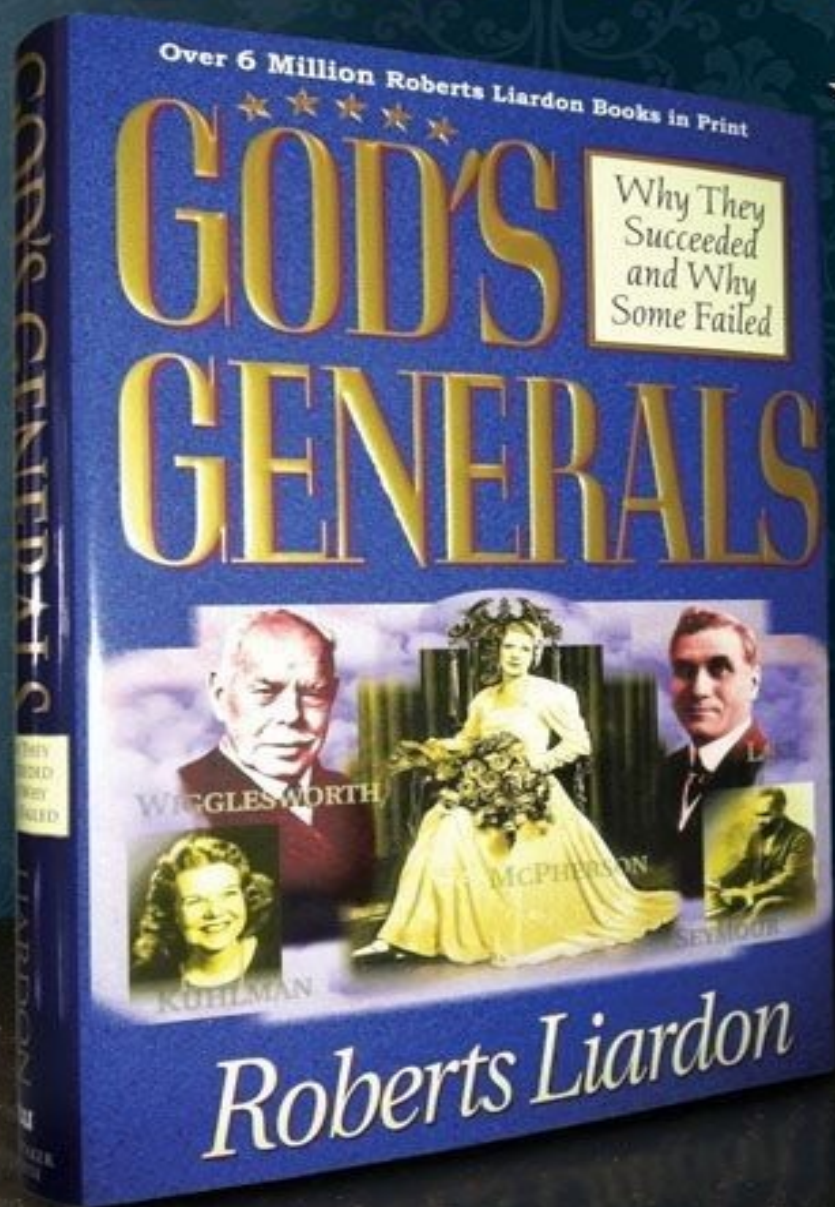


GOD'S GENERALS



CHARLES F.
PARHAM

ROBERTS LIARDON

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WHITAKER
HOUSE

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God's Generals: Charles F. Parham

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Introduction

When I was almost twelve years old, the Lord appeared to me in a vision. In this vision, He told me to study the lives of the great preachers—to learn of their successes and their failures. From that day on, I gave a large portion of my life to the study of church history.

When prominent people in the secular world die, people begin to look at their natural accomplishments. But when leaders in the body of Christ die, I believe Jesus would have us look at not only what was accomplished in the natural world through their lives, but at what they also accomplished within the body of Christ. The purpose of their remembrance is not to praise or criticize the leaders, but to see him or her as an example for our own lives.

The “Generals” that are written of in this book were human. Their stories represent a collaboration of the way life is. I have not made anyone out to be superhuman or bionic. I have told of their tears, their laughter, their successes, and their failures. They were all persecuted, lied to, betrayed, slandered, as well as honored, adored, and supported.

But most importantly, I have attempted to reveal the secrets of the power in their individual calls to the ministry—how they operated, what they believed, and what motivated them to change each of their generations for God.

The failures that took place in the lives of these great men and women will attempt to take place again. But their successes also challenge us and are waiting to be grasped again. There is nothing new under the sun. If there is something new to you, it is because you are new under the sun.

It takes more than a desire to fulfill the will of God. It takes spiritual strength. As you read these chapters, allow the Spirit of God to take you on a journey that points out the areas in your life which need to be focused or subdued. Then, determine that your life and ministry will be a spiritual success in this generation that will bless the nations of the earth to the glory of God.

—Roberts Liardon

Charles F. Parham

“The Father of Pentecost”

“At Christ’s Second Coming the Church will be found with the same power that the Apostles and the early Church possessed. The power of Pentecost is manifest in us. The Christian religion must be demonstrated. The world wants to be shown. Then let God’s power be manifest through us.”¹

Charles Fox Parham gave his life to restore the revolutionary truths of healing and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the church. (Note: whenever the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” is referred to in this chapter, it is implied that the experience is always accompanied with the “evidence of speaking in tongues.”) The first forty years of the twentieth century were powerfully visited by this man’s Pentecostal message that changed the lives of thousands around the world.

The miracles that occurred in Charles Parham’s ministry are too numerous to record. Multiplied thousands found salvation, healing, deliverance, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When he proclaimed to the world in 1901 that “speaking in tongues was the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” the Pentecostal truths of the early church were wonderfully restored. But the evangelist paid a price for it. The relentless backlash of persecution and slander Parham endured throughout his life would have destroyed others of lesser character. But for Parham, it only served to strengthen his hardened determination and purposeful faith.

PREACH TILL THE COWS COME HOME

Charles F. Parham was born on June 4, 1873 in Muscatine, Iowa. After his birth, his parents, William and Ann Maria Parham, moved south to Cheney, Kansas. They truly lived as and considered themselves American pioneers.

Aside from the rugged pioneer life, early childhood was not easy for young Parham. At six months of age, he was stricken with a fever that left him bedridden. For the first five years of his life, he was plagued with dramatic spasms, and his forehead swelled, making his head abnormally large. Then, at the tender age of seven, he lost his mother.

Though Parham had four other brothers, he felt an overwhelming sense of

grief and loneliness when his beloved mother died. His memories left him melancholy and despondent, as he thought of his mother's loving attention during his illness. As his mother said her last good-byes before dying, she looked at young Parham and said, "Charlie, be good." There, in the presence of God and his dying mother, he vowed to meet her in heaven.² Those simple words made a deep impression on him. It has been said that they were influential in his later decision to give his life to God. Parham's father would later remarry a young woman, Harriett Miller, who was greatly loved and needed by the entire family.

When Parham was nine, he contracted inflammatory rheumatism. The condition left his body tied in knots. When the affliction finally lifted, his skin was completely transparent. The boy then developed a tapeworm, which required such strong medications that the lining of his stomach was eaten away and destroyed. His many trials progressed as the medications stunted his growth for three years.³

It was also at the tender age of nine that Parham was called to the ministry. Because he and his brothers had been taken to Sunday school during their first years of life, Parham enjoyed an early awareness of God. Even before he was converted, the boy's constant thought was, Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel.⁴

So, he began to prepare himself for God's calling by pursuing literature. Though Kansas was not yet modernized, and libraries weren't readily available, he managed to collect a few history books along with his Bible. And he found other ways to prepare himself for the ministry by doing his chores and helping his brothers. While working with the family livestock, Parham was often known to give the cattle rousing sermons on various subjects ranging from heaven to hell.

"LIGHTNING" THAT PENETRATED

Parham never regretted that he had to do so much studying on his own. It actually worked to his advantage. There were so few churches and preachers on the prairie, and with no one to teach him otherwise, Parham studied God's Word and took it literally. There were no conferences of man-made theology in his doctrine, and there were no traditions to break through. From an early age, up to the age of thirteen, Parham had heard the sermons of only two preachers. It was during one of these meetings that Parham was converted.

Parham believed that deep repentance must take place within a convert's heart, yet he felt void of such an emotional experience. So, after seeking to be saved at the meeting, he began to question his conversion even as he walked home. He was so weighed down with a heavy heart that he was unable to pray. He found himself humming the song "I Am Coming to the Cross," and upon reaching the third verse, Parham immediately became assured of his conversion. Of the experience, he later said, "There flashed from the heavens a light above the brightness of the sun, like a stroke of lightning it penetrated, thrilling every fiber of my being."⁵ From that moment forward, Parham was never swayed from the "Anchor" of his salvation.

"WILL YOU PREACH?"

After his dramatic conversion, Parham served as a Sunday school teacher and worker. He held his first public meeting at the age of fifteen, with marked results. He preached for a short time, then enrolled at Southwestern Kansas College at the age of sixteen.

When he started college, Parham had every intention of entering the ministry, but he began to notice the disrespect and general disgust that the secular world held toward ministers. And he began to hear about the conditions of poverty that accompanied ministry. Discouraged by these stories, he looked upon other professions with great interest. Soon, Parham denied his calling and began to backslide.

In remembering his traumatic childhood illnesses, Parham reasoned that the medical field would be a good pursuit. So, he began studying to be a physician. But he was constantly tormented in remembering his promise to become a missionary, and he soon contracted rheumatic fever.

After he had suffered for months from the flames of the fever, a physician visited his bedside and pronounced Parham near death. But those bedridden months had prompted Parham to remember the words that had once rung in his ears: "Will you preach? Will you preach?" Again he hungered to answer his call, but he didn't want to live in the impoverished conditions that seemed unavoidable for ministers of his day. So, he cried out to God, "If You will let me go somewhere, someplace, where I wouldn't have to take collections or beg for a living, I will preach."

Parham was so sedated with morphine in his condition that he was unable to

think of more words to pray. So, he began reciting the Lord's Prayer. When he came to words "thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," his mind cleared, and he envisioned God's majesty. He caught a slight glimpse of how God's will was manifested through every ounce of creation and realized that it was God's will to heal. So, he cried out to God, praying, "If Thy will is done in me, I shall be whole." As he said this prayer, every joint in his body loosened, and every organ was healed. Only his ankles remained weak. But his lungs were clear, and his body recovered.

Following his recovery, Parham was quickly asked to hold an evangelistic meeting. He renewed his promise to God and vowed to quit college to enter the ministry if God would heal his ankles. Crawling under a tree, Parham began to pray, and God immediately sent a "mighty electric current" through his ankles, making them whole.⁶

A "BUMPKIN" WITH POWER

Parham held his first evangelistic meeting at the age of eighteen in the Pleasant Valley Schoolhouse, near Tonganoxie, Kansas. He was a stranger to the country community when he asked permission to hold a revival at their school. So, when they gave their approval, Parham went up on a hillside, stretched his hand out over the valley and prayed that the entire community be taken for God:

The first night of the meeting, the attendance was good, but most of the people weren't used to active participation. He received few responses at first, but before the evening was over, there were many conversions.

The Thistlewaites attended this meeting and wrote of it to their daughter. Their daughter, Sarah, had grown up in the community and was in Kansas City attending school. When she returned home, the meeting had closed, but the community had arranged for Parham to come back the next Sunday.

At the meeting, the refined Sarah Thistlewaite was surprised by what she saw. Parham looked much different from the wealthy, cultured preachers she had been used to in Kansas City. And when he took the pulpit, he didn't have his sermon written out like the preachers she had seen. In fact, Parham never wrote down what he was going to say. He relied on the Holy Spirit to give him inspiration. Then, as Sarah listened to the young evangelist preach, she realized her lack of devotion to the faith. She knew she was following Jesus from "far off," and she made the decision to consecrate her life totally to the Lord. She also began to

cultivate her friendship with Charles Parham, and soon, what began as a simple interest, turned into a union of purpose and destiny.

DENOMINATIONS? NO MORE!

When Parham was nineteen years old, he was asked to pastor the Methodist church in Eudora, Kansas. This he did faithfully, while also pastoring in Linwood on Sunday afternoons. Sarah and her family attended his services regularly.

The congregation grew steadily, and a new building was built to hold the people. The denomination's leadership saw a great future for Parham, and they would have given him most any pastorate or assignment if he would have submitted to their authority. But all was not well between Parham and the Methodist denomination. Parham had vowed to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, despite what other men asked him to do. In advising new converts, he would exhort them to find any church home, even if it wasn't the Methodist church. He explained that joining a denomination was not a prerequisite for heaven, and that denominations spent more time preaching on their particular church and its leaders than they did on Jesus Christ and His covenant. This caused many conflicts within his denominational ranks. Speaking of these conflicts, Parham said:

“Finding the confines of a pastorate, and feeling the narrowness of sectarian churchism, I was often in conflict with the higher authorities, which eventually resulted in open rupture; and I left denominationalism forever, though suffering bitter persecution at the hands of the church.... Oh, the narrowness of many who call themselves the Lord's own!”⁷

Parham's parents were greatly disappointed in their son, since they were strong supporters of the church. So when Parham resigned, he sought rest in the home of friends, who welcomed him as their own son.

Parham began to pray for direction. Many slanderous accusations had been leveled against him, and he was concerned that the rising persecution would forever ruin his work. Then one day while deep in prayer, he heard these words: “I made Myself of no reputation.” Immediately, Parham was strengthened and encouraged. As the Spirit of God continued to give him Scripture, he set his course. He would enter the evangelistic field, unassociated with any form of denomination. He would hold his meetings in schools, halls, churches,

tabernacles—wherever he could—and believe for the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself in a mighty way.

While holding a meeting in western Kansas, Parham wrote to Sarah Thistlewaite and proposed marriage. He warned Sarah that his life was totally dedicated to the Lord and that his future was unclear, but if she could trust God with him, they should marry. Charles and Sarah were married six months later, on December 31, 1896, in her grandfather's home.

HEAL YOURSELF!

As the young couple started traveling, they were received with great approval. September 1897 saw the birth of their first son, Claude. But the joy of the event was short-lived as Charles fell ill with heart disease. No amount of medicine seemed to work as he grew weaker. Then, without warning, tiny Claude was stricken with a high fever. The Parhams walked the floor, praying for the baby, but to no avail. The physician couldn't diagnose Claude's fever and therefore had no cure.

Parham was called to pray for another man who was ill, so in his own weakened state, he left for the man's home. While praying for the man, the Scripture "Physician, heal thyself" (Luke 4:23) exploded inside of Parham. The power of God had touched him, and he was healed instantly.

Parham eagerly rushed home after the visit, grabbed Sarah, and told her of his experience, then prayed for his baby. He then threw away all of his medicines, vowing to never again trust anything but the Word of God. The fever left Claude's body, and he grew to be a healthy child.

I want to say something here. Parham's healing ministry was always controversial to those who misunderstood it. He lived in a time when physicians, as a whole, stood contrary to the gospel. It was Parham's personal faith that inspired him to throw away his medicine. He believed that to trust totally in medicine was to deny the blood of Jesus and the price Christ paid on the cross. When true revelation comes, it is invincible. It will always produce the success it illustrates. Parham's deep revelation was transferred to his family, and medicine was forbidden in his home. But he left the final decision regarding their use of medication to anyone else. There will always be those who follow the inspiration of another, without any revelation themselves. Because of this, we have seen entire sections of the body of Christ refuse to use medication and call those who

do “sinners.” Parham never taught this, so it would be a mistake to blame him, as so many have, for the errors some believers have made about divine healing.

THE “LIVE OR DIE” VOW

Not long after Parham and his son were healed, he received some heartbreaking news. Within one week, two of his closest friends had died. Consumed with grief, Parham hurried to their graves. It was a day that marked the rest of his ministry:

“As I knelt between the graves of my two loved friends, who might have lived if I had but told them of the power of Christ to heal, I made a vow that ‘Live or Die’ I would preach this gospel of healing.”⁸

Parham moved his family to Ottawa, Kansas, where he held his first divine healing meeting. During the meeting, he boldly proclaimed the truths of God’s Word. A woman with dropsy, given three days to live, was instantly healed. Another young invalid lady, blind and ill with consumption, felt a tearing sensation through her chest and was completely healed. God also instantly restored her eyesight, and she spent the rest of her life sewing for a living.

The truths of divine healing were rare in the church during these years. Dowie and Etter had great success, but these truths were virtually unknown in the prairie. Though results couldn’t be denied, many claimed the power that manifested through Parham was of the devil. The accusations drove Parham to shut himself in a room to establish himself in the truth. As he prayed and searched the Scriptures, Parham found that everywhere he looked in the Bible, healing was present. He realized that healing, just as salvation, came through the atoning work of Jesus’ blood, and from that point on, persecution and slander never slighted him. Then a revolutionary idea had come to him: he would provide a refuge home for those seeking healing. Parham was filled with joy!

“A FAITH HOME ALL THE WAY THROUGH”

A daughter was born to the Parhams on Thanksgiving Day in November 1898. They named her Esther Marie. Not long after, Parham opened his divine healing home in Topeka, Kansas, which he and Sarah named “Bethel.” The purpose was to provide a homelike atmosphere for those who trusted God for healing. The ground floor had a chapel, a reading room, and a printing office. The top floor had fourteen rooms with large windows. The Parhams kept the windows filled with fresh flowers, making the atmosphere of the home peaceful

and beautiful. Chapel services were held daily, where the Word of God was powerfully taught. And prayer was offered individually, several times throughout the day and night.

Bethel also offered special classes for ministers and evangelists which prepared and trained them for the ministry. This place of refuge also found Christian homes for orphans and jobs for the unemployed.

One guest at Bethel wrote:

“Who can think of a sweeter name than ‘Bethel’? Surely it is the House of God. Everything moves in love and harmony. On entering the rooms one is impressed with the divine influence shed abroad here.... It is a Faith Home all the way through.”⁹

Parham’s biweekly newsletter, *The Apostolic Faith*, had a subscription price at first. But Parham quickly changed this by asking readers to study Isaiah 55:1, then give to the paper as they felt led. The newsletter published wonderful testimonies of healing and many of the sermons that were taught at Bethel.

Parham always believed that God would provide the financial support for Bethel. Once, after a hard day of ministry, he realized the rent was due the next morning, and he didn’t have the money to meet it. Tired and weary, he looked to the sky and told the Lord that he must have rest and that he knew God wouldn’t fail him. The next morning, a man showed up at Bethel, saying, “I was suddenly awakened with the thought of you and your work; no sleep came to me until I promised to bring you this.” It was the exact sum for the rent.

Another time, Parham had only a partial sum to pay on a bill that was due. So he set out to the bank to pay what he had. While on the way, he passed an acquaintance who handed Parham some money. When Parham got to the bank, he found the money was the exact amount he needed to pay the bill in full.¹⁰ And there are many other incredible stories of financial provision surrounding Parham’s ministry.

The Parham family was blessed with another son in March 1900. They named him Charles, after his father. Now, his family seemed to be outgrowing the Bethel Home, so a parsonage was built. Along with his growing family, Parham’s spiritual hunger was growing so he felt he should leave Bethel and visit different ministries. Leaving two Holiness ministers in charge, Parham set out to visit the ministries of several different godly men in Chicago, New York,

and Maine. He returned home, refreshed and renewed with an even deeper hunger:

“I returned home fully convinced that while many had obtained real experience in sanctification and the anointing that abideth, there still remained a great outpouring of power for the Christians who were to close this age.”¹¹

These words contained the seeds of the truths Parham would later unveil.

SURROUNDED BY A HALO

Because of his tremendous success at Bethel, many began to urge Parham to open a Bible school. So again, Parham shut himself away to fast and pray. Then, in October 1900, he obtained a beautiful structure in Topeka, Kansas, for the purpose of beginning a Bible school. He called it “Stone’s Folly.”

The building was patterned after an English castle, but the builder ran out of money before the structure could be completed in style. The staircase that joined the first and second floor was carved with finished woodwork of cedar, cherry wood, maple, and pine. The third floor was finished in common wood and paint.

The outside of Stone’s Folly was laid in red brick and white stone, with a winding stairway leading to an observatory. Another doorway led from there to a small room known as the Prayer Tower. Students took turns praying there for three-hour periods.

When Stone’s Folly was dedicated, a man looked out from the Prayer Tower and saw a vision above Stone’s Folly of a “vast lake of fresh water about to overflow, containing enough to satisfy every thirsty need.”¹² It would prove to be a sign of things to come.

Parham’s Bible school was open to every Christian minister and believer who was willing to “forsake all.” They were to arrive willing to study the Word deeply and believe God for all their personal needs. The students’ faith was their only tuition; everyone was to believe that God would supply their needs.

Examinations were given that December on the subjects of repentance, conversion, consecration, sanctification, healing, and the future coming of the Lord. When the book of Acts was included for the study of these subjects, Parham gave his students a historical assignment: they were to diligently study

the Bible's evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and report on their findings in three days. After assigning this homework, Parham left his students for a meeting in Kansas City. Then he returned to Stone's Folly for the annual Watch Night Service.

On the morning the assignments were due, Parham listened to the reports of forty students, and he was astonished at what he heard. While different manifestations of the Spirit occurred during the outpouring of Pentecost in Acts, every student had arrived at the same general conclusion: Every recipient baptized by the Holy Spirit spoke in other tongues!

Now there was a great excitement and new interest at Stone's Folly surrounding the book of Acts. Anticipation filled the atmosphere as seventy-five people crowded around one another at the school for the evening Watch Night Service.

During the service, a spiritual freshness seemed to blanket the meeting. Then, a student named Agnes Ozman approached Parham and asked him to lay his hands on her so she would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Ozman believed she had been called to the mission field and wanted to be equipped with spiritual power. At first, Parham hesitated, telling her that he himself didn't speak in other tongues. But she persisted, and Parham humbly laid his hands upon her head. Parham would later write of the incident, explaining it like this:

“I had scarcely repeated three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began speaking in the Chinese language, and was unable to speak English for three days.”¹³

Ozman later testified that she had already received a few of these same words while in the Prayer Tower. But after Parham laid hands on her, she completely overflowed with the supernatural power of God.

THE TONGUES OF FIRE

After witnessing this incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the students moved their beds out of the upper dormitory and turned it into a prayer room. For two nights and three days, the school waited upon the Lord.

In January 1901, Parham preached at a church in Topeka, telling the people of the wonderful experiences that were happening at Stone's Folly. And he told

them that he believed he would soon speak in other tongues. That night, after returning home from the meeting, he was met by one of the students, who led him into the Prayer Room. When he stepped inside, he was amazed at the sight of twelve denominational ministers. They were sitting, kneeling, and standing with hands raised, and they were all speaking in other tongues. Some were trembling under the power of God. An elderly lady approached Parham and related how, moments before he had entered the room, “tongues of fire” sat upon their heads.

Overcome by what he saw, Parham fell to his knees behind a table, praising God. Then he asked God for the same blessing, and when he did, Parham distinctly heard God’s calling to stand up in the world. He was to reveal the truth of this mighty outpouring everywhere he would go. The enlightened minister was also made aware of the severe persecutions that would accompany his stand. But he counted the cost and decided to obey, just as he had obeyed in proclaiming divine healing. It was then that Charles Parham himself was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues.

“Right then and there came a slight twist in my throat, a glory fell over me and I began to worship God in a Swedish tongue, which later changed to other languages and continued....”¹⁴

Soon, the news of what God was doing had Stone’s Folly besieged by newspaper reporters, language professors, and government interpreters. They sat in on the services to tell the whole world of this incredible phenomenon. They had come to the consensus that the students at Stone’s Folly were speaking in the languages of the world. And their newspapers screamed with the headline “Pentecost! Pentecost!” Newsboys shouted, “Read about the Pentecost!”

On January 21, 1901, Parham preached the first sermon dedicated to the sole experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.

DOORWAY TO THE SUPERNATURAL

Some say today that tongues have passed away. But, my friend, when miracles pass away, when signs and wonders pass away, when the manifestations of the Holy Spirit pass away, tongues will pass away, too. Then we will have no need for other tongues. But as long as we are on planet earth, these things shall remain. The book of Acts continues to be lived out in the life of the church

today. The only thing that has passed away is the sacrificing of lambs, because Jesus fulfilled the sacrifice system of shedding of blood and removed the veil separating God and man.

Praying in other tongues will birth the will of God in your spirit. You will no longer depend on your intellect or the direction of others. You will “know” for yourself what the will of the Father is for your life. Sometimes, we are limited in our prayer life by our national language, and we don’t always know how to pray for our situation, The Word tells us that “praying in the spirit,” or in tongues, enables us to pray the perfect will of God into every situation because praying in tongues moves us into the realm of the Spirit. You can go to heaven without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but it is not God’s highest desire for you.

There are several different operations of tongues spoken of in the Bible. First, tongues can manifest in a supernatural language that other nationalities can understand. (See Acts 2:8–11.) Second, the gift of tongues can be spoken out by one person in a public setting and then followed with the interpretation of that language, which brings edification to the people gathered there. (See 1 Corinthians 14:27–28.) And there is the prayerful language of tongues, which will edify and build your faith. Finally, praying in the spirit will bring boldness, strength, direction, and guidance into a believer’s life. Praying in tongues is also one of the most powerful forms of spiritual intercession. (See 1 Corinthians 14:4; Jude 20; Romans 8:26–27; Ephesians 6:18.)

If you haven’t experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of other tongues, then earnestly seek God for this. Speaking in other tongues is not just “for some.” It is for everyone, just like salvation. When you choose to enter into this measure of God’s fullness, your life will never be the same.

SPIRITUAL FATHERHOOD

At this stage of Parham’s life, there had never been such “refined glory” and peace in his household. Parham went throughout the country, preaching the truths of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in wonderful demonstration. Once, in a service, he began to speak in other tongues, and when he had finished, a man in the congregation stood up and said, “I am healed of my infidelity; I have heard in my own tongue the Twenty-third Psalm that I learned at my mother’s knee.”¹⁵ This was only one of the countless testimonies regarding the gift of other tongues that came out of Parham’s ministry. Soon, hundreds upon hundreds began to receive this manifestation. But along with this mighty

outpouring came a slanderous persecution of those who despised it.

Then, tragedy struck the Parham household again. Their youngest child, Charles, died on March 16, 1901. The family was grief-stricken. Their sorrow was compounded even further when those who stood against the Parhams persecuted them for contributing to the death of their son. Then, many who loved the family but didn't believe in divine healing added to the sadness by encouraging the Parhams to forsake their belief in this area. But through it all, the Parhams showed tremendous character by choosing to keep their hearts tender toward the Lord and win this test of faith. As a result, Parham would continue in an even greater fervency in the preaching of Christ's miraculous gospel around the world.

In the fall of 1901, the Bible school in Topeka was unexpectedly sold out from under Parham, for the purposes of secular use. Parham warned the new buyers if they used the school for secular reasons, the building would be destroyed. But they ignored his prophetic warning. By the end of December, news had reached Parham that the building had been totally destroyed by fire.

After Stone's Folly sold, the Parhams moved into a rented home in Kansas City. It was then that Parham began to hold meetings around the country. Hundreds of people from every denomination received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and divine healing. As is true with every pioneering revivalist, Parham was either greatly loved or hated by the public, but his colorful personality and warm heart were recognized by all. One Kansas newspaper reporter wrote, "Whatever may be said about him, he has attracted more attention to religion than any other religious worker in years."¹⁶

In 1901, Parham published his first book, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*. The book was filled with sermons on salvation, healing, and sanctification. Many ministers throughout the world studied and taught from it.

In June 1902, another son, Philip Arlington, was born to the Parhams. By now, Charles had become a father of the Pentecostal outpouring, and he was continually watching over his spiritual children to help them grow in the truth. Parham had his first experience with fanaticism in 1903. He preached at a church where wild and fleshly manifestations took place. The experience would add a new dimension to his teaching. Though he never allowed himself to be called the leader in this Pentecostal movement, Parham felt personally responsible in seeing that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was manifested according to the Word.

So, he endeavored to learn the personality of the Holy Spirit and spoke strongly against anything contrary to what he had learned.

Perhaps it was this personal passion that caused him to speak out against the manifestations at Azusa in later years.

“HE PREACHED IN BIG CHUNKS”

In the fall of 1903, the Parhams moved to Galena, Kansas, and erected a large tent. The tent could hold two thousand people, but it was still too small to accommodate the crowds. So, a building was located as winter set in. But even then, the doors had to be left open during services so that those outside could participate. Huge numbers poured into Galena from surrounding towns when strong manifestations of the Spirit occurred, and hundreds were miraculously healed and saved. In those days, cards were handed to people who came for healing. The common procedure was to write numbers on the cards and hand the cards to those who were seeking prayer. Then, during the service, the numbers were randomly called out, and prayer was offered for those holding the card number called. This practice was intended to give everyone an equal chance to receive prayer. But Parham shunned the practice and chose to pray for all who came, despite the length of time that it took.

Two newspapers, the Joplin Herald and the Cincinnati Inquirer, declared Parham’s Galena meetings to be the greatest demonstration of power and miracles since the time of the apostles, writing, “Many...came to scoff but remained to pray.”¹⁷

On March 16, 1904, Wilfred Charles was born to the Parhams. One month later, Charles moved the family to Baxter Springs, Kansas, then continued to hold tremendous meetings around the state.

Parham always warned the crowds to never call him “healer,” reminding them that he no more had the power to heal than he had the power to save. One observer said, “Brother Parham surely preached God’s holy Word straight from the shoulder; in chunks big, pure, and hard enough to knock the scales from our eyes.”¹⁸

The revivalist’s meetings were always very interesting. Parham was known to have a great love for the Holy Land, and always implemented its beliefs in his teachings. So besides the many miracles, he would often display a great array of garments from the Holy Land that he had collected over a period of time. The

newspapers always highlighted this aspect of his ministry favorably.

In 1905, Parham traveled to Orchard, Texas. He did so in response to certain believers who had attended his Kansas meetings and had fervently prayed for him to come to their part of the country. When he was ministering in Orchard, there was such a great outpouring of the Spirit that Parham was inspired to begin holding his “Rally Days.” These were a series of meetings that were strategically planned and held throughout America. Many workers volunteered to assist in the outreach once Parham returned to Kansas.

EVERYTHING’S BIG IN TEXAS!

The first Rally Day was planned for Houston, Texas. Parham and twenty-five workers held this meeting in a place called Bryn Hall, where they were advertised as nondenominational and invited anyone who wanted to experience more of the power of God. The newspapers loved the novelty of Parham’s Holy Land array and printed favorable reports of all the miracles that happened.

After these meetings, Parham and his group held large parades, marching down the streets of Houston in their Holy Land garments. The parades helped to spark the interest of many who attended the evening services. When the Rally Days were over, Parham’s group returned to Kansas, rejoicing in the Lord.

Due to high public demand, the team returned to Houston once more, but this time, heavy persecution came their way. Several of Parham’s workers were poisoned during one meeting, making them very ill, with severe pain. But Parham prayed for each of them immediately, and they recovered completely.

Parham’s own life was threatened several times, but he always escaped.

Once, after taking a drink of water on the platform, Parham doubled over with tremendous pain. But he began to pray, and the pain left instantly. Later, when the water from his glass was examined chemically, it was found to contain enough poison to kill a dozen men.¹⁹

Undaunted by the persecution, Parham announced the opening of a new Bible school in Houston, then moved his headquarters there in the winter of 1905. The school was supported like the one in Topeka, through freewill offerings. There was no tuition, and each student had to believe for his or her own means. It was said that a military style of order was practiced at the school and that each person understood how to work in harmony.²⁰

Parham's schools were never meant to be theological seminaries. They were training centers where the truths of God were taught in the most practical manner—with prayer as a key ingredient. Many ministers left his schools to serve God throughout the world.

It was in Houston that Parham met William J. Seymour. Up to this time, the Jim Crow Laws had forbidden blacks and whites from attending school together. And Parham's meetings were segregated, but it was because blacks didn't ask to attend the schools—that is, until Seymour did. His humility and hunger for the Word so moved Parham that he decided to ignore the racist rules of the day. Seymour was given a place in the school, where he experienced revolutionary truths on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. William Seymour would later become the leader of the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California.

After Parham's historical Houston school came to a close, he moved his family back to Kansas, and on June 1, 1906, Robert, their last child, was born.

Parham continued to hold meetings throughout the country and was in great demand. It was at this time that he received letters from Seymour, asking him to come to the Mission in Los Angeles at Azusa Street. It was said that Seymour wrote "urgent letters appealing for help, as spiritualistic manifestations, hypnotic forces and fleshly contortions...had broken loose in the meeting. He wanted Mr. Parham to come quickly and help him discern between that which was real and that which was false."²¹ In spite of the plea, Parham felt led by God to hold a rally in Zion City, Illinois, instead.

WALKING ON THE WATER AT ZION

When Parham arrived in Zion, he found the community in great distress. Dowie had been discredited in his ministry there, and others were in the process of taking control of the city. There was a strong oppression hanging over the town, because people from all nations and all walks of life had invested their future in the hands of Dowie. Discouraged and broken, these people had lost hope. Parham saw this as a wonderful opportunity to bring the baptism of the Holy Spirit to Zion. He could think of no greater blessing or joy than to introduce the fullness of the Spirit to these people.

When Parham arrived in Zion, he met with great opposition and was unable to secure a building for the meetings. All doors of opportunity seemed to close. Finally, at the invitation of a hotel manager, he was able to set up a meeting in a

private room. The next night, two rooms and the hallway were crowded and attendance grew steadily from there.

Soon, Parham began cottage meetings in the best homes of the city. One of these homes belonged to the great healing evangelist and author, F. F. Bosworth. Bosworth's home was literally turned into a meeting house during Parham's stay. Every night, Parham led five different meetings in five different homes, all beginning at 7:00 p.m. When his workers would arrive, he would go preaching from meeting to meeting, driving rapidly to make sure he reached each one. As a result, hundreds of ministers and evangelists went out from Zion filled with the power of the Spirit to preach God's Word with signs.

Though Zion was a Christian community, it seemed the greatest persecution Parham ever faced occurred there. Secular newspapers had a media blitz, citing the "Prophet Parham" as taking the ground of the "Prophet Dowie."²² Dowie himself went on public record to criticize Parham's message and actions. The new Overseer of Zion, Wilbur Voliva, was eager to see Parham leave the city. Voliva wrote to Parham to ask how long he intended staying in Zion. Parham replied, "As long as the Lord wants me here."²³

In October 1906, Parham felt released from Zion and hurried to Los Angeles to answer Seymour's call.

SHAKE, RATTLE, AND ROLL: THE L.A. STORY

It was told to Parham that Seymour had gone to Los Angeles with a humble spirit. Those from Texas who moved to Los Angeles with Seymour were impressed with his ability. It was clear that God was doing a wonderful work in Seymour's life. But it was also clear that Satan was trying to "tear it to pieces."²⁴ Because Seymour had been a student at Parham's school, Parham felt responsible for what was happening. Parham's experiences at Azusa added to his understanding of fanaticism. According to Parham, there were many genuine experiences of receiving the true baptism, but there were also many false manifestations. Parham held two or three services at Azusa but was unable to convince Seymour to change his ways. The door to the mission was padlocked, so Parham couldn't return. Instead of leaving Los Angeles, Parham rented a large building and held great services that ministered deliverance from evil spirits to the crowds who had previously attended the meetings.

Parham regarded the Seymour conflict as an example of spiritual pride. He

wrote about it in his newsletter and noted that fanaticism always produces an unteachable spirit in those given over to it. He explained that those under the influence of these false spirits “feel exalted, thinking they have a greater experience than anyone else, not needing instruction or advice...placing them out of reach from those who can help.” He ended his newsletter “deposition” by saying that “although many forms of fanaticism have crept in, I believe every true child of God will come out of this mist and shadow stronger and better equipped against all extremes that are liable to present themselves at any time in meetings of this kind.”²⁵

“PART HAM”

Parham returned to Zion from Los Angeles in December 1906. Unable to obtain a building, he pitched a large tent in a vacant lot. Parham’s tent meetings were well attended by some two thousand people. On New Year’s Eve, he preached for two hours on the baptism in the Holy Spirit and produced such an intense excitement that several men approached Parham with the idea of beginning a “movement” and a large church.

But Parham was against the idea. He told the men that he was not there for personal gain and that his idea of coming to Zion was to bring the peace of God to replace its oppression. Parham believed America had enough churches and said that what Zion needed was more spirituality in the churches they already had. Parham felt that if his message had value, then the people would support it without an organization. He was concerned that groups who gathered around the truth of the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” would eventually develop a worldly, secular objective.

After confronting these issues, Parham officially resigned as the “projector” of the Apostolic Faith movement. Many controversies over leadership had already developed in other states that adopted the movement. He wrote in his newsletter:

“Now that they [apostolic faith tenets] are generally accepted, I simply take my place among my brethren to push this gospel of the kingdom as a witness to all nations.”²⁶

Parham’s position created many new enemies at Zion, and when his meetings closed, he traveled alone to Canada and New England to preach.

His family remained in Zion and were greatly persecuted. Each day at school

brought new persecutions to the Parham children. Pork was forbidden in the city, and therefore, children began to call the Parhams “Part Ham,” so the children came home from school very often in tears. The Parham family believed they were persecuted mainly because they wouldn’t organize a movement. Later, Charles would write, “If I differ at all from Zion with respect to any of these truths, it is only as individuals in Zion differ among themselves.”²⁷

Then, one day, Mrs. Parham received a disturbing letter from a Zion citizen that threatened her husband in a scandalous manner. She denounced the letter as a lie, but conditions and persecutions grew so bad that she decided to take her children back to Kansas.

FLAMES FROM HELL: THE SCANDAL

It is here that we come to the greatest controversy in the life of Charles Parham. Clearly, Parham had many enemies in prominent Christian organizations. But his main antagonist was Wilbur Voliva, the General Overseer of Zion. After Parham’s public resignation as “projector” of the Apostolic Faith movement, various rumors were circulated throughout Pentecostal circles that Parham had been arrested for sexual immorality.

The Waukegan Daily Sun suggested that Parham’s sudden departure from Zion had been prompted by “mysterious men, said to be detectives, ready to arrest him on some equally mysterious charge.” The paper later admitted that its report was based on rumor and that the Zion police department knew nothing of the incident.²⁸ But much damage had been done.

In the summer of 1907, Parham was preaching in a former Zion mission located in San Antonio when a story reported in the San Antonio Light made national news. Its headline read: “Evangelist Is Arrested. C. F. Parham, Who Has Been Prominent in Meeting Here, Taken into Custody.”²⁹ The story said Parham had been charged with sodomy, a felony under Texas law, and that he had been arrested with his supposed companion, J. J. Jourdan, who, along with Parham, was allegedly released after making a payment of one thousand dollars.

Parham immediately fought back with rage. He secured a lawyer, C. A. Davis, and announced that he had been “elaborately framed” by his old nemesis, Wilbur Voliva. Parham was certain that Voliva was furious over a Zion city church that Parham had preached in. It had once belonged to Zion but had since left the Zion association and joined the Apostolic Faith movement.

Parham pledged to clear his name and indignantly refused to leave town. But Mrs. Parham, having previously read the rumors in a letter in Zion, left Kansas for San Antonio. The case never made it to court, and Parham's name disappeared from the headlines of secular newspapers as quickly as it had appeared. No formal indictment was ever filed, and, to date, there is no record of the incident at the Bexar County Courthouse.³⁰

But the religious newspapers weren't as kind to Parham as the secular. Their press seemed to locate even more details about his "affairs." Two newspapers that took liberties with the story were the Burning Bush and the Zion Herald (the official newspaper of Wilbur Voliva's church in Zion). These newspapers were said to have quoted the San Antonio Light, along with an eyewitness account of Parham's alleged improprieties, including a written confession. But it was found that the articles "quoted" in the Herald and the Bush had never appeared in the San Antonio paper. It was also learned that the scandal was publicized only in certain areas—every source of which could be traced to the Zion Herald. If the rumor went nationwide, it traveled by the grapevine.³¹

Without a doubt, it seemed that Voliva was making the best of the scandal, "leaving no stone unturned." Though no one could actually pinpoint Voliva as the instigator of the accusations, he had been known to spread rumors of immorality about his chief rivals. In addition to Parham, Voliva had launched many verbal attacks on his associates in Zion, calling them "adulterers" and "immoral." Parham's associates attempted legal action with the U.S. postal authorities for "unlawful defamation," but they refused to act on the matter.³²

Mrs. Parham felt their enemies must have had great faith in Parham's beliefs, because, if this kind of onslaught had befallen a secular person, court action would have surely followed. But Parham never discussed the incident in public. He left the matter to the discretion of his followers, believing that those who were faithful would never believe the charges.³³ On his fortieth birthday, Parham wrote, "I think the greatest sorrow of my life is the thought that my enemies, in seeking my destruction, have ruined and destroyed so many precious souls."³⁴

But sorrow and destruction make no difference to those who oppose the ministry of God. When Parham returned to preach in Zion nine years later, the Voliva followers fabricated posters and flyers that showed a signed confession of guilt in the crime of sodomy.³⁵

LIVING IN THE LONG-AWAITED DREAM

During the years that followed the scandal, Parham continued to evangelize throughout the nation. Many said his sermons were critical of Pentecostal Christians; others said he was never able to recover from Voliva's accusations. In 1913, he was met in Wichita by a mob armed with clubs and pitchforks. But a friend rescued Parham by secreting him away by a different route, and the meeting continued as scheduled. Hundreds were said to have repented in Wichita, and many were healed.

Though wounded by those he'd thought were his friends, Parham never backed away from the cities to which God led him. He even returned to Los Angeles and held a tremendous meeting, in which thousands were converted, baptized in the Holy Spirit, healed and delivered. In the winter of 1924, Parham held meetings in Oregon and Washington. It was at one of these that Gordon Lindsay found salvation. Lindsay went on to do a great work for God, establishing the international Bible college, Christ for the Nations, located in Dallas, Texas.

Finally, in 1927, the lifetime dream of Charles F. Parham came true. Thanks to funding provided by his friends, Parham was able to visit Jerusalem. The trip was a great joy to Parham. He was thrilled as he walked through Galilee, Samaria, and Nazareth. It was here that Parham encountered his favorite passage of Scripture, Psalm 23. In Palestine, the reality of the Shepherd and His sheep came alive to Parham, bringing great peace and comfort. When he returned to New York Harbor in April 1928, he carried with him slides of pictures of the land he loved. From then on, Parham's meetings consisted of the showing this collection of slides, which he entitled "The 23rd Psalm."

"PEACE, PEACE, LIKE A RIVER"

By August 1928, Parham had grown tired and worn. He told friends that his work was nearly over. To one, he wrote, "I am living on the edge of the glory land these days and it's all so real on the other side of the curtain that I feel mightily tempted to cross over."³⁶

After spending Christmas 1929 with his family, Parham was scheduled to preach and show his Holy Land slides in Temple, Texas. His family was concerned with his departure because his health had deteriorated, but Parham was determined to go. Several days later, the family received word that Parham

had collapsed during a meeting while showing his Holy Land slides. It is said that while on the floor, Parham regained consciousness and spoke only of wanting to continue the slideshow.

The Parham family set out for Temple to assess his condition. Once they arrived, a decision was made to cancel the meetings and bring Charles home to Kansas by train. Parham, so weak from a heart condition that he could barely speak, waited for his son Wilfred to return from ministry in California. While waiting for him, Parham refused all medication, saying that to do so “would fail his belief.” He asked only for prayer.

His youngest son, Robert, quit his job with a department store to come home to fast and pray in the house where his father lay. After several days, he came to Parham’s bedside to tell him he had also “surrendered his life to the call of ministry.” Thrilled in the knowledge that two of his sons would carry on the work of the gospel, Parham gained enough strength to say, “I can’t boast of any good works I have done when I meet my Master face-to-face, but I can say I have been faithful to the message He gave me, and lived a pure, clean life.”

Sarah said she would never forget her beloved’s face, knowing “with a joy and a look of peaceful satisfaction that his prayer for many years was answered.”³⁷

His last day on earth, Charles Fox Parham was heard quoting, “Peace, peace, like a river. That is what I have been thinking all day.” During the night, he sang part of the song “Power in the Blood,” then asked his family to finish the song for him. When they had finished, he asked them to “sing it again.”³⁸

The next day, on January 29, 1929, at fifty-six years of age, Charles F. Parham went to be with the Lord.

His funeral was attended by over twenty-five hundred people, who visited his grave in the newly fallen snow. A choir of fifty occupied the stage, along with a number of ministers from different parts of the nation. Offerings poured in from all over the country, enabling the family to purchase a granite pulpit for a grave memorial. On the memorial was carved “John 15:13,” the last passage of Scripture that Parham had read as he had held his final meeting on this earth: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

THE TRULY FAITHFUL

Before Charles Parham died, his ministry contributed to over two million conversions, both directly and indirectly. His crowds often exceeded seven thousand people. And though some spoke in tongues long before Topeka, Kansas, it was Parham who pioneered the truth of tongues as the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

His life exemplifies the harsh reality of the persecution and conflict that accompany God's revivalists. Though several men sought to destroy him, they couldn't touch the pillar of strength that was built within his spirit. He was never moved from his calling because of the slander waged against him. And when he left earth, he did so because he willed it. Although some will not accept Parham's ministry because of his support for the Ku Klux Klan,³⁹ most remember Parham for his sacrificial love and primarily for his faithfulness. The utmost cry of God is that we be found faithful to His plan. And for Charles Fox Parham, he could live no other plan than what God had prescribed. Faithfulness will always endure the conflict that comes to challenge it.

God has called us to an area of service. Whether we stand before the masses or before the few in our families, we, like Charles Parham, must prove our faithfulness, too. But in our fast-paced, "feel good" generation, faithfulness seems to have been compromised. Still, no matter what generation we speak of, God's Word remains the same. First Corinthians 4:2 states that faithfulness is a requirement for believers.

Believing the Word of God and trusting God to fulfill His promises to you, in spite of life's conflicts, produce faithfulness. How wonderful it will be to hear the Lord say, "Well done, My good and faithful servant!" instead of Him saying only, "Well...?"

I challenge you today to take account of your life, to count the cost, and to analyze where you stand in the area of faithfulness. I challenge you to know what you believe in and what you are against, then to stand true to those convictions. Demonstrate the "cutting edge" of truth to the nations of the earth, and never allow yourself to be counted among the persecutors, the despisers or the envious. Whatever your call in life may be, always stand true on God's side. Be faithful.

1 Mrs. Charles Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham* (Birmingham, AL:

Commercial Printing Company, 1930), 59, 74.

2 Ibid., 1.

3 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 2.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 5.

6 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 6–9.

7 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 23.

8 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 33.

9 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 42.

10 Ibid., 46–47.

11 Ibid., 48.

12 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 57.

13 Ibid., 52–53.

14 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 54.

15 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 62.

16 Ibid., 76.

17 Ibid., 95–97.

18 Ibid., 100.

19 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 134.

20 Ibid., 136.

21 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 155–156.

22 Ibid., 158–159.

23 Ibid., 159.

24 Ibid., 161–162.

25 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 163–164, 168.

26 Ibid., 176.

27 Ibid., 182.

28 James R. Goff Jr., *Fields White unto Harvest* (Fayetteville and London: The University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 136, 223, footnote 32.

29 Ibid., 136.

30 Ibid., 136–137, footnote 39.

31 Ibid., 138–139, footnote 41.

32 Goff Jr., *Fields White*, 225–226, footnotes 44–45.

33 Ibid., 141.

34 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 201.

35 Ibid., 260–261, and Goff Jr., *Fields White*, illustrations.

36 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 406.

37 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 200, 410.

38 Ibid., 413.

39 Goff Jr., *Fields White*, 157.