

## The Other Side of Azusa St.

Many Pentecostals cite the famous *Azusa St. Revival* as the restoration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This event is widely recognised by many church groups, (such as the *Assembly Of God* churches), as the roots of the Pentecostal movement. It was here in Los Angeles, 1906, that many are said to have received the '*Baptism in the Holy Spirit*' with the evidence of this experience being the gift of unknown 'tongues'. At this time 'fundamentalist' Christians immediately opposed many things involved with these events, believing it to be too subjective and a false and extra source of revelation.

At Azusa St., W.J. Seymour, a student of Charles Parham, began a series of meetings that were to run for over three years. Seymour took with him a previous experience that occurred while at college under Parham. At this college on 1st. Jan. 1901, the students were encouraged to seek the same experience as at Pentecost. The first person to experience the 'Baptism' with the experience of unknown tongues was Agnus Ozman, a 30 year old unmarried 'holiness enthusiast' from Nebraska. She had a reputation of wandering around the country seeking mystical things and the sensational. At the college under Parham, Ozman spoke in an unknown language, (although some thought it was Chinese). The teaching up unto this time was that Acts 2 were languages *known* by the hearers, (as is clearly confirmed in Acts 2:6-11). However, the 'tongue' of Ozman was *unknown* to herself or the hearers. No one but Ozman spoke in tongues initially. The others received the experience two days later. The '*initial evidence*' doctrine, (that tongues is *the* initial evidence of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit), came later, and was initially only accepted by Ozman and later Parham. This doctrine was not taught before this, yet is now one of the main teachings and is included in the statement of faith' of many Pentecostal Churches, (eg. *Assembly of God*).\*

Seymour left the college and later was invited to speak at a Nazarine church in Los Angeles but was eventually locked out because of extremes in his holiness doctrine. He then held home meetings and seven people spoke in unknown 'tongues'. People outside were attracted by the noise. He then moved to 312 Azusa St. and commenced meetings that were to go constantly for three years. As time went on the visions and manifestations became more extreme. People had visions of Jesus with blood trickling down His sides. Both men and women preached. What is not widely reported is that when Charles Parham was asked by Seymour to come to assess the situation, he found much that resembled the Corinthian Church.

Parham found it difficult to distinguish between the true and the false use of the gifts. He found '*hypnotic influences, familiar spirit influences, spiritualistic influences, mesmeric influences and all kinds of spells and spasms, falling in trances, etc. All of these things are foreign to and unknown [to the Apostolic Faith movement] outside of Los Angeles, except in the places visited by the workers sent out from this city.*' (1) Parham later denounced the movement as a case of '*awful fits and spasms*' and of '*holy rollers and hypnotists*'. (2) This account is backed up by the newspaper reports of that time. The *Los Angeles Times*, (April 18th., 1906, P.1) wrote: '*Meetings are held in a tumbled down shack on Azusa St...and the devotees of the weird doctrines practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories, and work themselves into a state of wild excitement in their peculiar zeal. Coloured people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation. And the night is made hideous in the neighbourhood by the howlings of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplica-*

*tion. They claim to have the gift of tongues and to be able to comprehend the babble.*' Another source stated: '*Our missionaries have been stationed at Los Angeles [where the Azusa St. meetings were held] during the whole history of the tongues movement, and have watched it closely from the very first outbreak in Seymour's meetings; and truly, conditions have been such that it would be impossible to publish the things that have occurred there. The familiarity between sexes in the public meetings has been shocking, to say the least. Hell has reaped an awful harvest and infidelity has become more strongly rooted on the Pacific Coast than ever before.*' (3) A Samuel Riggins who defected from the Parham school, wrote in the '*Topeka Daily Capital*' newspaper: '*I believe the whole of them are crazy.*'

Other accounts of Azusa St. show that there was a decrease in the preaching. One writer, (writing *in favour* of the 'Toronto Blessing'), admits that, '*Where the Welsh revival went wrong, and Azusa St. too, was in its repudiation of sound and dynamic instruction from the Word of God.*' (4) Bartleman in his book, '*What Really Happened at Azusa St.*', (1925), rejoices that, '*No attempt was made to preach. A few messages were given by the Spirit.*' He also states that the intellect was regarded as thoroughly polluted by sin and that the mind was '*the last fortress of man to yield*'. Theologians were also regarded with great suspicion. It is interesting to note that these *same* features are present in the current 'Toronto Blessing' and 'Pensacola Outpouring'!

The Azusa St. Mission was in fact terminated by 1911.

The story could easily end here except that few people care to research the life of Parham. Earlier in life Parham had suffered a brain viral infection which some believe caused him to behave disorderly. He was in fact rejected ordination by the Methodist Church. He denied the doctrine of eternal punishment, opposed medical and medicine treatment, and believed serious diseases to be demonic. He was also influenced by a cult like centre called '*Shiloh*' run by a Frank Sandford near Durham, Maine, and believed that missionaries could be endowed with special powers for last days mission work. Parham was documented as having mental, emotional, psychological and sociological disorders. In 1907 he was arrested for homosexual acts with a 22 year old man in San Antonio, Texas. (5) The case was not prosecuted for lack of evidence and the scandal remained a mystery. From then unto his death in 1929, he was considered a fallen prophet by many church leaders of his time. However, he continued his religious endeavours up to the end, including raising funds for a trip to the Holy Land to search for the Ark of the Covenant. This trip never materialised as Parham claimed to have been 'mugged' in new York and had all his money stolen. (6)

The above information is almost unknown to most Pentecostals. Only one side of Azusa St. is usually presented in Pentecostal writings. No doubt there was a genuine seeking of God by the persons involved in the Azusa St. revival. However, when the roots, the fruit, and even the lives of the leaders involved are examined, there remains at least some serious questions as to the teachings and the experiences that continue and remain to this day. **Terry Arnold**

\* In private conversations with many AOG pastors and superintendents in Australia, I have found many do not (in private) agree with this doctrine. (For further reading on the Baptism with the Spirit and tongues, etc., see booklist for the book, '*Finding the Balance*' by the author). (1) '*The life of Charles Parham*' by Sarah Parham, P.168. (2) '*The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States*' by Vinson Synan, P.112 (3) '*Demons and Tongues*' P. 82. (4) '*Times of Refreshing*' by Dr. Mark Stibbe, P.XVIII (5) '*Fields White Unto Harvest*' by James Goff, PP.106,136. (6) *Ibid* pages 145,146.