History of the Azusa Street Revival

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for the history section of the Azusa Street Centennial website of the Center for Spiritual Renewal located in Cleveland, Tennessee. The Azusa Street Centennial convened in Los Angeles, California in April 2006 with almost 20,000 in attendance. Dr. Morgan served on the Centennial Ministry Team.

Los Angeles 1906 ~ A New Pentecost

Los Angeles, California, was a popular destination at the turn of the twentieth century for many Americans dreaming of greater opportunities and purpose. By 1906 this city was quickly becoming a major hub of activity. In April of that year two events focused the world’s attention on Los Angeles: The city was impacted by an earthquake that also devastated San Francisco, and services conducted in a small holiness mission on Azusa Street birthed spiritual renewal globally. Thousands of individuals converged on the city to attend the revival at Azusa Street’s mission, where they found a renewed purpose and passion in serving Jesus Christ and were commissioned to share the message of His love and power with others. Almost a century later, the activities of the renowned Azusa Street outpouring in Los Angeles are hailed as one of the greatest events in Christian history. Today, Pentecostal and Charismatic believers throughout the world reflect on the significance of Azusa Street in their spiritual heritage and development.

Pentecost Prior to Azusa Street

Los Angeles was not the only place and time of spiritual renewal, however. The Spirit of God was being poured out in other parts of the world simultaneously. Revival was sweeping parts of Europe, specifically in Wales. In the United States the same transforming revivals were taking place in Minnesota, North Carolina, and Texas. Among the spiritual manifestations accompanying these outpourings included remarkable healings, complete transformations of lifestyle, deliverance from ungodly habits, physical demonstrations of emotion, and speaking in languages unknown to the speaker. For centuries there had been testimonies of some of these same manifestations among isolated groups, such as the Huguenots in France and Irvingites in England. In 1891 Daniel Awrey spoke in other tongues in Delaware, Ohio, and his wife spoke in tongues in 1899 in Beniah, Tennessee. Since the days of the early apostles, there are recordings throughout history of men and women speaking in languages unknown to them. And to those who met at Azusa Street it was viewed as a sign of the restoration of true New Testament Christianity. These
early “Pentecostals” believed they were experiencing the same infilling of God’s power as the apostles did on the Day of Pentecost. Obeying the commands of Christ upon His ascension, the early apostles gathered together in Jerusalem to await the promised Holy Spirit, who empowered the Christian Church to complete the work that Christ had started on the earth. Even today, Pentecostal and Charismatic believers reflect on the passages recorded by Luke in Acts, chapter 2: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance,” (Acts 2:1-4, KJV).

In addition, sincere Christians in Los Angeles had been praying for revival and seeking more of God for several years prior to the 1906 outpouring. Frank Bartleman, a revival participant, wrote, “It would be a great mistake to attempt to attribute the Pentecostal beginning in Los Angeles to any one man, either in prayer or in preaching…‘Pentecost’ did not drop suddenly out of heaven. God was with us in large measure for a long time before the final outpouring.” In addition to Bartleman, some of those early seekers included E.J. Boehmer, Elmer Fisher, Joseph Smale, Demos and Goolisar Shakarian, and Louis and Cena Osterberg. Consumed with the desire for more of God, these men and women prayed, witnessed, preached, and prophesied about a forthcoming outpouring of God’s Spirit.

**Charles Fox Parham influences the Pentecostal Movement**

While great revivals were taking place around the world, perhaps the most noted outpouring prior to the Los Angeles revival occurred in January 1901 at the Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. After studying the Bible and spending time in prayer, several students experienced glossolalia (speaking in other languages). Agnes Ozman is reported to have been the first to receive the experience, followed by several other students and the teacher, Charles Fox Parham. As a result, Parham soon coined the term that speaking in other tongues was the “Bible evidence” that one had been baptized with the Holy Ghost, becoming convinced that this was in accordance with scripture. Up to this point most holiness adherents believed that one was baptized with the Holy Spirit upon being sanctified. Parham and others, however, taught that there were three works of grace available for the Christian, namely salvation, sanctification, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the “Bible evidence” of speaking in other tongues.

Meanwhile, William Seymour was traveling throughout the United States in search of a better life. An African-American from Louisiana, he was the son of former slaves.
Much of Seymour’s childhood spiritual influence came from Roman Catholicism and Baptist traditions. It was during his travels that Seymour entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

He was converted in Indianapolis and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. A few years later he was “wholly sanctified” in Cincinnati, Ohio, during his affiliation with another holiness group. He became a preacher following a severe case of smallpox that left him blind in one eye and his face disfigured.

In 1905 Seymour traveled to Houston, Texas, in search of relatives. There he attended a black holiness congregation pastored by Lucy Farrow. (She was a former slave and the niece of famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass.) Farrow moved to Kansas City to serve as a governess and cook for evangelist Charles Fox Parham, at which time Seymour became the interim pastor for the holiness congregation in Houston. In the late fall of 1905, Farrow returned to Houston and testified of her spiritual experience. She had been baptized with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. Soon after Farrow returned to Houston, Parham relocated his ministry there as well.

Parham conducted services in Bryan Hall and taught training classes on conviction, repentance, sanctification, healing, the Holy Spirit in different operations, prophecies, and the Book of Revelation. Seymour was faithful in attending Parham’s services and training sessions. However, due to segregation laws of the time Seymour was forced to sit in the hallway while listening to Parham and others teach. He was not even permitted to pray with others while seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, Seymour hungered for more of God and was determined to learn. Parham later noted that Seymour could recite word-for-word the teachings he learned while sitting under Parham’s ministry.

**Pentecost Comes to California**

Los Angeles resident Neely Terry, who attended a small holiness church pastored by Julia Hutchins, made a trip to Houston, Texas, in 1905. She attended the church that William Seymour was pastoring. Although Seymour had not yet received the baptism of the Holy Ghost with evidence of speaking in other tongues, he was convinced that it was biblical and preached the message with great fervency. Impressed by Seymour’s character and message, Terry told her church about him upon her return to California and they invited him to visit. Seymour agreed to go, much to the shock of Charles Parham and others in Houston. Nonetheless, they laid hands on him and sent him forth for his evangelistic endeavor, which was originally scheduled to last for one month.
Seymour arrived in Los Angeles on February 22, 1906, and within two days was preaching at the holiness church pastored by Julia Hutchins. He preached on regeneration, sanctification, faith healing, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with evidence of speaking in other tongues. Hutchins rejected Seymour’s teaching and within a few days locked the doors of the church to keep him from preaching there. A council of elders rejected Seymour’s teaching, predominately because he had not yet experienced the blessing about which he was preaching. Some felt that he should discontinue preaching about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues. Yet, in the midst of the persecution, Seymour continued to be steadfast and unmovable in his work for the Lord. Those in the congregation who were hungering and thirsting after the deeper things of God felt compelled to spend hours in prayer. Several received confirming visions that God was about to bless Los Angeles with a spiritual outpouring.

The group continued to gather for prayer and worship, ultimately conducting services in the home of Richard and Ruth Asbery at 214 Bonnie Brae Street. Others learned of the meetings and began to attend, including some white families of nearby holiness churches. Then, on April 9, 1906, a breakthrough occurred as Edward Lee was baptized with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues after Seymour had prayed with him. The two then made their way to the Asbery home. There they had a song, prayers and testimonies, followed by Seymour’s sermon using Acts 2:4 as a text. Following the sermon Lee raised his hands and began to speak in tongues. The Spirit of God moved upon those attending and six others began to speak in tongues that same evening. Jennie Moore, who would later marry William Seymour, was among them. She became the first woman in Los Angeles to receive the Spirit-baptism. She then began to sing in tongues and play the piano under the power of God, having never played the piano prior. A few days later, on April 12, William Seymour finally received his baptism at about four o’clock in the morning, after having prayed all night long.

One eye-witness, Emma Cotton, later reminisced about those experiences: They shouted three days and nights. The people came from everywhere. By the next morning, there was no way of getting nearer the house. As the people came in they would fall under the power, and the whole city was stirred. They shouted there until the foundation of the house gave way, but no one was hurt. During those three days, there were many people who received their baptism, who had just come to see what it was. The sick were healed, and sinners were saved just as they came in.

Moving to Azusa Street
Following the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Los Angeles, interest grew in the prayer meetings. The crowds became too large for the Asbury home on Bonnie Brae
Street and were moved to the yard. Soon this became too limited as well. The group then discovered an available building at 312 Azusa Street, which had originally been constructed as an African Methodist Episcopal Church. Having fallen into disrepair, the building was used as a stable to house hay and livestock. Nonetheless, it was secured and cleaned in preparation for services. Within days, the Los Angeles press learned of the revival services conducted at the Azusa Street Mission and newspaper reports were published throughout the United States and the world. Thousands learned of the revival and were drawn to the meeting. They all came together in worship: men, women, children, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, rich, poor, illiterate, and educated. They flocked to Los Angeles with both skepticism and spiritual hunger.

In September 1906 a local newspaper reporter frowned on the events taking place and wrote that the Azusa Street mission was a “disgraceful intermingling of the races...they cry and make howling noises all day and into the night. They run, jump, shake all over, shout to the top of their voice, spin around in circles, fall out on the sawdust blanketed floor jerking, kicking and rolling all over it. Some of them pass out and do not move for hours as though they were dead. These people appear to be mad, mentally deranged or under a spell. They claim to be filled with the spirit. They have a one eyed, illiterate, Negro as their preacher who stays on his knees much of the time with his head hidden between the wooden milk crates. He doesn't talk very much but at times he can be heard shouting, ‘Repent,’ and he's supposed to be running the thing... They repeatedly sing the same song, ‘The Comforter Has Come.’”

Yet, while some stirred the waters of opposition, the river of God’s Spirit was flowing mightily in Los Angeles. God had proven faithful in answering prayer; revival had come. Within months the Azusa Street mission, known as the Apostolic Faith Mission, was the largest congregation in the city, with as many as 1300 attending the services, and the revival fervor continued for three years. Services were held three times daily, often without a break in the “spontaneous” services. Humility was fundamental at the mission, and Seymour often admonished that “our highest place is low at His [Jesus’] feet.” The message was the love of God, and unity and equality were priority. Frank Bartleman noted, “The ‘color line’ was washed away by the blood.” Women were provided positions of leadership at the mission as well. The Apostolic Faith, published by the mission and reaching a worldwide distribution of more than 50,000, promoted such unity. In 1907 the paper noted, “One token of the Lord’s coming is that He is melting all races and nations together, and they are filled with the power and glory of God. He is baptizing by one spirit into one body and making up a people that will be ready to meet Him when He comes.”
**Eyewitness Accounts from Azusa Street:**
Revival participant A. C. Valdez, Sr. later wrote: On the platform, a black man [Seymour] sat behind two wooden boxes, one on top of the other. They were his pulpit. Occasionally, as Pastor Seymour prayed, his head would be so low that it disappeared behind the top wooden box. Everything about the Azusa Street Mission fascinated me—especially the prayer or “tarrying room” on the second floor. Usually one hundred or more black, brown and white people prayerfully waited there for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Dozens of canes, braces, crutches and blackened smoking pipes leaned against the barnlike walls.

Many times waves of glory would come over the tarrying room or meeting room, and people would cry out prayers of thanks or praise as they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Meetings used to go past midnight and into the early hours of the morning. Hours there seemed like minutes. Sometimes after a wave of glory, a lot of people would speak in tongues. Then a holy quietness would come over the place, followed by a chorus of prayer in languages we had never before heard.

Many were slain in the Spirit [in a trance-like state], buckling to the floor, unconscious, in a beautiful Holy Spirit cloud, and the Lord gave them visions. How I enjoyed shouting and praising God. During the tarrying, we used to break out in songs about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, “Fill Me Now,” “Joy Unspeakable,” and “Love Lifted Me.” Praise about the cleansing and precious blood of Jesus would just spring from our mouths. In between choruses, heavenly music would fill the hall, and we would break into tears. Suddenly the crowd seemed to forget how to sing in English. Out of their mouths would come new languages and lovely harmony that no human beings could have learned.

**Beyond Azusa Street**
As a direct result of the Azusa Street outpouring, thousands of individuals were led into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. People began to study the Word of God, become convicted of sin, and surrender their lives to Christ. They were baptized with the Holy Ghost, who led and guided them into greater spiritual truths found in the Word of God. The Spirit of God empowered them with boldness to fulfill the great commission. Signs and wonders followed those who believed, such as blinded eyes being opened, deaf being able to hear, mute being able to speak, the lame made to walk, and the dead raised to life again. Such reports are commonplace among these early Pentecostal believers, and all of these signs testify of the glory and power of the Risen Christ. These early Spirit-filled believers considered everyone to be witnesses, and many sailed to foreign lands as missionaries to share the gospel.
message. This move of God was not only for Los Angeles, but it was for the whole world—even future generations. What happened at Azusa Street has helped renew Christianity, bringing fresh vision and passion to the Great Commission. Consumed with zeal for God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, individuals have taken the Word of God to diverse villages and races across the globe. As a result many have learned of the love and grace of Christ, ultimately preparing the world for His return. That same power of God is still filling men and women with the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Christ throughout the world. Ultimately hundreds of millions have been reached as an indirect result of Azusa Street. Today there are more than 500 million Pentecostal and Charismatic believers across the globe. May we continue to go forward in the power of the Holy Spirit as witness and ministers to reach this world for Jesus Christ.

William Seymour ~ A Brief Biography

William Joseph Seymour, pastor of the Azusa Street mission, is recognized globally for his influence on the Pentecostal movement of the Twentieth Century. Born on May 2, 1870 in Centerville (St. Mary Parish), Louisiana, his parents had been slaves and his father fought with the Union Army during the US Civil War. Seymour was reared in poverty and began traveling at a young age—living in Memphis, St. Louis, and Indianapolis. At age 25, he worked as a waiter for some of the most upscale restaurants and hotels in Indianapolis.

Early Spiritual Experiences

It was in Indianapolis that Seymour personally accepted Jesus Christ, although during childhood he was affiliated with the Baptist Church and the Roman Catholic Church. (He was christened in the Catholic tradition on September 4, 1870, at the Church of the Assumption in Franklin, Louisiana.) Upon his adult conversion in Indianapolis he joined the Simpson Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church and became firmly established in the rising Holiness movement. A few years later, while living in Cincinnati, Ohio, he received a deeper spiritual experience and testified of being “wholly sanctified.” There he joined the Church of God Restoration Movement, also known as The Evening Light movement. This group taught that a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit would precede the return of Christ, and they were committed to a radical holiness doctrine and promoted Christian unity and racial reconciliation.

In 1905 Seymour moved to Houston, Texas, in search of relatives. He attended a black holiness congregation pastored by Lucy Farrow, and soon he served as interim pastor when Farrow moved to Kansas City to work in the home of Charles Fox Parham. Later that year, Farrow returned to Houston and testified of her baptism with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.
Soon afterward, Charles Fox Parham relocated his ministry to Houston and taught Bible training classes. Seymour faithfully attended these classes despite segregation laws of the time, which forced him to sit in the hallway while listening to Parham and others teach. Seymour was not even permitted to pray with others while seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, Parham later noted that Seymour could recite word-for-word the teachings he learned while sitting under Parham’s ministry.

**Receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

In 1906 Seymour arrived in Los Angeles, California, upon accepting an invitation to preach at a Holiness mission there. Seymour preached on the baptism of the Holy Ghost with evidence of speaking in other tongues and other subjects. However, because he had not received the Holy Spirit baptism personally, many were skeptical and he was forbidden to preach for the congregation. Seymour then began participating in a Bible study and prayer meeting at the home of Richard and Ruth Asbery at 214 Bonnie Brae Street. Soon several individuals were baptized with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues, including William Seymour. He finally received his Holy Spirit baptism about four o'clock in the morning on April 12th, after having prayed all night.

**A Faithful Pastor**

Interest in the movement increased, and soon the services relocated to 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles. Seymour led these services with the help of a volunteer staff comprised of blacks, whites, men and women. The local press published stories about the spiritual manifestations experienced at the mission, and soon other newspapers throughout the United States and the world were informing readers about the Azusa Street outpouring. Seymour also published *The Apostolic Faith* magazine that was circulated globally. Upon learning about the revival, thousands of individuals attended the meetings, experienced spiritual transformations, and carried the message of Jesus and His power throughout out the world. The revival continued unabated for about three years, until 1909.

During the peak of the Azusa Street meetings, Seymour married Jennie Evans Moore on May 13, 1908. She had been active in the Asbery home Bible studies and was a faithful participant at the Azusa Street mission. She and Seymour formed a ministry team, and she often preached at the mission in his absence. The couple resided in a small apartment above the mission.
Leaving a Legacy
Following the revival, Seymour continued to serve as pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission on Azusa Street. He envisioned organizing schools, rescue missions, and planting other congregations, but most of these goals were never actualized before his death. He also traveled throughout the United States, fervently preaching against racism. Ironically, he ultimately suffered rejection from some of his initial converts over racial issues.

William Joseph Seymour died on September 28, 1922, and is buried at Evergreen Cemetery in East Los Angeles, California. His widow, Jennie, continued to pastor the mission after his death until at least 1931.

Hailed by some as the founder of the modern Pentecostal movement, Seymour's consecrated lifestyle, devotion to prayer, and unwavering commitment to preach Jesus Christ and the full gospel helped spark spiritual renewal in the United States and the world. Today, over half a billion Pentecostal and Charismatic believers throughout the world are a testimony of the pivotal impact that the Azusa Street meetings had on Christianity. Consequently, the Azusa Street revival has been noted as one of the major world events of the Twentieth Century. It is evident that William Seymour was a willing vessel devoted to his Lord, and that God used him in a powerful way to help spread the message of Jesus Christ to all the nations of the earth.
Sources

Some of this historical material was gleaned from the research of Larry Martin, particularly from his books:


Other sources include:


*Nickle, Thomas R.*, *Azusa Street Outpouring: as told to me by those who were there.* Hanford, CA: Great Commission International, 1979.

