

Rodney Challenges Churches

Howard-Browne Australian

The South African evangelist believes fearful world events have prepared people to respond to the gospel

Fire!” shouts evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne, and a squeal ripples through the packed congregation at Richmond Assembly of God in Melbourne, Australia. Tongues of fire or rivers of living water—the people don’t seem to care as long as God comes.

It has been eight years since Howard-Browne, 40, first ministered in Australia, bringing a fresh impetus of God’s anointing with his visits through the 1990s. Today, he is president and founder of Revival Ministries International in Tampa, Fla.

He once was nicknamed the “Holy Ghost Bartender” for his services in which people would laugh seemingly uncontrollably as if they were drunk. The term “holy laughter” was coined as a result of his ministry and became common among some Christians in the 1990s to describe what would occur, often without warning, when Howard-Browne was preaching or praying over individuals or a congregation.

And though his ministry has had its share of critics, especially in the United States, he and his wife, Adonica, and their three children—Kirsten, Kelly and Kenneth—have traveled as missionaries in North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, England, Scotland, Wales, Holland, Germany, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines.

He conducted meetings in Australia twice in 2001. In the winter he traveled to the Outback with missionary Max Wiltshire, ministering to Aboriginal groups. Returning in October, he spent a week each in Melbourne and Brisbane. He allows no misunderstanding about the urgency of his mission.

"Everyone must give everything they've got; they must sell out completely," he said. "This is not the time to be wishy-washy or Sunday morning Christians. This is the time to be committed, on fire, full of the power of God and bringing in the harvest."

The context of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States adds intensity to the message. In his Good News New York crusade in 1999, Howard-Browne prophesied of dark days.

"I talked about terrorism, about America being a sitting duck, about what New York would do if a missile attack was on the city, and chemical and biochemical warfare," he said.

"I told them there's a storm coming, and they can't get rid of the storm, but they can avert it in their lives. I think [Sept. 11] has shaken the nation, and people are starting to turn to God. How long it will last I don't know, but America needs a great awakening. That's what we're believing God for," he said.

Howard-Browne and his family moved from South Africa to the United States in 1987, but he still stresses the original purpose of their move and of their ministry.

"We're missionaries," he says. "We treat it just like Max [Wiltshire] would the Australian Outback. We believe God

called us to see revival come to America, and we've seen great moves of God. But the greatest days are ahead, I believe, especially as we have turmoil like what's been happening since September. People are going to turn to God."

In December 1996 Howard-Browne founded The River at Tampa Bay, a church that now numbers more than 2,000. The congregation has moved into premises recently vacated by an insolvent auto dealer with a building ready-made in the shape of a cross.

"The Lord's just blessed us with 83 acres of property right on Interstate 75 worth \$16 million," he said. "[The building] was virtually brand-new, and we bought it for \$8 million. The Lord gave us favor."

Howard-Browne is scaling back the rigorous travel schedule he has kept for the last 13 years, though his international trips will still continue.

"We plan to focus next year on one international crusade a month and one American crusade a month and be home the rest of the time. What we have been doing is crusades every single week, 46 weeks a year, so I need to make some changes," he said.

The man who was born again at age 5 and filled with the Holy Spirit at age 8 recalls how he lined up his teddy bears and laid hands on them, praying for them. "And they'd fall under the power [of the Holy Spirit]," he said with a laugh.

Being more serious, he adds: "I believe we're living in the greatest hour in the history of the planet. What a great hour to preach the gospel, because people really are afraid right

now, and this is a time for the good news as never before.
We're living in the closing of the ages."

-Adrian Brookes in Australia