

When Heaven Came Down

If we could send a reporter back in time to 1906, his report on the Azusa Street Revival would read like this.

One of the earliest reports we read was from The Pentecostal Herald. J.M. Taylor wrote, "Men, women and children—boys and girls of 10 and 12 years of age, young men and maidens, preachers, deaconesses, mission workers and business men of all colors, races, denominations, and stages of culture, intelligence and means are receiving the mighty baptism of power, and speak 'with tongues and prophesy.'"

Other reports criticized the revival and especially the pastor of the mission, William J. Seymour. The Nazarene Messenger said the movement had "as much influence as a pebble thrown in the sea." The Beulah Christian said it was "Satan transformed into an angel of light."

I paid little attention to the negative words because my heart bore witness as I read the good reports. I wondered if what people were experiencing at Azusa could be the baptism in the Holy Spirit that D.L. Moody had spoken so fondly about before he passed away. Evan Roberts also testified that he had received a baptism before the great revival began in Wales. We hoped that this was our chance to see a nation-shaking move of God.

I had often asked God for this baptism of power, and my heart yearned to visit the Azusa Street Mission, officially titled the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission. I began to pray earnestly for provision, and in the will and timing of God He granted the resources for my trip.

It was a beautiful journey. I had never been west of the Mississippi River. Along the way, I visited some Holiness missions.

In Houston, I spent much of the day at the Apostolic Faith Mission. It was here that Seymour first heard the Pentecostal truths from Charles F. Parham, who had subsequently gone to minister in Zion, Illinois. The workers at the Houston mission spoke warmly of Bishop Seymour.

I received a different report of him in Denver, however. At the Pillar of Fire church, no one spoke highly about him or the mission. It seems that he also stopped here on his way to California.

The leader of the work in Denver, Alma White, accused Seymour of demon possession. I was so discouraged (and even frightened) by the criticism that I almost returned home, but when I prayed I felt the peace of God. I knew this was just the devil trying to keep me from my Pentecost. Later I learned that when Mrs. White's husband received the baptism in the Holy Ghost, she refused to follow him in the ministry.

When my train finally arrived in Los Angeles, I didn't know where to go or who to ask for directions. But workers from the mission were at the station to welcome me and other pilgrims to Los Angeles.

It was a short distance from the station to the mission on Azusa Street. The closer we got to the church, the worse the neighborhood looked. Warehouses, saloons and other broken-down buildings surrounded the tiny mission.

If I had been expecting a grand cathedral, I would have been sadly disappointed. The building was on a dead-end street. It had rained the night before, and the entire area had turned to mud. There was no pavement to walk on and not even a boardwalk into the building.

The building itself was in the shape of a square box. I heard that it had been an attractive church previously but that a fire had taken off the gables, which were replaced by a flat roof. The building was scarred by the fire and was in bad need of painting. A "For Sale" sign was still visible on the side.

I was amazed at how many people were present. Bodies were everywhere! Inside the building, outside at every window, upstairs and downstairs. It was the middle of the day, yet hundreds were packed into the place.

Inside, the saints were singing. Oh, what singing! I didn't know it at the time, but it was their favorite song, "The Comforter Has Come": "The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come! / The Holy Ghost from Heav'n, the Father's promise giv'n / O spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found / The Comforter has come!"

The old mission literally rocked as everyone sang at the tops of their voices. There were no instruments; none were needed because the voices filled the room. People were clapping their hands, shouting and praising God.

I had never seen anything like it in my life. I had been to camp meetings, but nothing could compare to the joy and exuberance in this little room. It was as if the place would explode.

Another thing that struck me was that people of different races were all worshiping together. Being from the South, where racial tension is an issue, I was quite shocked by this demonstration of love. Here, blacks, whites, Hispanics and Asians all treated one another as brothers and sisters. Frank Bartleman, one of the pastors in town testified and said, "The blood of Jesus washed the colorline away."

I looked around the room trying to spot the leader, Bishop Seymour. I expected him to be seated in a prominent position, but I was surprised when I located him. He was sitting behind the "pulpit" (two wooden crates stacked on top of each other and covered with a cloth) and had his head bowed low inside it. He wept and prayed throughout the worship.

Finally, the singing stopped, and Brother Seymour stood to speak. He was of average size and build and had a visible film over one eye. People told me that a bout with smallpox left him blind.

Some of the Holiness papers had hinted that Seymour was illiterate. It was obvious that he was not. He read from the Bible and exhorted us on the coming of the Lord. He spoke with a strong Cajun accent that testified to his south Louisiana roots.

In an illustration, he told us that his father had been a Union soldier in the War Between the States. I wondered if his father had met mine in battle. It seemed strange that our fathers may have faced each other across the embattlements of war and now we faced each other over God's altar.

Seymour was not a loud, demonstrative preacher as many of his

Southern counterparts were. Instead, he spoke quietly, almost in a hush, teaching us about the Lord's return to Earth.

The Holy Spirit's conviction was strong. When he finished his message, Seymour called the repentant to the altar—a long redwood plank. Almost everyone in the building pressed forward. If there were aisles, they disappeared.

I have never seen such repentance. Grown men were weeping under the weight of their sins. It did not impress me that these were wicked men and women. They appeared to be good and godly people, stirred by their Master to a closer walk. After the prayer time, there was another round of singing. This time something absolutely remarkable happened. Someone on one side of the building began singing in tongues. Another person joined in. Across the building other voices blended together.

I had never heard anything like this, but I learned it was a frequent occurrence at the mission. They call the phenomenon the "heavenly choir," and the faithful pray that they can participate.

When the music faded, various people in the audience began to share testimonies. One lady said she had suffered from a blood disease for decades. She had been to the best doctors in California but had received no relief.

While at a service in the mission she felt the power of the Holy Ghost. She said her body shook from head to toe. The next day she knew she was healed. A return to her doctors confirmed that a miracle had been wrought in her life.

Her testimony was followed by a round of boisterous praise. One lady began to shout and dance across the floor, spinning in circles.

There was great freedom in the service, but at the same time perfect order. In fact, in a later service when someone became loud and began drawing attention to himself, Brother Seymour stopped the demonstration and gave a short lecture on bringing glory to God and not to self.

There were several other reports of notable healings, but the best testimony was that of a man from India. Every eye was on this foreign guest when he stood up to testify.

The man had worked on a ship that brought him to Los Angeles. He was a Hindu and had never heard the gospel. Somehow he found himself at Azusa Street.

While he was there, a little girl in the mission stood on a bench and began to speak in tongues. She was speaking in the Hindi language. She told the surprised guest about his life, named his sins and told him that Jesus is the Savior.

After the service, the man learned that the child had never been to India and didn't know one word of his native language. His life was forever changed. He said he had begun reading the Bible and looked forward to returning to India to share the gospel with his family.

As the service began to wind down, I realized it was past midnight. I had been at the mission for 10 hours!

I was invited to spend the night with several gospel workers who were living in the second-story apartments in the mission.

I could barely sleep as I reflected on my first day at Azusa. I was hungry for God. I wanted my own Pentecost.

Morning came early at Azusa. Services at the church began at 10 a.m., but there was something happening almost around the clock. On this morning there were papers to sort and mail.

The mission produced a newspaper, The Apostolic Faith, and it had to be mailed around the world. The paper contained sermons and testimonies from Azusa and from others who had received the Pentecostal experience. All the workers and guests lent a hand to the project. I have never seen such unity among the saints.

Today was remarkable at the mission. There were several notable people in attendance, though no one was given special treatment. There was such a respect for what God was doing that speakers were never introduced and people refrained from greeting one another when they came inside. Instead, they quietly bowed to acknowledge God's presence.

Samuel Mead, a Methodist missionary, testified that since he had been at the mission he had heard people speak in African dialects. George Studd also spoke in the morning session. He and his brother C.T. were from a wealthy English family and had received notoriety in the sports world. Then C.T. became a missionary and George came to worship at Azusa.

In the evening service, Dr. A.S. Worrell, a noted scholar and publisher, greeted the congregation. He has served at a number of Bible colleges as instructor, dean and president. Recently he translated the New Testament from the Greek. Worrell shared several reasons why he believed the Apostolic Faith movement

was from God.

He said there was “a mighty power for witnessing, a wonderful love for souls ... the blood of Christ is exalted ... the Word of God is honored,” and there is a “bestowment” of the “gift of tongues” and “several other gifts of the Spirit.”

It was encouraging to see these men and others of rank and position at the dilapidated mission. On the inside, the dirt floors stirred up a cloud when people shuffled around. The ceiling was so low that tall men had to stoop. The walls were unfinished, and the room was furnished with mismatched furniture and plank benches.

The heat was often stifling. But no one cared. The rich and the poor, the cultured and the simple worshiped shoulder-to-shoulder because God was in the house.

Bishop Seymour constantly emphasized the need for a sanctified life. To him the most important thing was not the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but a holy life. The conviction was incredible.

A local pastor, A.G. Garr, stood one day and said that God had dealt with him because he had had an argument with another pastor. Three times Garr rode his bicycle across the city, intending to apologize to his estranged friend. Each time the Lord spoke to him and told him that he wasn't truly sincere. Finally, broken by the conviction, Garr made peace with his brother and his Lord. Such heartfelt repentance and obedience to God, more than anything, was the spirit of Azusa Street.

No one asked for an offering during my entire visit. This, too, was amazing. One night a brother stood and said God had

called him to India. Without any appeal except the appeal of the Holy Spirit a man in the back said, "I will give \$500 to help him." Someone else offered \$200. In only minutes, his need had been supplied.

On my last day at the mission, we had a prayer meeting in the upper room. The workers often gathered in this upstairs room to pray, work and share the wonders of the Lord. Today they were reading testimony letters.

One was from T.B. Barrett, a Methodist pastor from Norway, who wrote to say he had received the Holy Ghost baptism after reading The Apostolic Faith and meeting some Azusa pilgrims on their way to the mission field. The glory of the Lord filled the room as we rejoiced.

Then G.B. Cashwell, who was with us, and who later helped lead several denominations into the Pentecostal movement, told us his story. He said that as a Southern gentleman, he had been offended by the mixing of the races at Azusa's altar. He almost left for home right after he arrived, but in his hotel room the Holy Spirit crucified his flesh. Now he was glad he had stayed until his Pentecost was fully come.

That evening I was hungry for more of God. Bishop Seymour preached on the baptism in the Holy Ghost. He said, "When we have a clear knowledge of justification and sanctification, through the precious blood of Jesus Christ in our hearts, then we can be a recipient of the baptism in the Holy Ghost." I knew he was talking just to me.

He continued: "The Lord Jesus is always ready to fill the hungry, thirsty soul. ... Praise our God, He is the same

yesterday, today and forever. Receive Him just now and He will fill you.”

While Brother Seymour continued to speak I felt the power of God fill my very being. At first I felt just a tingle, but then my entire body began to shake and my tongue to quiver. Suddenly, I was speaking in a language I had never learned. This was my time! This was my baptism in the Holy Ghost! It was wonderful beyond words.

That night I slept little. I spoke in tongues all night, praising and glorifying God, who had saved me, sanctified me and baptized me in the Holy Ghost.

I could hardly wait to get back to Alabama and share the good news: The Comforter has come. It seemed as if the train floated along the tracks. At every stop, God gave me an opportunity to testify.

The apostles had the upper room and Paul the road to Damascus, but I will always be grateful to God that I met Him at a ramshackle old mission on an unpaved, dead-end road called Azusa Street.

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E.J. Boehmer

(1881-1953)

Edward John Boehmer met evangelist Frank Bartleman in 1905 while working at Peniel Mission in Pasadena, California. Sharing a burden for revival, they often prayed all night for spiritual renewal in Southern California. Their prayers were answered with the Holy Spirit outpouring in Los Angeles the following year. Initially skeptical about the gift of tongues, Boehmer, who was of German descent, became convinced after hearing a man speak in perfect German. Boehmer received the Holy Spirit baptism at Azusa Street in August 1907 and noted: "Though we have the Holy Ghost and enjoy His sweet presence, there is still a longing to be made more like Jesus. We see room for more humility, and down we go again and again before the Lord in earnest prayer, asking Him for those things that rightfully belong to those whom He has purchased with His own blood." Boehmer then evangelized in the Appalachian Mountains and united with the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee).

F.F. Bosworth

(1877-1958)

Fred Francis Bosworth was one of the first to be baptized in the Holy Spirit at John Alexander Dowie's church in Zion City, Illinois, when Bible teacher Charles F. Parham preached there in September 1906. In 1910 Bosworth established a racially integrated Pentecostal church in Dallas. Bosworth attended the first general council of the Assemblies of God (AG) in 1914 and later served as an executive presbyter. He left the AG in 1918 because of his belief that the gift of tongues was only one form of evidence of the Holy Spirit baptism. He then ministered with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, conducting large crusades throughout the U.S. and Canada. Numerous healings were reported in his meetings, including sight being restored to the blind. Bosworth also organized a successful radio ministry in Chicago. He influenced the post-

World War II healing revival and even assisted evangelist William Branham in his healing crusades. Bosworth's later years were spent in missions work in Africa.

G.B. Cashwell **(1862-1916)**

Gaston Barnabus Cashwell, a Holiness evangelist from North Carolina, visited the Azusa Street Mission in November 1906. Initially resisting prayer from blacks, he returned to Azusa after seeking the Lord and asked William Seymour to lay hands on him. "While seeking in an upstairs room in the mission, the Lord opened up the windows of heaven and the light of God began to flow over me in such power as never before," Cashwell remembered. "I then went into the room where the service was held, and ... before I knew it, I began to speak in tongues and praise God." Cashwell returned to North Carolina and conducted a successful revival in Dunn in January 1907. That year he also began publishing the Bridegroom's Messenger. He helped introduce Pentecostal doctrine to several organizations, including the Pentecostal Holiness Church, which started in the 1890s as an outgrowth of the National Holiness Association movement. Because of his widespread evangelistic campaigns, Cashwell became known as the "evangelist to the South."

Glenn A. Cook **(1867-1948)**

Glenn A. Cook, a newspaper journalist in Los Angeles, initially rejected the validity of William Seymour's preaching and sought to correct what he believed was doctrinal error. However, he soon changed his mind and explained: "After asking forgiveness of Brother Seymour and all the rest for all my hard sayings I fell on my face and began to pour out my soul in prayer. ... When I had just about given up all hope, the Holy Ghost fell on me as I lay in bed at home. I seemed to be in a trance for about 24 hours and the next day in the meeting

began to speak in tongues." Cook then became business manager at the Apostolic Faith Mission and assisted Seymour in publishing The Apostolic Faith. In 1907 he introduced the Pentecostal message to Indianapolis. In 1914, after being rebaptized in the name of Jesus, Cook became a pioneer minister in the Oneness Pentecostal movement.

Emma "Mother" Cotton (1877-1952)

"God was exalted and the power fell. ... People left their big churches and temples and went to that old barn to pray. The lame, the halt and the blind came and God healed them. ... The saints were so saturated with the power of God that the thing swept the city." So wrote Emma "Mother" Cotton when reflecting on the Azusa Street Revival. Among the first to receive the Holy Spirit baptism at William Seymour's initial meetings on Bonnie Brae Street, Mother Cotton continued as a worker when the mission moved to Azusa Street. A songwriter, she penned several early gospel favorites, and some historians believe she wrote "When the Saints Go Marching In." She and her husband, Henry, were close friends with healing evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson and were invited often to preach at McPherson's Angelus Temple. McPherson encouraged the Cottons to organize the Azusa Pentecostal Temple in Los Angeles, which today is known as Crouch Memorial Pentecostal Church of God in Christ, where the Cottons ministered until their deaths.

Florence "Mother" Crawford (1872-1936)

"I looked around to see if anybody saw me go in, but I would not have cared if the whole world saw me go out," wrote Florence "Mother" Crawford in describing her first visit to the Azusa Street Mission in 1906. The daughter of atheists, she heard God speak to her at a dance and was soon converted. She then became active in benevolence work and social

organizations. Desiring a deeper experience with God, Crawford learned about the Azusa Street Revival, where she received the Holy Spirit baptism and spoke in tongues. Although her husband rejected her faith and left her, she was an active worker at the Azusa Street Mission until 1907. Disapproving of Seymour's marriage to Jennie Evans Moore, Mother Crawford left Los Angeles, taking with her the mailing list for The Apostolic Faith paper. She founded the Apostolic Faith Church in Portland, Oregon, and served as its general overseer until her death.

William H. Durham **(1873-1912)**

William H. Durham was baptized in the Holy Spirit at the Azusa Street Mission in 1907. "His mighty power came over me, until I jerked and quaked under it for about three hours," Durham testified. "He finished the work on my vocal organs, and spoke through me in unknown tongues. ... I had a depth of love and sweetness in my soul that I had never even dreamed of before." Seymour prophesied that the Holy Spirit would fall wherever Durham preached. Durham evangelized across the U.S., with miraculous healings occurring in his services. He later led the North Avenue Mission in Chicago and began publishing The Pentecostal Testimony paper. Durham developed the doctrine of the "finished work" of Christ on Calvary, which suggested that sanctification is a gradual process attained throughout a Christian's life. Contrary to many early Pentecostals' view of sanctification as an instantaneous experience, the "finished work" has gained wide acceptance among contemporary Pentecostals and charismatics. Durham died of pneumonia in 1912.

C.H. Mason **(1866-1961)**

The son of former slaves, Charles Harrison Mason desired the

same spiritual passion as those who endured slavery. In 1897 Mason and Charles Price Jones co-founded the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) as a holiness organization. Mason, who attended the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, wrote: "As I arose from the altar and took my seat, I fixed my eyes on Jesus, and the Holy Ghost took charge of me. I surrendered perfectly to Him and consented to Him. Then I began singing a song in unknown tongues, and it was the sweetest thing to have Him sing that song through me." When Jones rejected Mason's new experience, Mason reorganized COGIC in Tennessee in 1907 as a Pentecostal denomination. Mason also ordained a large number of white Pentecostal ministers before 1914, when many of them separated to form the Assemblies of God. Until his death, Mason led COGIC, which is based in Memphis. Currently it is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States.

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Elmer Kirk Fisher
(1866-1919)

A Moody Bible Institute graduate, Elmer Fisher was a pastor in California. In 1906 he received the Holy Spirit baptism at pastor Joseph Smale's (New Testament Church in Los Angeles). Fisher then worked with William Seymour at the Azusa Street Mission, being left in charge for four months in Seymour's absence. Fisher, who believed in order in worship and did not allow all to speak who felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to do so, established and pastored the Upper Room Mission in Los Angeles. He also published The Upper Room paper. Fisher was passionate about leading his family into the Pentecostal experience. Following the healing of his daughter, Myrtle, he testified: "All the family ... laid our hands on [Myrtle's] head and each one prayed for her healing. A wonderful spirit of song came upon us. The Spirit sang the songs of Zion through our lips. ... When the song stopped, [Myrtle] said, 'O Papa, I have seen Jesus.'"

A.G. Garr Sr.

(1874-1944=

After completing Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, Alfred Oodrich Garr Sr. pastored the Burning Bush Mission in Los Angeles. In June 1906 he became the first white pastor to receive the Holy Spirit baptism at the Azusa Street Mission, but his church rejected his spiritual experience. Garr and his wife, Lillian, believed they had received Indian dialects when they spoke in tongues, and the couple left Los Angeles in 1907 as missionaries to India, China, Sri Lanka and Japan. Initially believing that "tongues" were given to preach to people on other languages, Garr modified his teaching after realizing he did not actually have an Indian dialect even though he once spoke Bengali supernaturally while praying with a convert. Instead, he focused on tongues as a prayer language. Returning to the U.S. in 1911, Garr led revivals and emphasized faith healing. Following a 1930 revival in Charlotte, North Carolina, he organized Garr Memorial Church, which he pastored until his death.

John g. Lake

(1870-1935)

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Ordained at age 21, John Graham Lake left the ministry for a successful career in business. Then in 1898, he returned to ministry after his wife was healed of tuberculosis under the ministry of John Alexander Dowie. Lake then served for several years as an elder at Dowie's church in Zion City, Illinois. Baptized in the

Holy Spirit in 1907 after seeking the experience for nine months, Lake felt called to missions work. In 1908 he and his family arrived in Africa, where they helped establish the Apostolic Faith Mission. There Lake endured many difficulties, including the death of his wife. He returned to the U.S. in 1912 and ministered primarily in the Northwest where he started churches and organized healing centers. Despite his

own poor health, he continued to pray for the sick until his death in 1935. Thousands were healed as a result of his ministry.

The Untold Story on William J. Seymour

Most Pentecostal and charismatic Christians have heard of the revival at Azusa Street. Many even know the revival was led by a black man, William Z. Seymour. Unfortunately, most know almost nothing else about this significant leader of early Pentecostalism.

Even worse, some of what has been written about Seymour has been based on fictitious accounts, resulting in a biography buried in obscurity and inaccuracy. This is the seldom-told story of the man that Yale University scholar Sidney Allstrom called "the most influential black leader in American religious history." William Joseph Seymour was born May 2, 1870, in Centerville, Louisiana. His parents, Simon Seymour, also known as Simon Simon, and Phillis Sababar, were former slaves. Phillis was born and reared on the Adilard Carlin plantation near Centerville, in St. Charles Parish. *

When President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, ending slavery in the rebel states, Simon enlisted in the Northern Army and served until the end of the Civil War. While with the United States Colored Troops he marched across the Southern Gulf states of Louisiana, Mississippi, (Alabama and Florida. During his service, he became very ill and was hospitalized in New Orleans. From descriptions of his symptoms, it seems he may have contracted malaria or another tropical disease in the Southern swamps. Simon never fully

recovered.

William Suymour, the oldest in a large family, lived his early years in affect poverty. In 1896 the family's possessions were listed as "one old bedstead, one old chair and one old mattress." All of his mother's personal property was valued at 55 cents. Seymour also suffered the injustice and prejudice of the Reconstruction South. Violence against freedmen was common, and groups such as the Ku Klux Klan terrorized southern Louisiana.

As a child, Suymour was exposed to various Christian traditions. His parents were married by a Methodist preacher; the infant William was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church in Franklin, Louisiana; and Simon and Phillis were buried on the grounds of a Baptist church.

Many accounts of Seymour's life imply that he was illiterate. This is not true. He attended a freedman's school in Centerville and learned to read and write. In fact, his signature shows a good penmanship.