Parham '*life*' P.32

(6) Parham '*life*', P.53,61 The Topeka Mail and '*Breeze*', 22/02/2001; other sources also.

(7) Topeka State Journal, 09/01/2001

(8) Apostolic Faith & Parham '*life*' ; other sources numerous.

(9) Shumway, P.168; (10) Topeka Daily Capital, 06/01/01

(11) The Other Side of Azusa St.' By Terry Arnold; You can read this article on our website;. At http://taministries.net/?page_id=131 '

(12)Parham '*Life*', P.169 ; (13) Zion Herald supplements, 26/07/2007

(14) '*Fields White Unto Harvest*' by Goff, P.228; To purchase this book, Please see our [Resource list](#) on our website at http://taministries.net/?page_id=109

Compiled from various sources including: '*Slaying In The Spirit*' by Mikhael; Encyclopedia of Pentecostal Ministries And Preachers; Way of Life; Inner City Christian Discernment Ministry.