

Revival Goes On

The passage from the year 2000 to the year 2001 may seem to have been less spectacular than the one from 1999 to 2000 since Y2K hysteria was not a potential concern this go-round. Nevertheless, it is a passage worth noting—nothing less than the start of a new millennium!

For Christians, the date is significant for another reason. It is the anniversary of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at a small, long-defunct Bible institute in Topeka, Kansas. And it is this event that historians point to as the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement.

The outpouring occurred at Bethel Bible College, headed by Charles F. Parham, who believed that speaking in languages a person has never studied—xenolalia—would be useful in world missions. It began when a 30-year-old missions student named Agnes Ozman prayed to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. She spoke in tongues for the first time on either Dec. 31, 1900, or Jan. 1, 1901—depending on whose account you believe. A few days later Parham and other students also received this gift.

Not much happened for several years. But in Houston in 1905 Parham preached that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is accompanied by speaking in tongues. A black Holiness preacher, William Seymour, heard the message.

In the spring of 1906 he began preaching it at home prayer meetings in Los Angeles that eventually drew so many people

they had to establish a mission in an old building on Azusa Street. The resulting Azusa Street revival spread around the world.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Pentecostal experience was accepted by many in mainline Protestant churches. In 1967 it began to influence the Roman Catholic Church as well and came under a new banner—the charismatic movement. Today this Pentecostal-charismatic movement includes an estimated 523 million adherents.

Is it an accident that the fastest-growing Christian movement started on the first day of a new century? Or did God have a purpose in pouring out His Spirit in a new way at that time? Now, as we enter a new millennium, what does God have in store for His church?

An event that took place in November of last year—100 years after the outpouring in Topeka—may give us a clue. On the day Americans voted for a new president, German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke began a crusade in the west African city of Lagos, Nigeria. About 6 million people attended the six-day event. Peak attendance on the final night was 1.6 million.

Bonnke, well-known in Africa for his huge crusades, had never before had a crusade this large or with as much impact. He preached salvation messages and prayed for mass deliverance and healing. Every night his prayers resulted in testimonies of incredible healing miracles.

One night Bonnke taught on receiving the Holy Spirit and then prayed for the group of nearly 1 million people who attended. He told them to raise their hands, pray to receive the Holy

Spirit and expect to pray in other tongues. Listening to the resulting roar as they prayed in tongues for 20 minutes was one of the most incredible experiences of my life.

History has proved that revivals come and go. Most last only a few years. The Welsh Revival that preceded Azusa Street died out so completely that today it's difficult to find evidence of it.

The initial Pentecostal Outpouring has ended, too. The Bible college in Topeka where Agnes Ozman received the Holy Spirit and the Azusa Street mission were torn down. But the movement the outpouring spawned keeps being renewed because it has always had a missionary thrust.

Bonnke's crusade is the latest example. Just think: 100 years after the first modern Pentecostal was baptized in the Holy Spirit, perhaps as many as a million people received this experience simultaneously! Surely that is a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (see Acts 2:17).

This is the kind of outpouring I believe God has in store for us in the days to come. What a way to begin the new millennium!

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