

Leaders Commission Todd Bentley at Lakeland Outpouring™

The special service was billed by leaders as one of the greatest moments in revival history



[] Canadian revivalist Todd Bentley, leader of the “Lakeland Outpouring,” was commissioned as an evangelist last night in a special ceremony in Lakeland, Fla., that was broadcast into millions of homes by God TV.

California pastors Ché Ahn and Bill Johnson, along with Canadian pastor John Arnott, laid hands on the 32-year-old Bentley while Peter Wagner, leader of the International Coalition of Apostles, read a statement about the need for apostolic alignment. Other prominent leaders from the apostolic and prophetic movements stood on the platform to show their support for Bentley and to endorse the revival, which began in early April and is now in its 83rd day of continuous meetings.

The ceremony, held in a 10,000-seat tent, took place after some charismatic leaders raised questions about Bentley’s claims, methods and theology. They asked Wagner to oversee a dialogue, and he responded by organizing Monday evening’s event so that Bentley could have more accountability—or what Wagner calls “apostolic alignment.”

“I believe last night was truly historic and a true sign of unity,” Bentley told *Charisma* today. “Many streams converged and I know last night’s commissioning will truly help bring God’s outpouring to a much larger part of the body.”

Participating leaders at the ceremony included Wagner; Ché Ahn, pastor of Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena, Calif.; John Arnott of Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship in Canada; Bill

Johnson, pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, Calif.; and Rick Joyner, founder of MorningStar Ministries in Charlotte, N.C.

Wagner said to Bentley on the platform: "This commissioning represents a powerful spiritual transaction taking place in the invisible world. With this in mind, I take the apostolic authority that God has given me and I decree to Todd Bentley, your power will increase, your authority will increase, your favor will increase, your influence will increase, your revelation will increase.

"I also decree that a new supernatural strength will flow through this ministry. A new life force will penetrate this move of God. Government will be established to set things in their proper order. God will pour out a higher level of discernment to distinguish truth from error. New relationships will surface to open the gates to the future."

In a newsletter released earlier this week, Bentley said Wagner was the one who suggested having an official ceremony in which Bentley could be commissioned.

"I am no church historian, but I do not know of any other time in history, since the book of Acts, have so many different apostles and so many different prophets and movements and leaders [been represented]," Bentley said of the capacity crowd. "This is so much bigger than [anything else] ever before. The devil is shaking in his boots because the apostles are gathering and the prophets are gathering."

Though the outpouring has enjoyed mostly favorable publicity and is stirring excitement in charismatic congregations worldwide, it has also spawned a debate among leaders dialoguing behind closed doors. These backroom discussions over aspects of Bentley's teachings were partly what prompted leaders to lay their hands on him last night.

Reportedly 214 nations could watch leaders take turns praying and prophesying over Bentley. It remains to be seen if the ceremony will persuade some still opposed to the meetings to abandon their objections.

Bentley has outgrown three venues in Lakeland since his April 2 visit to Ignited Church led to what he describes as an encounter with an angel in his hotel room the next day.

Critics complain that Bentley entertains extra-biblical practices and has devoted some of his past teachings to “third heaven” experiences and angelic encounters. They say it’s bizarre for him to claim he has met the apostle Paul and angels named “Winds of Change” and “Emma.” They also object to what they believe are exaggerated claims of healings and resurrections.

Bentley recently responded to critics in an open letter posted on his Web site called “Lifting Jesus High: Bringing biblical light to your questions about the Lakeland Outpouring and Todd Bentley”.

In the document, he said his supernatural experiences have always brought him closer to Jesus. He denied believing in female angels, stating that he didn’t understand why God chose an angel named Emma, other than that the angel had “mother-like nurturing qualities.”

Regarding his encounter with an angel called “Winds of Change,” Bentley said it shouldn’t come as a surprise to Christians that an angel with such a name could usher in a new move of God.

Leaders who have expressed private concerns about Bentley’s ministry turned down *Charisma’s* request for public comment.

To counter accusations that accounts of healing are embellished, Bentley declared last night that his team of interns is working 80 hours a week collecting medical records and other proof of healings so that the Lakeland Outpouring becomes “one of the most well-documented revivals in history.”

Those affiliated with Bentley’s Fresh Fire Ministries claim that he understands the meetings are much bigger than him. “This is not the Todd Bentley revival show,” a Fresh Fire

spokesperson told *Charisma*.

Organizers said nightly meetings will continue in Lakeland indefinitely. Bentley also plans to travel to other U.S. cities for one- or two-night events. "Entire cities are about to come under the glory of God ... I'm talking about in America!" Bentley shouted during last night's meeting.

"I feel that what's going to be released tonight is a city-taking, nation-taking anointing," he continued. "We're going to the cities, then the nations. My dream has never been for a mega-ministry, it has been for a movement. I want to be part of a movement."

—Paul Steven Ghiringhelli