

STRANG REPORT: Claim Pentecost's Gift

Editor's Note: Although Pentecost 2024 has passed, the need for the Holy Spirit's power has not. Enjoy this column from Charisma CEO and bestselling author Stephen Strang.

Pentecost Sunday falls on May 19 this year. It's a time for action and also reflection on the way Pentecost is uniquely central to Spirit-led living.

In the late 1800s a Holiness movement began, emphasizing purity, zeal and devotion to Christ. People began praying for a fresh baptism in the Holy Spirit. At Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, a handful of students of Charles Parham, a Holiness preacher, prayed on New Year's Eve 1900 to receive this baptism in the Holy Spirit. First, a young woman named Agnes Ozman spoke in an unknown tongue. Soon other students did. When Parham heard this, he believed it confirmed his theory of tongues being the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

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Parham began going around the country to preach about Spirit baptism, and in the summer of 1905 he took his teaching to Houston, where a young Black preacher named William Seymour heard the message and believed. Seymour led prayer meetings at 216 Bonnie Brae Street in Los Angeles that attracted so many people the house's foundation collapsed. The group was forced to move to a vacant former livery stable at 312 Azusa Street, from which one of the great revivals of the 20th century took its name.

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Someone prophesied that what happened at the Bonnie Brae meetings would go around the globe, and it has. These events marked the birth of the Pentecostal movement, which has become one of the fastest-growing religious movements in history.

Sadly, because many Christians in that era believed the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit died with the first-century apostles, they weren't open to this new outpouring. (This is called "cessationism.") When the baptism of the Holy Spirit was poured out at Azusa Street, Christians struggled to know what to call it. Most settled on the term "Pentecostal," referring both to the day of Pentecost and to the Greek word for 50 days after Easter.

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