



Pentecostal Founders
- Charles Parham

(February, 2026)

Author

Terry Arnold

Index

Ministry and Life	P.3
<i>Topeka</i>	P.3
<i>Azusa Street</i>	P.6
Doctrine	P.10
Conclusion	P.12



T. A. Ministries
A Ministry of Teaching

PO Box 432, Babinda,
4861, Qld, Australia
Website: www.taministries.net
E-mail: taministries2@gmail.com
Ph. 0411489472

The founding of the Pentecostal movement is attributed to Charles Parham (1873-1929). He was the first to plant Pentecostal churches and from his teaching came the *Assembly of God* affiliation, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world. He was the founder of the distinctive doctrine of Pentecostalism - '*The Baptism with the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues*'.

Ministry and Life

At age 15 Parham was a lay preacher in the Congregational church before switching to Methodism. By 1893 his theology was considered controversial within Methodist Episcopal circles. He published works denying Hell was eternal, believing it was a '*destruction of the wicked*' ('annihilation'). He was influenced by David Baker, a Quaker, and in 1895 left the Methodist church complaining about their 'hierarchy' and that their preaching was not by 'direct inspiration'.

In 1896 Parham married David Baker's daughter. The Quakers were known for their inward seeking of God's voice through private impressions. In the late 1800's they became involved in the new Methodist *Holiness Movement*. *It was this latter movement that was the seedbed for the new Pentecostal movement to be founded by Parham*. Upon leaving the Methodist church Parham established his own independent itinerant ministry, preaching the ideas of the Holiness Movement.

Topeka

In 1897 Parham and his wife fell ill. When they recovered he attributed the recovery to God healing them. He then refused all medical help and began preaching divine healing. His ministry was now 'by faith', taking no offerings. In 1898 he moved to Topeka, Kansas and established a *Bethel Healing Home* and began a new magazine titled *Apostolic Faith*.

In 1899 he suffered a breakdown and took a sabbatical. He began to investigate offshoot ministries from the Holiness Movement. Much time was spent at 'Shiloh', a ministry run by a Frank Sandford in Maine. From writings it is clear Parham was influenced

greatly by Sandford. ‘*While in Shiloh Parham heard glossalalia for the first time when several students came down out of a ‘prayer tower’ speaking in tongues after hours of intercessory prayer.*’ (1) Sandford, like many Holiness enthusiasts, longed for something *more* and was influenced by the new emphasis on Sanctification states and ‘higher life’ principles taught in Holiness camps. In 1899 Sandford was operating a ‘*Bethesda*’ healing home. Medicines and doctors were banned. There were claims of a resurrection from the dead. Sandford became a ‘chosen prophet’. He imposed fastings upon his people and if a healing did not occur, it was a ‘lack of faith’. However, in Shiloh a 14 year old boy, Leander Bartlett, died of Diphtheria during a Small Pox epidemic. Sandford was charged with manslaughter as Leander did not receive medical care. After years of trials Sandford was found not guilty.

Sandford believed the *Shiloh* of the Old Testament was his Shiloh at Durham, Maine, and that it would restore the kingdom of Israel. He claimed personal revelations from God and in 1901 claimed to hear a voice say ‘*Elijah is here*’. He had a revelation to hire a boat and sail with others around the world and ‘claim’ countries for Christ. On route to Portland, a port in the North Atlantic, several people died and some had Scurvy. He was charged with the deaths of 6 people and sentenced to 10 years in prison in Atlanta, Georgia. He was released 7 years later. He predicted he would die violently in the streets of Jerusalem as one of the two prophets in Revelation. In 1948 he died in an armchair surrounded by a few friends.

Influenced by Sandford, in 1901, *6 months after Parham had stayed at Shiloh*, Parham was teaching 34 students at his Bethel Bible school at Topeka, where events would occur that would shape the entire Pentecostal movement to come. At the end of December 1900 Parham urged his students to study Acts 2 for evidences to ‘receive the Holy Spirit’, (this being something more than the Holy Spirit given at salvation). After days of prayer and worship they were gathered together on December 31st and again late the next evening January 1st. A student, Agnus Ozeman, requested prayer to ‘receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit’. She began to speak in what they believed was ‘tongues’.

At first some assumed Ozeman spoke in a Chinese language. Others left the group and wrote scathing reports of the manifestations of the students. A Samuel Riggins wrote: *'I believe the whole of them are crazy...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'*. (2)

Parham exaggerated the spontaneousness of the Topeka event as his later accounts show. Diary accounts show Ozeman had already spoken in unknown tongues before her 'baptism' at Topeka. She was a 30 year old unmarried 'holiness enthusiast' known for going from one holiness camp to another seeking the mystical and sensational.

An important aspect of Parham's character and evident in many modern day Pentecostal accounts is the *amount of exaggeration*. Parham's claims of numbers of students at his mission was exaggerated, often double that later shown by historical accounts. He claimed William Seymour (leader of the later Azusa St. church) attended his school for 3 months when in fact Seymour attended 5 weeks. In Parham's own conversion accounts, there is also arguably a level of exaggeration: *'There flashed Heaven, a light about the brightness of the sun; like a stroke of lightning it penetrated, thrilling every tissue and fibre...'* (3)

However, *Parham did not believe in 'tongues' being anything but a real known human foreign language*. Parham had a linguist ascertain what language Ozeman spoke. It was quickly found to be ecstatic, not a real language. Yet Parham believed a last days revival would be for 'missionary' work with miraculous signs and wonders including 'Zenoglossalia' ('Zeno' - foreign / 'glossa' - known language). However, what occurred at Topeka was *unknown* ecstatic utterances.

Later Agnus Ozeman admitted that after the Topeka experience she entered a 'spiritual darkness' because she *'rested on the tongues and other demonstrations instead of resting alone in God'* and that she had been wrong to believe that all people would 'speak in tongues' when 'baptized with the Holy Spirit'. (4)

Soon after, Parham's son died (16/03/1901). Then in July they were forced to leave the property when it was sold. This was despite

Parham originally predicting the property would be the training centre to send out missionaries with the 'new languages'. (The land later became the property of the Roman Catholic church).

Parham now took his ministry to Chicago as a 'healing ministry' which drew increasing crowds. At one time the Joplin, Missouri, *News Herald* reported claims that 1,000 had been healed and 800 had been converted. Parham continued to spread his 'apostolic faith' and in 1904 the first church built specifically as a Pentecostal assembly was constructed in Keelville, Kansas. Other 'Apostolic Faith Assemblies' were established in Texas, Kansas and Oklahoma.

Several deaths were reported from false healings and during deliverance of demons. On Oct. 23, 1904, a 9 year old girl, Nettie Smith, died after her father refused medical treatment due to belief in Parham's teaching.

Azusa Street

Parham had a black student, William Seymour, who on leaving the Topeka Bible school, was locked out of a Los Angeles Nazarene Holiness church after preaching a sermon considered to be 'heresy'. He then held house meetings and spread his experience of 'tongues' from Topeka. Seymour received a license as a minister of Parham's *Apostolic Faith* movement under Parham's authority. In 1906 he began meetings at 312 Azusa Street. Both men and women preached (Pentecostals were the first to have women pastors and preachers). As time went on visions and manifestations became more extreme. Pastors went to Azusa St. to receive and take their experiences home to other churches.

Pentecostals often cite the Azusa Street 'revival' as the restoration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Many in Azusa St. Los Angeles claimed to receive the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' with the 'evidence' being the gift of speaking in 'tongues'.

Despite Parham realising the tongues at Topeka were not real languages, at Azusa St. some tried to write the 'languages' down. Copies of these show examples similar to the following transcribed from Topeka: '*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: 'Jesus is mighty to save', 'Jesus is ready to hear', 'God is love'. (5)

Azusa St. had up to 1,000 people in attendance at some services. Seymour was concerned about the '*spiritualistic manifestations, hypnotic forces, fleshly contortions*' and lack of order in the assembly. (6) It was reported that '*spiritualists and mediums from the numerous occult societies of Los Angeles began to attend and to contribute their seances and trances to the services*'. (7) He requested Parham come and assess the situation. When Parham came to Azusa St. the lack of evidence of 'zenoglossalia' (known foreign languages) was an embarrassment. He renounced Azusa St. for their '*babbling*' and their coercing of such sounds. (8) 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*'. (9) Parham was eventually asked to leave. He later denounced the movement as a case of '*awful fits and spasms*', (10) of '*holy rollers and hypnotists*', (11) '*a freak imitation of Pentecost. Horrible awful shame!*'. (12)

Parham's accounts are backed by newspaper reports. The *Los Angeles Times* (April 18th.1906) wrote: '*Meetings are held in a tumbled down shack on Azusa St...The devotees of the weird doctrines practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of wild excitement... 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 supplication. They claim to have the gift of tongues and to be able to comprehend the babble.*'

Accounts by visitors reported visions of Jesus and manifestations including complete loss of control, contortions, kissing between sexes and people fainting. A Christian eye-witness account stated: '*Men and women...were talking excitedly 'in tongues'. A man (holding on to a post) seemed to be in possession of...the jerks.*

He was muttering and mumbling...but would also shriek. About 60 or 70 of the 300 present were 'possessed of the spirit'...There was barking like dogs, hooting like owls...' (13) One eye witness who wrote in favour of the proceedings stated: '...A divine 'weight of glory' was upon us, we could only lie on our faces. For a long time we could hardly remain seated..the 'jerks' and 'treeing the devil' [crawling and barking up a tree like a dog] were in evidence in the [Azusa] mission'. (14)

Respected theologians also gave reports. Dr. Campbell Morgan, a Bible college president, pastor and commentator, described the Azusa St. activities as *'the last vomit of Satan'*. R.A. Torrey, evangelist, pastor and author, declared the new movement as *'emphatically not of God, and founded by a Sodomite'* (Parham was eventually charged with Sodomy). (15) H. A. Ironside concluded the holiness and Pentecostal movements were *'disgusting... delusions... insanities... pandemoniums where exhibitions worthy of a madhouse or a collection of howling dervishes [causing] a heavy toll of lunacy and infidelity'*. (16) Clarence Larkin, a commentator known for avoiding criticism of others wrote: *'The conduct of those possessed, in which they fall to the ground and writhe in contortions, causing disarrangement's of the clothing and disgraceful scenes, is more a characteristic of demon possession, than a work of the Holy Spirit...We see that we are living in 'perilous times' and that all about us are 'seducing spirits' and that they will become more active as the dispensation draws to its close, and that we must exert the greatest care lest we be led astray'*. (17) W.B.Godbey, a Methodist evangelist, said the Azusa St. movement was the result of *'Satan's preachers, jugglers, necromancers, enchanter, magicians, and all sorts of mendicants'*. (18)

Many modern day accounts of the Azusa St. 'revival' have been re-written, exaggerated and ignore the accounts of fleshly or demonic manifestations, as well as the infidelity, immorality and disorder. The church was shut down in 1911. But by then other cities had planted churches modelled after Azusa St. Pentecostal groups such as the *Assemblies of God*, the *Church of God*, the *Pentecostal Holiness church*, the *Foursquare Gospel*, the *United Pentecostal*

church, all trace their roots to the 1906 Azusa St. 'Revival' in Los Angeles, pastored by William Seymour.

From Azusa St. came the first Pentecostal missionaries to be scattered throughout the world. William Durham (1873-1912) after visiting Azusa St., went to Chicago, then took the experience to Italy. In 1907 he explained how he received his 'Pentecost': *'He worked my whole body, one section at a time, first my arms, then my limbs, then my body, then my head, then my face, then my chin, and finally at 1 am Saturday March 2, after being under the power for 3 hours, he finished the work on my vocal organs, and spoke through me in unknown tongues...'* (19) Durham would recite 'tongue messages' and have them interpreted. Many were published in Pentecostal papers - one sample read: *'I, the spirit of liberty and of truth, will speak if you will let me have my way.'* (20)

In 1909 Durham's wife died after childbirth. In 1910 his 6 month old daughter died of pneumonia. He married again in 1912 and that year died at age 39, leaving behind a pregnant 29 year old wife and 2 young children from his first marriage.

From Italy the Azusa experience spread to Brazil. Friends of Durham took the experience to their country, and a few Persian men took it back to their homeland.

Francisco Olazabal, with other Mexicans took the experience to Latin America. Olazabal was later known for his exaggerated and false claims of mass healings.

Pentecostalism in India was founded after embracing teachings from the Holiness Movement, then from 'missionaries' from Azusa St. Amanda Smith and Minnie Adams preached a second 'Baptism with the Spirit'. Tongues came in 1906 after people heard reports about 'tongues' and 'interpretations' in Topeka and Azusa St.

The 'oneness' movement (about 20% of Pentecostal groups in America who deny the orthodox view of the Trinity) - also has its roots from the Azusa St. Church.

Many missionaries went from Azusa St. expecting miraculous languages to be understood. A 1909 report described the results: *'Missionary S. C. Todd, of the Bible Missionary Society has made*

investigations in three mission fields...People who have gone from this country to Japan, China and to India expecting to preach to the natives of those countries in their own tongue; but in no single instance have been able to do so. They have needed an interpreter... Some of them are in absolute destitution and are dependent on their Christian brethren there for the necessities of life...In some cases they are in danger of losing all faith...' (21).

Meanwhile, in 1907 Parham was arrested for homosexual acts with a 22 year old man in San Antonio, Texas. (22) The case was not prosecuted for lack of enough evidence. From then unto his death he was considered a fallen prophet by many. In addition there were allegations of financial irregularity in his ministry. He continued his ministry to the end, raising funds for a trip to the Holy Land to search for the Ark of the Covenant. This trip was cancelled when Parham claimed to have been 'mugged' in New York and had his money 'stolen'. (23) In early January 1929, Parham collapsed while presenting pictures of a Holy Land visit. He was brought home to Baxter Springs, Kansas, where he died (Jan.29, 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).

Doctrine

The late 1800's Holiness Movement made a steady progression away from the orthodox teaching on sanctification - ie. a *continuous* life long inward work of the Spirit *conforming one to the image of Christ* (Rom:8:29) and *continuously filling* the believer upon salvation (Eph.5:18). In seeking holiness and to eradicate sin many sought a *crisis point* of sanctification. This led to *second states or stages* of sanctification, and for some a heretical 'entire sanctification' (sinless perfection). Much of this *laid the foundation for the distinctive Pentecostal doctrine* to come.

Parham was the first to publicly introduce the new doctrine of a 'Baptism with the Spirit' as *subsequent* to receiving the Holy Spirit at salvation, with the '*evidence*' that speaking in tongues was the

proof of this baptism. This doctrine was resisted at first by Holiness leaders (the Nazarine church deleted the name 'Pentecostal' from their titles to separate themselves from the new movement).

Seymour, the leader of the Azusa St. movement, '*ultimately repudiated the initial evidence teaching (speaking in tongues)*'. (24) Yet today this is the very foundational doctrine of Pentecostal churches!

The unknown tongues of today are linked to Azusa St. and clearly contradict the three biblical cases of speaking in tongues being *known foreign languages* (Acts chapters 2,10,19 - the Greek words for 'tongues' being '*glosse*' and '*dialektos*', showing a *known language*).

Parham had other extra biblical doctrines. He did not believe in the eternity of Hell, favouring the view of many cults - annihilationism. He stated: '*Orthodoxy would cast this entire company into an eternal burning hell; but our God is a God of love and justice, and the flames will reach those only who are utterly reprobate*'. (25)

Parham rejected a 6 day creation, believing that Adam and Eve were not part of creation, that others existed outside of the garden. He believed God took 2 days to create humans, non whites on the 6th day, whites on the 8th day. Parham was a sympathizer for the Ku Klux Klan and even preached for them. (25) He taught a 'British Israelism' (ie. Anglo Saxons as descendants of 10 lost tribes of Israel). (26) He believed his 'baptism with the Spirit and fire' with tongues '*sealed the bride of Christ for the marriage supper of the lamb*'. The bride of Christ was also the 144,000 taken in the Rapture to escape the Tribulation.

Parham's morality was also severely questioned. He was well known for the sexual overtones in his sermons, (he sometimes asked all females to cross and then uncross their legs, saying, '*now you've just opened the gates of hell*'). (27)

Conclusion

Parham believed, as many Pentecostals do, that the Holy Spirit communicated with him personally and directly apart from the scriptures. From early years he left orthodoxy and sound doctrine. The influence of the Holiness views, Frank Sandford and other fringe or cultic leaders, influenced Parham to seek more than what was in the 'faith once delivered' (Jude 3). His 'healing ministry' overshadowed any true Gospel ministry that may have been there in the beginning.

Most Pentecostals would be shocked if they did an unbiased investigation into the forerunners and 'heroes' of the Pentecostal movement. Names such as Charles A.A. Allen, Maria Woodworth-Etter, Aimee-Semple Mcpherson, Kathryn Kulman, William Branham and Smith Wigglesworth - many of them were documented as false teachers, false prophets who lived immoral lives with tragic deaths. (28)

Pentecostals today would claim miraculous gifts and the ability to discern error. But as one ex-pentecostal writes: *'...The same rule which they measure these things, they fail to apply to the roots of Pentecostalism itself, indeed to it's founder [and] to Azusa St...The Bible says 'by their fruits you shall know them'...Mr Parham was a faith healer. He taught he could only effect a cure in the person if they had faith to be healed...that God condemned the use of medicine...He believed in British Israelism...He supported the Klu Klux Klan until he died...This was the man who was the founder of Pentecostalism...supposedly chosen by God to bring new revelation, new gifts, a new move of God into the world...He was arrested for Sodomy...There was an enormous amount of scandal and controversy...and is it not the same with the false prophets today? The same measuring rod that is used to measure false prophets today...Pentecostals who stand against these do not apply that same standard of testing to the roots of Pentecostalism'.* (29)

Recommended Reading: *'Fields White Unto Harvest - Charles Parham & the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism'* by James Goff (an unbiased, documented historical account by a descendant of a co-worker of Parham). A follow up book is: *'Portraits of a Generation'* by Goff & Wacker.

See also our website taministries.net for more on the founders of Pentecostalism.

- (1) *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the 20th Century* Synan, P.90, 2nd Ed
- (2) *Topeka Daily Capital* 6/1/01
- (3) *Parham Voice*, P.15
- (4) *When The Latter Rain First Fell: The First One to Speak in Tongues*, Latter Rain Evangel, Jan.1909, P.2
- (5) *Topeka State Journal*, 9/1/01
- (6) *The Birth of a Lie*, K. Napier www.christiandocctrine.net
- (7) *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, Vinson Synan 1971
- (8) *Life*, Parham P.169
- (9) *The Life of Charles Parham* Sarah Parham P.168
- (10) *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, Vinson Synan, P.112
- (11) *The Life of Charles Parham*, Sarah Parham P.168
- (12) *Apostolic Faith* Charles Parham, Baster Springs, Kansas 1912
- (13) *A Critical History of Glossalalia* C.W. Shumway, PhD Dissertation Boston Uni 1919
- (14) *Another Wave Rolls In* Bartleman. Voice Publications 1962
- (15) *Holy Laughter to Holy Fire* by Michael L. Brown P.197,198
- (16) *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement* Synan P.144
- (17) *Dispensational Truths* Clarence Larkin

- (18) Parham was eventually charged with sodomy. *Holy Laughter to Holy Fire* by Michael Brown P.197,198
- (19) M.W. Moorehead, *Apostolic Faith* 1907, P.8 (20) *Messages Spoken in New Tongues Interpreted*, BM April 15 1908 P.2
- (21) A. Seddon *Edward Irving and Unknown Tongues*
- (22) *Fields White Unto Harvest* James Goff P.106,136
- (23) Ibid 145,16
- (24) *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*
- (25) Blumhofer 1993 P.45
- (26) *Apostolic Faith* July 1927 *The Ten Lost Tribes*
- (27) *Fields White Unto Harvest* Goff, P.228
- (28) See *TA Ministries* website
- (29) Mark Haville *Signs and Wonders-Exposed*

Notes

About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

Terry is the author of several books and is involved in a full time ministry of *teaching, informing* and *equipping* the church. He is also editor of a growing worldwide publication '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

His ministry includes preaching/teaching and conducting seminars and conferences in a wide range of churches and colleges.

TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book '*To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to *teach, inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.