

Lesson II

**The Beginnings of the Azusa
Street Revival**

Lesson Objective

**To introduce a more detailed teaching
on the beginnings of the Azusa Street
revival.**

In the last 100 years, Pentecostalism, and later the charismatic movement, spread from a handful of people in Topeka, Kansas and in Los Angeles, California to hundreds of millions throughout the world. The latest estimate is that half a billion people are involved in Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement today, claiming to recover and practice the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit that are mentioned in Acts and in I Corinthians 13-14. The movement is regarded as a "third force" in Christendom, with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.¹ This began a wave of the Holy Spirit that continues on today.

Pre-Azusa Street

Charles Parham

The time is 1900 A.D. – the turn of the century. A move of God, as not seen since the time of the earliest apostles, would begin the Pentecostal heritage in America through Evangelist Charles Fox Parham. Although he was not present at the beginning of the Azusa Street revival, Parham was in many ways considered the theological father of the Azusa Revival.

Born in 1873 in Muscatine, Iowa, Parham spent his childhood being raised in Kansas. He wrestled with poor health all of his life. At the age of 9 he contracted rheumatic fever, which weakened his heart and forced him into long periods of inactivity.



Parham's family was not particularly religious; however, he was converted to Christ in 1886 A.D. when he attended evangelistic meetings at a local Congregational church. Shortly thereafter, he began attending a Methodist church where he taught Sunday school. At the age of 15, Parham began conducting revival services on his own. By 1890 A.D., at the early age of 17, he enrolled at Southwest Kansas College in Winfield, Kansas, thinking it would prepare him better for the life of ministry. While a student, he backslid in his faith and decided to become a medical doctor. Shortly thereafter, he had another bout with rheumatic fever, which brought him to recommit himself back into the ministry. Parham obtained a minister's license from the Southwest Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. At the age of 20, he received a temporary appointment as supply pastor at the Eudora Methodist Church near Lawrence, Kansas. Parham had, however, adopted the Wesleyan "holiness" theology, believing in Entire Sanctification, which brought a negative attitude

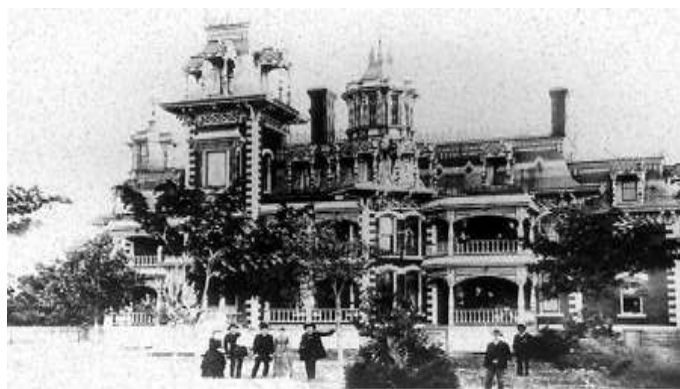
¹ Englesma, David. <http://www.prca.org/current/Articles/pentecostalism2.htm>

toward the denomination of the church where he served, as well as denominational affiliations in general. His relationship with his superiors became strained, and ultimately the doctrinal difference branded Parham as divisive.²

By 1895 A.D. Parham surrendered his license, denouncing Methodism as spiritually bankrupt. Believing he was free to have a “world-wide parish,” Parham went out on his own, doggedly opposing all forms of ecclesiastical organization. He, however, had no spiritual covering.³ Regardless, his ministry succeeded, but before long he was overcome by an exhaustive preaching schedule and suffered again with a heart ailment.

In 1896 he married Sarah Thistlethwaite, the daughter of a devout Quaker family. They had a son who became deathly ill. After pleading with God to heal him, Parham testified to his complete recovery. Praying for the sick then became a featured part of his ministry.

As his ministry gained more recognition, Parham moved his family and base of operations to Topeka, Kansas. There 27 year old Parham founded Bethel Healing Home, renting a space at the plush Stone mansion. It became known as Stone Folly. There he enlarging his ministry to include rescue missions for prostitutes and the homeless, an employment bureau, an orphanage service, and later a Bible school. He also began to publish a holiness periodical – “the Apostolic Faith.”



Stone Folly, site of Parham's Bethel Bible School.

http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199903/068_tongues.

Convinced that God had commissioned his students at the Bible school as missionaries in the “last days,” they gathered to pray for the promised “latter rain” outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and acquire the same spiritual power that marked the expansion of the Early Church.⁴ His teachings included divine healing, Entire Sanctification, and the belief in the imminent return of Christ.

Earlier evangelists before the turn of the century referred to Entire Sanctification as the Baptism in the Spirit, which meant an ushering in of a higher stage of Christian living providing purification and empowerment, but did not include speaking in tongues. In the radical holiness circuit, however, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit referred to the “fire-baptism” doctrine of a third experience of grace. Critics called it the “third blessing heresy.” Parham endorsed this doctrine; however, he wanted to find a definite distinction between the second and third blessing. Were they separate, or were they supportive of one another. Consumed in this thought, Parham visited various holiness centers, such as those run by John Alexander Dowie, A.B. Simpson, and Frank W. Sandford. Under Sandford, this “third experience” doctrine was reinforced by demonstrations of the empowering function of Spirit baptism. Parham began to envision that the Spirit would confer known languages, known at time as “missionary tongues,” on believers in response to their faith. He believed that Jesus would give them a heathen tongue, which they then could go out to the missionary field to use to communicate with

² The Azusa Street Revival: The Holy Spirit in America. Charisma House. 2006.

³ <http://www.sec-comm.com/cparham.htm>

⁴ McGee, Gary. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199903/068_tongues.cfm

that particular heathen nation. This, however, had only been demonstrated by a few people who had received this language and used it in a preaching capacity. Parham wrote of these experiences in his Apostolic Faith magazine.

Parham began teaching at his Bible school about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues, but considered it as the third blessing. By the beginning of 1901 A.D., his first student received glossolalia - the gift of tongues.⁵

Glossolalia

From the Greek, "γλῶσσα" (glossa), tongue and "λαλῶ" (lalô), to speak) comprises the utterance of what appears (to the casual listener) either as an unknown foreign language ([xenoglossia](#)), meaningless syllables, or utterance of an unknown [mystical language](#); the utterances sometimes occur as part of religious worship – speaking in tongues. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossolalia>

The first recorded - Baptism of the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues.

Parham had to leave his school for a few days on business, so he gave his students an assignment to search the Scriptures while he was gone to see what it had to say about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. His intent was to have his students scripturally search for any physical evidences of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.⁶

His students at Bethel Bible College were obedient to follow his command. They not only found physical evidence, but experienced something divinely miraculous. On January 1, 1901 A.D., Agnes Ozman, one of Parham's students began speaking in tongues. She began speaking in Bohemian and continued in Chinese for three days. This was verified by someone who spoke and understood perfect Chinese language dialect. As such, she became the first person on historical record as having spoken in tongues. This began a wave of the Holy Spirit that continues today.

Charles Parham in Houston

Biting criticisms from the newspapers and area residents, along with the death of his son and the abrupt sale of Stone Folly, led Parham to begin traveling and preach divine healing. Daily services continued for months, with many conversions and healings. Several hundred people received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. This success later inspired Parham to move to Houston, Texas to start another Bible school and evangelize in the surrounding area with his students.

In the summer of 1905 A.D. Charles Parham came to Houston, Texas to conduct a citywide crusade in Bryan Hall. He began preaching a controversial "third blessing" after sanctification message, which he called the "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," referring to the discovered doctrine of speaking in tongues that his students made back in 1901 A.D. "Parham considered this move to be a sign of the last days – God's way of restoring to the church apostolic faith of the New Testament. It also confirmed to him that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit would be accompanied, or 'evidenced,' by speaking in tongues."⁷

⁵ McGee, Gary B. www.agts.edu/faculty/faculty_publications/articles/mcgee_parham.

⁶ <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/penta.html>

⁷ Hyatt, Eddie. The Azusa Street Revival: The Holy Spirit in America. 100 Years. Special Centennial Ed. Charisma House. 2006.

Lucy Farrow

Born in slavery in Norfolk, Virginia, Lucy Farrow distinguished herself as a teacher, preacher, and missionary in early Pentecostalism. She pastored an all black church in the Houston area. After she, and her friend William Seymour, attended one of Parham's meetings, they both heartily embraced his message; however, each did not experience speaking in tongues at that time. Lucy Farrow developed such a friendship with Parham to where she was invited by Parham to serve as a governess to their children back in Kansas. She then passed her pastorate over to William Seymour and left for Kansas. While serving as a governess, Lucy Farrow was baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues.

That fall she returned with the Parhams to Houston for another crusade. With the planning of opening a Bible school, Lucy Farrow encouraged William Seymour to enroll.

William Seymour

William Seymour was born on May 2, 1870 A.D., in Centerville, Louisiana, to Simon and Phyllis Seymour, who were former slaves. Life was tough with racial prejudices and hardship following the Civil War. His father had been a Union soldier in war, and post war conditions brought on poverty and oppression in the reconstructed South.⁸

Young Seymour was raised Baptist by his parents. In his youth, he often had visions of God and studied the Scriptures diligently. At the age of twenty-five, he moved to Indianapolis, where he worked as a railroad porter and a waiter in a fashionable restaurant. His church, while in Indianapolis, was a black Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1900 A.D. he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio and enrolled in a Holiness Bible School, which emphasized Entire Sanctification, divine healing, and the expectation that there would be a worldwide Holy Spirit revival before the Lord's soon return. "Seymour heard God call him to become a preacher, but he resisted. Shortly thereafter, he caught smallpox, a disease that often killed its victims. Seymour was left blind in his left eye. He felt his illness had been a punishment for not obeying God's call. Seymour then moved to Houston, Texas, to live with some relatives lost during slavery times."⁹

At the encouragement of his friend Lucy Farrow, Seymour enrolled in Parham's Bible school in Houston and his intention was to continue to pastor the church while attending classes. There was, however, one problem. Customs laws within Texas mandated racial segregation. Skirting around those laws, Parham allowed Seymour to sit in an adjoining room and listen to classes through an open door. Parham taught that in every instance of Holy Spirit filling, God would give the believer the ability to speak in a foreign language for the purpose of evangelism.¹⁰

William Seymour was later invited to pastor a Los Angeles storefront holiness mission whose parishioners were primarily black. This small congregation had been expelled from the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles because they had accepted the holiness teaching of a second blessing

⁸ <http://www.azusastreet.org/bookstoreazusa1.htm>

⁹ <http://trailblazerbooks.com/books/Journey/Jrny-bio.html>

¹⁰ <http://chi.gospelcom.net/DAILYF/2002/04/daily-04-09-2002.shtml>

of sanctification. One of its members was a good friend to William Seymour. Looking for the possibility of Seymour becoming their pastor, a trip to Houston was taken to hear him preach. Afterward, Seymour was promptly asked to fill the pulpit ministry of the mission over on Santa Fe Street. With some financial assistance from Charles Parham, Seymour traveled by train westward and arrived in Los Angeles in February 1906 A.D.

In the first service at the mission in Los Angeles, William Seymour approached the subject of the “so-called third blessing,” but his audience equated the baptism in the Holy Spirit with their experience of sanctification and rejected the idea that tongues was necessary. As such, the doors were locked to him preaching, and he was without a church to minister to.



Some members of the mission took compassion on Seymour and invited him to stay in the homes of Edward Lee and later Richard Asberry who lived at 214 Bonnie Brae Street. In a hunger to have more of God, Seymour spent most of his time in prayer.



The Asberry's saw his hunger for God so they opened their home to evening prayer meetings. In those prayer meetings he told them about his friend Lucy Farrow who had introduced him to the idea of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.



One of those present in the prayer meeting was Jennie Moore, who later became Seymour's wife. When she spoke in tongues, she also went to the piano, and never having a lesson in her life, played the piano and sang in tongues. Suddenly, the power of God flooded the room, and virtually everyone present broke out in tongues as well. The local people kept coming throughout the night. By day break there was no way of getting near the house. When then got near the house, they would fall under the power of God. For three days, people kept coming. Sinners were saved and the sick were healed. Falling under the power of God, the prayer group broke loose with singing, dancing, clapping, and shouts of praise. They continued until the foundation of the house gave way. It thus became necessary to find larger quarters.

An old warehouse was found at 312 - Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles. The building had once been a Methodist Episcopal church, but more recently a stable and warehouse. They cleaned up the debris and installed rough plank benches and a makeshift pulpit made from wooden shoeboxes. On April 14, 1906, Pastor William Seymour held his first meeting in his new facility. So began the twentieth century's most momentous revival.

