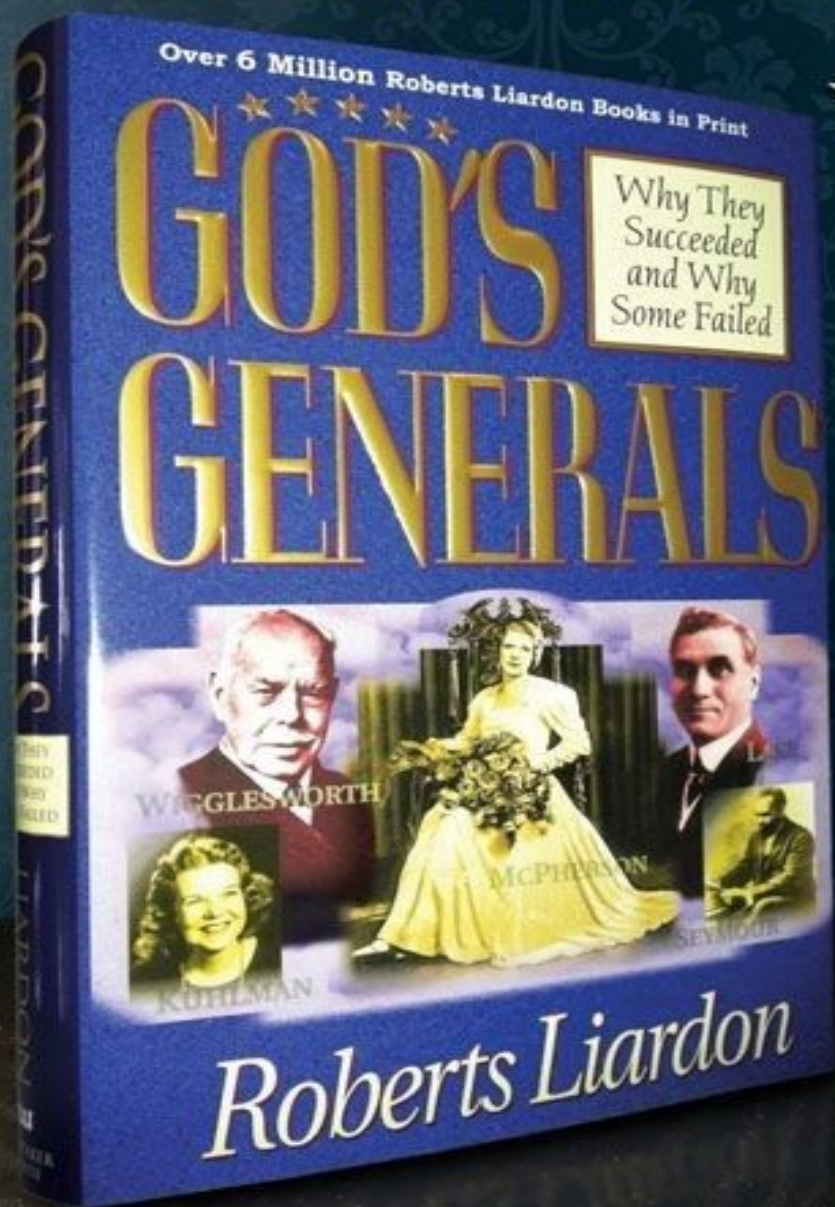


# GOD'S GENERALS



WILLIAM J.  
SEYMOUR

ROBERTS LIARDON

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WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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God's Generals: William J. Seymour

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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

# William J. Seymour

## “The Catalyst of Pentecost”

As she looked at me through her gold-handled lorgnette, she said, ‘Reverend, I believe in the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire...but I don’t appreciate the noise, the shouting.’

“‘Sister, you are just like I am,’ I responded. ‘There are many manifestations that I see among God’s people that I don’t appreciate myself, but, do you know, when the Spirit of the Lord comes upon me, I enjoy it.’

“Her small mouth pursed in mild disagreement, but I continued:

“‘...Now, my little sister, if you want to go into the prayer room and pray to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, please go ahead. And when it happens, don’t shout unless you feel like it. Just be yourself.’

“She nodded vigorously, ‘Oh, indeed I will.’

“...I was busy in an office about seventy-five feet away and soon forgot that she was there. Suddenly,...I heard a penetrating outcry.

“Quickly I jerked open the door to look through the church and there came the little lady out of the prayer room as if she had been shot from a cannon. She began jumping, dancing, and shouting in the Lord. It was something to see this reserved, refined lady with the gold-handled lorgnette, dancing and swaying...crying out and singing intermittently in tongues and in English.

“I went out to meet her and smiling on the inside, commented, ‘Sister, what you are doing doesn’t appeal to me.’

“She made an undignified jump into the air and shouted, ‘Maybe not, but it sure appeals to me!’”<sup>1</sup>

Serving as the “catalyst” of the Pentecostal movement in the twentieth century, William J. Seymour turned a tiny Los Angeles horse stable on Azusa Street into an international center of revival. Because the baptism of the Holy

Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues was a major part of the meetings held there, Seymour became the leader of the first organized movement that promoted this experience. At Azusa, blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Europeans all met and worshipped together, crossing formerly impossible cultural lines. Although the success of the revival was short-lived, we still enjoy its fruits. Today, “Azusa” remains a common word within God’s household.

The Azusa Street Mission produced some wild stories. Time was of little concern to these Pentecostal pioneers, who would often pray all night for another’s deliverance. They believed the Word of God and waited for its manifestation.

In every situation that arose, the seekers made a demand on the Word’s authority. If insects tried to destroy someone’s crops, believers at Azusa marched out to the field and declared the Word of God over their crops and the insects! In every recorded account, the insects stayed where they were told and didn’t cross field borders. If they were destroying a neighbor’s crops, they remained about twenty yards away from the believer’s crops.

In another story, a large group of firemen came rushing into the Azusa Street Mission during a service carrying fire hoses to extinguish a fire. But they never found one! Neighbors of the mission had seen a light that led them to believe the building was engulfed in flames, so they called the fire department. However, what they had actually seen was the glory of God.

### EYE OF THE TIGER

Centerville, Louisiana, is a southern bayou town only a few miles from the Gulf of Mexico. On May 2, 1870, a son was born in Centerville to Simon and Phyllis Seymour. They had been freed from slavery only a few years earlier, so William was born into a world of horrible racial violence. The Ku Klux Klan had been on the rampage for years. Jim Crow Laws had been established to prohibit all blacks from any social justices. And segregation was prevalent, even in the church.

Once freed from slavery, Seymour’s parents continued working on the plantation. As Seymour grew, he followed in their footsteps. Undaunted by the lack of formal education, he, like many others, taught himself, primarily through reading the Bible.

Seymour found his identity in Jesus Christ, believing that the Lord was the

only liberator of mankind. He was a sensitive, high-spirited youth, hungry for the truth of God's Word. It is said he experienced divine visions and he began early in life to look for the return of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

At the age of twenty-five, Seymour finally broke through the mental bondage of his inferiority complex. Then, doing what few black men dared to do, he left his homeland of southern Louisiana and headed north to Indianapolis, Indiana.

According to the U.S. census of 1900, only 10 percent of blacks had ever left the South. But Seymour was determined, so he left. He was determined that man-made shackles would never hold him.

### SAINTS AND SMALLPOX

Unlike the rural South, Indianapolis was a thriving city that offered many opportunities. But many businesses still closed their doors to the black population, and the only job Seymour could secure was a position as a hotel waiter.

Not long after his arrival in Indianapolis, Seymour joined the Simpson Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. This branch of Northern Methodists had a strong evangelistic outreach to all classes that appealed to Seymour. The church's example helped Seymour to further formulate his beliefs. To him, it was becoming ever more evident that there was no class or color line in the redemption of Jesus Christ.

However, it wasn't long before the racial lines hardened in Indianapolis. So, Seymour moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. There, he continued to attend a Methodist church, but he soon noticed that their doctrine was hardening, as well. He was an avid follower of John Wesley, who believed in strong prayer, holiness, and divine healing, and that there should be no discrimination in Jesus Christ. But it seemed the Methodists were moving away from their original roots.

In his search for a church, Seymour stumbled upon the Evening Light Saints, which would later become known as the Church of God Reformation Movement. The group didn't use musical instruments. They didn't wear rings or makeup. And they didn't dance or play cards. Even though it seemed like a religion of "no's," the group was extremely happy. They found joy in their faith in difficult times as well as good.<sup>3</sup>

Seymour was warmly received by the Saints. It was in this setting that he

received the call to ministry. Seymour wrestled with his calling and was fearful to answer. In the midst of his struggle, he contracted smallpox, a disease that was usually fatal in that era. He survived three weeks of horrible suffering and was left with blindness in his left eye and severe facial scarring.

Seymour felt that he had contracted the disease because of his refusal to follow the call of God. He immediately submitted to the plan of God and was ordained through the Evening Light Saints. Soon, he began traveling as an itinerant evangelist, relying on his own financial support. In those days, few ministers asked for offerings. And Seymour, like many in his circle, believed that God was his Provider. He believed that if God had called him, then God would support him.

### SPEAKING IN TONGUES...TODAY?

Seymour left Cincinnati and traveled to Texas, evangelizing along the way. When he arrived in Houston, he found family there, so he decided to make that city his ministry base.

In the summer of 1905, evangelist Charles F. Parham was holding crusades in Bryn Hall, located in downtown Houston. Each evening after the traffic had cleared, Parham and his helpers would march downtown in spectacular Holy Land clothing carrying their "Apostolic Faith Movement" banner. Newspapers wrote positively about Parham's meetings, often giving them prominent headlines.<sup>4</sup>

Houston was a city of cultural variety, and people of all races were drawn to Parham's meetings. A woman friend of Seymour's, Mrs. Lucy Farrow, attended Parham's meetings regularly and had developed a pleasant relationship with the revivalist's family. Parham offered her the position of governess with his family if she would accompany them to Kansas, where they lived. Farrow was the pastor of a small Holiness church, but her love for Parham's family and her spiritual hunger motivated her to go. Upon her acceptance, she asked Seymour if he would pastor the church in her absence. He agreed to do so until her return two months later with the Parham family.

When Mrs. Farrow returned to Houston, she told Seymour about her wonderful spiritual encounters in the Parham home, including her experience of speaking in tongues. Seymour was very moved by her experience, but he questioned the doctrine. He would eventually accept it, even though he wouldn't

speak in tongues himself for some time.<sup>5</sup> The Evening Light Saints didn't approve of Seymour's new theology. So, he left the group, even though he had yet to speak in tongues. Then, Charles Parham announced the opening of his Bible school in Houston that December, and Mrs. Farrow vehemently insisted that Seymour attend. Moved by her fervency and his own growing interest, Seymour enrolled.

Parham's school in Houston was set up much like the one in Topeka, Kansas. It was a communal living arrangement in one house, where the students and their instructor spent days and nights together praying and studying the Word in an informal fashion. The students were not required to pay tuition but had to believe God for their own needs. Due to the racial customs of the day, it is questionable as to Seymour was allowed to stay overnight. Parham was moved by Seymour's hunger for the Word, but I believe that Seymour was welcomed strictly as a daytime student. Though Seymour did not embrace every doctrine that Parham taught, he did embrace the truth of Parham's doctrine concerning Pentecost and soon developed his own theology based on it.

#### IN THE BEGINNING

After Seymour had completed his studies at Parham's school, the events that led Seymour to Los Angeles started to quickly take place. In early 1906, Seymour began making plans to start a new Pentecostal church in which he could preach his newfound doctrine. Then, he unexpectedly received a letter from Miss Neely Terry. Terry, who had been visiting relatives in Houston, had attended the church where Seymour pastored in place of Lucy Farrow. When Terry returned to California, she didn't forget Seymour's gentle and secure leadership. In the letter, Miss Terry asked Seymour to come to Los Angeles and pastor a congregation that had broken away from a Nazarene church. Believing the letter revealed his destiny, Seymour packed his bags and left for California in late January. Later, he would write,

“It was the divine call that brought me from Houston, Texas, to Los Angeles. The Lord put it on the heart of one of the saints in Los Angeles to write me that she felt the Lord would have me come there, and I felt it was the leading of the Lord. The Lord provided the means and I came to take charge of a mission on Santa Fe Street.”<sup>6</sup>

#### THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE CITY

In Los Angeles, a spiritual hunger was stirring. There was a deep desire and a longing for something to happen. There was evidence of a spiritual revival even before Seymour arrived. Turn-of-the-century evangelists had spread the fire of God throughout Southern California, and many groups of people were praying and witnessing door-to-door throughout the city. In fact, the entire city was on the verge of a great spiritual happening as many congregations of Christians were earnestly seeking God.

In 1906, Los Angeles was a miniature picture of the world. Racial discrimination was rarely practiced, because every culture, from the Chinese to the Hispanic, flocked to the city.

One particular group, the First Baptist Church of Los Angeles, was waiting for the return of their pastor, Rev. Joseph Smale. He had been on a three-week trip to Wales to sit under the great Welsh evangelist Evan Roberts. Smale was on fire for God and was hoping to bring the same revival that had visited Wales home with him to Los Angeles.

Another evangelist, journalist Frank Bartleman, shared a similar vision and joined with his church in prayer. Bartleman wrote to Roberts for revival instructions. One response from Evan ended this way: "I pray God to hear your prayer, to keep your faith strong, and to save California." From these letters, Bartleman said he received the gift of faith for the revival to come. And he went on to believe that the prayers from Wales had much to do with God's outpouring in California, later saying that "the present worldwide revival was rocked in the cradle of little Wales."<sup>7</sup>

In Los Angeles, there was a small group of blacks hungry for more of God. Led by Sister Julia Hutchinson, they came together to worship. Sister Julia taught sanctification in a way that was not in agreement with her church's doctrine. Consequently, the pastor expelled the families involved with her teaching, who would eventually form a group with Seymour as pastor.

The group wasn't discouraged. They quickly banded together in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Asbery. Soon, the group grew so large that they were forced to rent a small mission hall on Santa Fe Street. Along with this growth came the desire for a change in leadership. The group felt that a stranger to the Los Angeles area could be more effective, believing that he would command more respect among them. And Miss Terry, the Asberys' cousin, believed there could be only one man for the job. After praying about it, they all agreed to

extend the invitation to William J. Seymour.

## BREAKING THE MESSAGE IN

Seymour arrived in Los Angeles when the climate was ripe for revival. This seemed to validate his sense of destiny. The large group assembled, eager to hear Seymour's first sermon as he expounded powerfully on the gospel of divine healing and the coming return of Christ. He then began his message from Acts 2:4 on speaking in other tongues. He taught that a person is not baptized in the Holy Spirit unless he or she speaks with other tongues. And he admitted that he had not yet received this manifestation. Nevertheless, he proclaimed it as God's Word.

Seymour was met with mixed reactions. While some agreed with him and viewed him favorably, others denounced him fervently. A family by the name of Lee invited him home for Sunday dinner. When they returned with him to the mission that evening, they found that Sister Hutchinson had padlocked the doors. She was outraged and declared that she wouldn't permit such extreme teaching in her little mission on Santa Fe Street. And Seymour was denied access to his mission sleeping room.<sup>8</sup>

Now Seymour found himself with little money and no place to stay. So the Lees felt obligated to take him home, though they did have reservations. While staying with the Lees, Seymour remained behind the closed doors of his room in prayer and fasting. Then, after many days, he invited the Lees to pray with him. They accepted his invitation and began to feel differently toward him. Soon, other members of the mission began hearing about the prayer meetings at the Lee household. They started to gather with them, and Seymour became known as a man of prayer.<sup>9</sup>

Soon, Sister Hutchinson found out who all were joining Seymour. She arranged a meeting between Seymour and the Holiness clergy to determine the origin of the error. Seymour faced a large, difficult audience of Holiness preachers in his inquisition, but he clung to the Word. He read again from Acts 2:4 and explained that unless the Holiness preachers had the experience that took place in the Upper Room, they had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. According to Seymour, their problem was with the Word of God, not with him.

One minister who had been against Seymour would later say, "The contention was all on our part. I have never met a man who had such control over his spirit.

No amount of confusion and accusation seemed to disturb him. He would sit behind that packing case and smile at us until we were all condemned by our own activities.”<sup>10</sup>

## 214 NORTH BONNIE BRAE STREET

The calming leadership of William Seymour was noticed by all. Following his investigation, the Asberys asked him to move into their home on North Bonnie Brae Street and to begin holding regular meetings there. Seymour accepted, and the small group began to meet in late February 1906. Their meetings consisted of hours of prayer as they sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

As the meetings grew, Seymour asked for the assistance of his longtime friend Lucy Farrow. He explained to the group that Farrow had an extraordinary ability to present the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and so money was collected to fund her trip from Houston.

When Sister Farrow arrived, Seymour announced that the group would enter into a ten-day fast until they received the divine blessing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The group fasted and prayed through the weekend. Then, on Monday, Mr. Lee called Seymour to his home to ask for the prayer of healing. Seymour anointed Lee with oil and prayed for him, and Lee was healed instantly. Then, Lee asked Seymour to lay hands on him and pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Seymour laid hands on him again, and this time, Lee broke out speaking loudly in other tongues! The two rejoiced ecstatically for the rest of the day, then walked together to the evening prayer meeting.

When they arrived at the Asbery home on North Bonnie Brae Street, every room was packed with people. Many were already praying. Seymour took charge of the meeting, leading the group in songs, testimonies, and more prayer. Then, he began to tell the story of Mr. Lee’s healing and his infilling of the Holy Spirit. As soon as Seymour finished, Lee raised his hands and began to speak in other tongues. The entire group dropped to their knees as they worshipped God and cried out for the baptism. Then, six or seven people lifted their voices and began to speak in another tongue. Jennie Evans Moore, who would later marry Seymour, fell to her knees from the piano bench as one of the first to speak in tongues.

Some people rushed outside to the front porch, prophesying and preaching.

Others, still speaking in tongues, ran into the streets for all the neighborhood to hear. The Asberys' young daughter rushed into the living room to see what was happening, only to meet her frightened brother running the other way! Then, Jennie Evans Moore returned to the piano and began singing with her beautiful voice—in up to six languages, all with interpretation. The meeting lasted until well past 10:00 p.m., when everyone left in great joy and thankfulness.<sup>11</sup>

For three days, they celebrated what they dubbed “early Pentecost restored.” The news spread quickly, bringing crowds that filled the Asberys' yard and surrounded their home. Groups from every culture began to find their way to 214 North Bonnie Brae Street. Some would stand outside the windows hoping to hear someone pray in tongues. At times, they heard great shouting. At other times, it was intensely quiet. Many fell “under the power” and lay on the floor—some for three to five hours.<sup>12</sup>

Unusual healings also took place. One person said:

“The noise of the great outpouring of the Spirit drew me. I had been nothing but a ‘walking drugstore’ all my life, with weak lungs and cancer. As they looked at me, they said, ‘Child, God will heal you.’ In those days of the great outpouring, when they said God would heal you, you were healed. For thirty-three years, I have never gone back to the doctors, thank God, nor any of that old medicine! The Lord saved me, baptized me with the Holy Ghost, healed me, and sent me on my way rejoicing.”<sup>13</sup>

It is said that the Asberys' “front porch became the pulpit and the street the pews” as Seymour would address the people from this home. Eventually, the front porch collapsed because of the weight of the crowd, but it was quickly reinforced so the meetings could continue.

It was during the third night of these meetings that Seymour finally experienced his own encounter with the Holy Spirit. It was late on the night of April 12, 1906, after many had left the meeting, when Seymour himself was filled and began to speak in other tongues. He was kneeling beside a man who was helping him pray for a breakthrough when at last he received. The long-awaited gift of the Holy Spirit had finally come to the man whose preaching had brought His freedom to so many others.

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Everyone knew another meeting place had to be found quickly. The Asbery home could no longer accommodate the crowds. So on April 14, 1906, Seymour and his elders set out to find the perfect place. They wandered around the city near their area until they came upon a dead-end street that was about a half a mile long. It was there, in the industrial business section of Los Angeles, that Seymour found what had once been an old Methodist church. After its use by the Methodists, the building had been remodeled for a different purpose. It had been divided in half, the top section having been turned into apartments. But a fire had destroyed the floor, and the cathedral-shaped roof had been flattened and covered with tar.

When Seymour acquired the building, the top floor was being used for storage, while the bottom floor had been converted into a horse stable. The windows were broken, and bare electric lightbulbs hung from the ceiling. Seymour was offered the building for eight dollars a month.

As the word got out, people came from everywhere to help restore the building. A. G. Osterburg, the pastor of the local Full Gospel Church, paid several men to help renovate the building. Volunteers swept the floors and whitewashed the walls. J. V. McNeil, a devout Catholic and owner of the largest lumber company in Los Angeles, donated lumber for the cause. Sawdust was placed on the floor, and planks were nailed to wooden barrels for use as pews. Two empty crates were nailed on top of each other to act as Seymour's pulpit.

It was in this humble, skid-row-like setting that Azusa Street prepared themselves for international revival.

## BEGINNING STAGES

April 18, 1906, was a memorable day in U.S. history: the day of the great San Francisco earthquake. The next day, a lesser shock was felt in Los Angeles, causing many to repent of their sins out of fear. Hundreds of them fled to Azusa to hear the gospel message and to experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. Even the very wealthy came to this lower-class area to hear of God's power.

The seating arrangement at Azusa was unique. Because there was no platform, Seymour sat on the same level as the congregation. The benches were arranged so the participants faced one another. The meetings were spontaneous; no one ever knew what would happen or who the speaker would be.

In the beginning stages of Azusa, all of the music was impromptu without the use of instruments or hymn books. The meetings began with someone singing a song or giving a testimony. Because there was no program, someone would finally arise, anointed to bring forth the message. The speaker could be any race, age, or gender. And everyone felt that God was responsible for the altar calls, which could take place at any point of the meetings.

At Azusa Street, sermons were inspired in English or in tongues with interpretation. Sometimes the services ran continuously for ten to twelve hours. Sometimes they ran for several days and nights! Many said the congregation never tired because they were so energized by the Holy Spirit. After the services ended, in the early-morning hours, many could be seen standing beneath the streetlights, still talking about the Lord.

At Azusa, the services were so anointed that if anyone got up to speak from their intellectual understanding, the Spirit-filled believers would break out in wailing sobs. This has been illustrated well in a story about a woman called Mother Jones. One man arose to speak, apparently not being led by the Spirit. As he stood and preached, Mother Jones is said to have quietly hurried up to the platform, where she sat at the foot of the pulpit, then stared up at the fellow with icy, foreboding eyes. Finally, she said, "Can't you see that you aren't anointed to preach?" Because of this incident, Mother Jones quickly earned a reputation that discouraged any unanointed preacher from standing at the pulpit. It is said that all she had to do was stand up, and the unanointed preacher would run from the pulpit!

Soon, all classes of people began attending the Azusa Street meetings. Frank Bartleman wrote:

"Many were curious and unbelieving, but others were hungry for God. The newspapers began to ridicule and abuse the meetings, thus giving us much free advertising. This brought the crowds. The Devil overdid himself again. Outside persecution never hurt the work. We had the most to fear from the working of evil spirits within. Even spiritualists and hypnotists came to investigate and to try their influence. Then all the religious soreheads, crooks, and cranks came, seeking a place in the work. We had the most to fear from these. But this is always the danger to every new work; they had no place elsewhere. This condition cast a fear over many that was hard to overcome. It hindered the Spirit much. Many were afraid to seek God for fear the Devil might get them.<sup>14</sup>

He also wrote:

“We found early in the Azusa work that when we attempted to steady the ark, the Lord stopped working. We dared not call the attention of the people too much to the working of the Evil One. Fear would follow. We could only pray—then God gave victory. There was a presence of God with us that, through prayer, we could depend on. The leaders had limited experience, and the wonder is that the work survived at all against its powerful adversaries.”<sup>15</sup>

I believe this statement of Bartleman may be one of the main reasons that Seymour has been severely criticized as a leader. God was looking for a willing vessel, and He found it in Seymour. God is not looking for those who brag of their status and experience. However, in spiritual terms, Seymour’s limited experience may have been the cause of his difficulties. I agree that leadership should expound strongly on the truth instead of focusing on that which is false. Deceit cannot stand against the authority, strength, and wisdom of prayerful, godly leadership. I’m glad they depended on prayer. Prayer will see you through. But God also gives His leadership a voice. That voice, by the strength of the Holy Spirit, will know how to separate that which is of value from the counterfeit that will tarnish. Strong, godly leadership can separate the gold from the brass.

Despite some spiritual confusion, Azusa began operating day and night. The entire building had been organized for full use. Great emphasis had been placed on the blood of Jesus, inspiring the group to a higher standard of living. And divine love began to manifest, allowing no unkind words to be spoken of another. The people were careful to make sure that the Spirit of God wouldn’t be grieved. Both the rich, educated people and the poor, unlearned people sat as one in the sawdust and makeshift barrel pews.

### PACKING THE STREETS, FALLING LIKE TREES

Bartleman wrote, “I often used to declare...that I would rather live six months at that time than fifty years of ordinary time....I have stopped more than once within two blocks of the place and prayed for strength before I dared go on. The presence of the Lord was so real.”<sup>16</sup>

It was said that the power of God could be felt at Azusa, even outside of the building. Scores of people were seen dropping into a prostrate position in the

streets before they ever reached the mission. Then, many would rise, speaking in tongues without any assistance from those inside.<sup>17</sup>

By summer, crowds had reached staggering numbers, often into the thousands. The scene had become an international gathering. One account states that “every day, trains unloaded numbers of visitors who came from all over the continent. News accounts of the meeting spread over the nation in both the secular and religious press.”<sup>18</sup>

Inexperience may have been prevalent at the beginning, but seasoned veterans of ministry were now arriving to help support Seymour’s work. Most came from the Holiness ranks or were missionaries returning from the nations. The result of this seasoned mixture of people was a wonderful new host of missionaries who were dispatched around the world. Many, newly baptized in the Holy Spirit, would feel a call to a certain nation. So men and women were now departing for Scandinavia, China, India, Egypt, Ireland, and various other nations. Even Sister Hutchinson, who had initially locked Seymour out of her mission, came to Azusa, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and left for Africa.<sup>19</sup>

Owen Adams of California traveled to Canada from Azusa, where he met Robert Semple, first husband of Aimee Semple McPherson. When Adams met Semple, he told him of the miraculous events at Azusa and of his experience of speaking in tongues. Semple then excitedly told his new bride, Aimee, before they went on to China, where Robert Semple would die. But Adam’s news had birthed a burning curiosity in the heart of young Aimee. When she returned to America, she would make Los Angeles her ministry base.<sup>20</sup>

Though there was much excitement swirling around about the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Azusa, many misunderstood the ultimate purpose of speaking in other tongues. Many felt it was only a divine language for the nation to which they were sent.<sup>21</sup>

At this time, everyone seemed to love William Seymour. When the Spirit moved, he was known to keep his head inside of the top box crate that sat in front of him, bowed in prayer. He never asked for a salary, so he would very often be seen “walking through the crowds with five and ten dollar bills sticking out of his hip pockets which people had crammed there unnoticed by him.”<sup>22</sup>

John G. Lake visited the Azusa street meetings. In his book *Adventures in God*, he would later write of Seymour: “He had the funniest vocabulary. But I

want to tell you, there were doctors, lawyers, and professors, listening to the marvelous things coming from his lips. It was not what he said in words, it was what he said from his spirit to my heart that showed me he had more of God in his life than any man I had ever met up to that time. It was God in him that attracted the people.”<sup>23</sup>

Missionaries were called from their nations to come and witness the spiritual phenomena in Los Angeles. Many came, then carried Azusa Street’s Pentecostal message around the world. No one could possibly record all the miracles that occurred there.

The members of Azusa all carried tiny bottles of oil wherever they went. They would knock on doors to witness to and pray for the sick throughout Los Angeles. They stood on street corners, singing and preaching, and worked as volunteers to clothe the poor and feed the hungry. It was exciting and incredible.

In September 1906, due to popular demand, Seymour began a publication entitled *The Apostolic Faith*. Within a few months, the mailing list grew to over twenty thousand names. By the next year, it had more than doubled. In this publication, Seymour announced his intention to restore “the faith once delivered” by old-time preaching, camp meetings, revivals, missions, street, and prison work.<sup>24</sup>

In the first publication, Seymour wrote, “...multitudes have come. God makes no difference in nationality.”<sup>25</sup>

Then, a few months later, he wrote:

“The meeting has been a melting time. The people are all melted together...made one lump, one bread, all one body in Christ Jesus. There is no Jew or Gentile, bond or free, in the Azusa Mission. No instrument that God can use is rejected on account of color or dress or lack of education. This is why God has built up the work.... The sweetest thing is the loving harmony.”<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, these were revolutionary words in a time of such racial division.

## BEGINNINGS OF DECLINE

Persecution outside of Azusa was expected, but it finally began within. Early one autumn morning, some members arrived at the mission and saw the words

“Apostolic Faith Mission” written across the top of the building. They started accusing the mission of evolving into just another denomination. This was the name of Seymour’s early mentor’s movement, so the Azusa Mission was now being perceived as a loose offshoot of Charles Parham’s ministry. And many feared the mission was becoming just another in Parham’s network of churches and Bible schools. “From that time, the trouble and division began. It was no longer a free Spirit for all as it had been. The work had become one more rival party and body, along with the other churches and sects of the city...the church is an organism, not a human organization.”<sup>27</sup>

By now, Azusa outreach centers had been planted in Seattle and Portland under the direction of a woman by the name of Florence Crawford, and the Los Angeles headquarters was attempting to draw the entire West Coast revival outlets into their organization, but failed. So the revival itself was slowly setting itself up for ultimate failure.

### “TARRYING” AND TONGUES

The new body of believers also had a misconception of the “tarrying” concept. They would simply wait for hours for the Spirit to come, and restlessness began to surface when they felt many were abusing this time. What they didn’t realize was that the Holy Spirit had already come. He was there!

Then there was the confusion surrounding their understanding of speaking in other tongues. Up to this point, it had primarily been taught that tongues were for foreign missions. They believed that if a person were to go to the mission field, they would be gifted to preach in the nation’s language. Many Azusa missionaries were greatly disappointed when they discovered this was not the rule. Though it is a biblical and historical fact that tongues will manifest for that purpose, this is not their only use! It would be later, during the growth of the Pentecostal movement, that tongues would be understood as a prayer language as well. But at Azusa Street, the experience of speaking in tongues was in its “first diaper”!

Azusa members also believed that a person only needed to speak in tongues once to be filled with the Holy Spirit. To the early Azusa members, speaking in other tongues was a sovereign move of God that meant waiting for God to come upon them.

Along with these misunderstandings, accusations of fleshly manifestations

that people called the moving of the Holy Spirit began circulating. With this spiritual understanding being so new, can you imagine how it must have been to lead it? It was here that Seymour wrote to Charles Parham, and asked him to come to Azusa to hold a general revival.

### FANATICS, FAKES, AND FRACTION

Though Seymour didn't fully agree with all of Parham's theology, I believe he respected and trusted Parham's leadership experience. Perhaps he felt Parham could present another view and ignite a fresh move of God.

It is said that many others had written letters to Parham begging him to come and determine which manifestations at Azusa were counterfeit and which were real. While there is not documentation of these letters, Mrs. Pauline Parham has claimed that some are in her collections.<sup>28</sup> We do have one letter written by Seymour to Parham that states, "...we are expecting a general one [revival] to start again when you come, that these little revivals will all come together and make one great union revival."<sup>29</sup>

It is true that there were many divisions within the Los Angeles revival. But by previous examples of Seymour's character, I believe he wanted Parham to unite the city instead of discipline it. And it is certain that Parham wouldn't have come to Azusa without an invitation.

When Parham arrived, Seymour introduced him as the "Father in this gospel of the kingdom."<sup>30</sup> I believe Seymour was sincere. He needed a spiritual father to help him lead this great movement. But whatever he had expected from Parham, things didn't go as Seymour had planned. After Parham's sermons and private exhortations, Seymour padlocked the mission's door to keep Parham out.

What did Parham say to Seymour? What could have caused him to lock Parham out of Azusa? While it is true that Parham's background in education, leadership, and experience differed from Seymour, their views on the baptism of the Holy Spirit seemed to be the same. Or were they?

Parham sat in the service while looking on in horror at the manifestations around him. In Parham's services, a certain liberality was allowed, but nothing that bordered on fanaticism. Some of Parham's own Bible school students even felt he was too strict in his definition of "fanaticism." And at Azusa, besides the shouting and dancing, the people jerked and shook. It was a highly emotional atmosphere, and there were many genuine, Spirit-filled expressions along with

the false. Because of the many cultures represented, Seymour believed that each person should allow their own emotional experience, based on how each individual understood the moving of the Spirit, whether it was right or wrong.

Seymour's theology was to allow the Holy Spirit to do whatever he wanted. But only a few knew enough about the movings of the Spirit to lead the people in it. Seymour felt that if a culture was forced into a certain mode or expression, the Holy Spirit wouldn't manifest Himself among them. I believe Seymour was spiritually sensitive in his leadership, and followed this to the best of his ability. There is a fine line between wounding the human spirit and offending the Holy Spirit.

There is no known written account from Seymour regarding certain hypnotism accounts. But there are from Parham. Here is his account:

“I hurried to Los Angeles, and to my utter surprise and astonishment I found conditions even worse than I had anticipated...manifestations of the flesh, spiritualistic controls, saw people practicing hypnotism at the altar over candidates seeking baptism, though many were receiving the real baptism of the Holy Ghost.

“After preaching two or three times, I was informed by two of the elders that I was not wanted in that place. With workers from Texas, we opened a great revival in the W.C.T.U. Building in Los Angeles. Great numbers were saved, marvelous healings took place, and between two and three hundred who had been possessed of awful fits and spasms and controls in the Azusa Street work were delivered, and received the real Pentecost teachings and spake with other tongues.

“In speaking of different phases of fanaticism that have been obtained here, that I do so with all lovingkindness and at the same time with all fairness and firmness. Let me speak plainly with regard to the work as I have found it here. I found hypnotic influences, familiar-spirit influences, spiritualistic influences, mesmeric influences, and all kinds of spells, spasms, falling in trances, etc.

“A word about the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The speaking in tongues is never brought about by any of the above practices/influences. No such thing is known among our workers as the suggestion of certain words and sounds, the working of the chin, or the massage of the throat. There

are many in Los Angeles who sing, pray and talk wonderfully in other tongues, as the Spirit gives utterance, and there is jabbering here that is not tongues at all. The Holy Ghost does nothing that is unnatural or unseemingly, and any strained exertion of body, mind or voice is not the work of the Holy Spirit, but of some familiar spirit, or other influence. The Holy Ghost never leads us beyond the point of self-control or the control of others, while familiar spirits or fanaticism lead us both beyond self-control and the power to help others.”<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps Parham’s perception was right; still, the results may have been different if Parham had been more fatherly than dictatorial. Seymour never changed his theology and neither did Parham. Seymour wouldn’t mention the rivalry for some two months. And even when he finally did, his account was discreet, avoiding any direct criticism. Seymour wrote:

“Some are asking if Dr. Charles F. Parham is the leader of this movement. We can answer, no, he is not the leader of this movement of Azusa Mission. We thought of having him to be our leader and so stated in our paper, before waiting on the Lord. We can be rather hasty, especially when we are very young in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are just like a baby—full of love—and were willing to accept anyone that had the baptism with the Holy Spirit as our leader. But the Lord commenced settling us down, and we saw that the Lord should be our leader. So we honor Jesus as the Great Shepherd of the sheep. He is our model.”<sup>32</sup>

So, in attempting to uphold his doctrine of unity, Seymour remained true to his teachings by not allowing an unkind word to be spoken against any of his accusers.

## THE SANCTIFICATION SLUR

Though Seymour followed John Wesley, he didn’t follow his teachings on sanctification. Seymour believed one could lose their salvation if they reacted in the flesh. He taught that sanctification, or sinless perfection, was a separate work of grace aside from salvation. Once you were sanctified, Seymour believed, you acted sanctified all the time. But if you sinned, you lost it.

Can you imagine the trouble and accusations that kind of teaching caused within Azusa? Many overzealous believers got caught up in pointing fingers and

judging one another. Their self-righteous behavior resulted in clashes, splits, and controversies. In fact, this is one of the main reasons Seymour never reacted in the flesh to any persecution that came against him. According to his theology, this was necessary to keep his salvation. He said, "If you get angry, or speak evil, or backbite, I care not how many tongues you may have, you have not the baptism with the Holy Spirit. You have lost your salvation."<sup>33</sup>

Seymour would padlock an opposing minister, but he would never speak out against him!

### LOVE AND BETRAYAL

In spite of the many accusations, mistakes, and persecutions, Seymour remained faithful in his purpose for revival. It seemed he trusted and believed the best of almost everyone. True to his gentle, almost naive nature, he would later write:

"You cannot win people by preaching against their church or pastor...if you get to preaching against churches, you will find that sweet Spirit of Christ...is lacking and a harsh judging spirit takes place. The churches are not to be blamed for divisions. People were hunting for light. They built up denominations because they did not know a better way. When people run out of the love of God, they get to preaching dress, and meats, and doctrines of men and preaching against churches. All these denominations are our brethren.... So let us seek peace and not confusion.... The moment we feel we have all the truth or more than anyone else, we will drop."<sup>34</sup>

The next spring, Seymour had to decide whether he would purchase Azusa or move to another location. He presented the option to the congregation, and they agreed to make an immediate payment of \$4,000 toward the \$15,000 needed. Within a year, the remaining balance was paid, far ahead of schedule. By this time, reports of miracles and newly-founded missions poured into Los Angeles from all over the world. Encouraged, Seymour commented, "We are on the verge of the greatest miracle the world has ever seen."<sup>35</sup>

During this time, Seymour's thoughts turned to marriage. Jennie Evans Moore, a faithful member of his ministry in Los Angeles, became his wife. She was known for her beauty, musical talents, and spiritual sensitivity. She was a very gentle woman and was always faithful to stand beside Seymour. It was

Jennie who felt the Lord would have them marry, and Seymour agreed. The couple married on May 13, 1908. After the ceremony, William and Jennie moved into a modest apartment upstairs in the Azusa Mission.

But the news of their marriage angered a small yet very influential group at the Mission. One of the main antagonists was Clara Lum, the mission's secretary responsible for the newspaper's publication. After learning of Seymour's marriage, she abruptly decided that it was time to leave the mission.

A few believers at Azusa had some very odd ideas about marriage. Lum's group believed marriage in the last days to be a disgrace because of the coming return of Christ, and they severely denounced Seymour for his decision.

It may have been that Clara Lum was secretly in love with Seymour and that she left because of her jealousy. Whatever the reason, she relocated to Portland, Oregon, to join the mission headed by a former Azusa associate, Florence Crawford. When she did, she took the entire national and international mailing lists with her.

This unthinkable action crippled Seymour's worldwide publication outreach. His entire national and international lists of over fifty thousand names had been stolen, leaving him with only the Los Angeles list. Then, when the May 1908 Apostolic Faith was sent out, the cover looked the same, but inside was a column announcing its new address in Portland for contributions and mail. The thousands who eagerly read and sent contributions to the newspaper now started sending them to Portland without questioning the change. By the June issue, no article by Seymour appeared at all. Finally, by midsummer of 1908, all references to Los Angeles were omitted entirely. When it became clear that Lum wouldn't be returning, the Seymours traveled to Portland to confront Lum and ask for the lists. But the lists were never returned. Without this vital information, it was impossible for Seymour to continue the publication, and an era of Azusa was brought to a dramatic end.

### THE LAST DIVISION: MAN OR GOD?

Throughout 1909 and 1910, Seymour continued his ministry at Azusa, though the number of people decreased dramatically due to lack of influence and funds. So, he left two young men in charge at the mission and departed for Chicago on a cross-country preaching tour. In early 1911 William H. Durham held meetings at Azusa in his place.

Durham's dramatic preaching caused hundreds to flock again to the mission. Many of the old Azusa workers, from various parts of the world, even returned to the mission. They called it "the second shower of the Latter Rain," as the fire began to fall at Azusa once again. In one service, over five hundred people had to be turned away. So between the services, the people wouldn't leave their seats for fear of losing them.<sup>36</sup>

The last conflict at Azusa took place between Seymour and Durham. The two differed greatly in their theology. Durham preached adamantly, and soundly, that people couldn't lose their salvation even if they sinned in the flesh. Salvation was by faith with works involved, not by works alone. Durham preached the needed balance between law and grace that the Pentecostal movement desperately needed, because the "works" doctrine had led to many divisions.<sup>37</sup> His teaching felt like a cool rain on those who heard. It literally brought the people in droves!

Alarmed by Durham's large following and doctrinal differences, the elders of Azusa contacted Seymour. He returned immediately to Los Angeles for a conference. But Seymour and Durham couldn't come to an agreement in their doctrine. So in May, Seymour used the padlock again, locking Durham out of the mission!<sup>38</sup>

Unshaken by this action, Durham and his workers secured a large two-story building that seated more than one thousand people. The upstairs served as a prayer room, which was open day and night. The crowds from Azusa followed Durham. Thousands were saved, baptized, and healed, while the old Azusa Mission became virtually deserted.

## TIRED AND WORN

But the old Azusa Mission remained open to anyone who would come. Seymour remained its leader and kept his doctrine the same, though no one seemed interested in attending. He changed Azusa's meeting schedule to one all-day service to be held on Sunday. And he regularly attempted to increase the meetings, but the interest was not there. In the end, only twenty people remained. And they were mainly those from the original Azusa group. At times, visitors came from the previous "glory days," and of course Seymour was elated in welcoming them. But he spent more and more time reading and reflecting.

In 1921, William Seymour made his last ministry campaign across America.

When he returned to Los Angeles in 1922, people began to notice that he looked very weary. He attended many ministry conventions, but was never publicly recognized from the platform.

Finally, on September 28, 1922, while at the mission, Seymour suffered a sudden attack of severe pain in his chest. One of the workers ran for the doctor, who was only blocks away. Upon examination, Seymour was told to rest. Then, at 5:00 p.m. that same afternoon, while he was dictating a letter, another chest pain clinched him. He struggled for breath, then went to be with the Lord at the age of fifty-two. The cause of his death was officially cited as heart failure.

The revivalist was buried in a simple redwood casket at Evergreen Cemetery in Los Angeles. He was appropriately laid to rest amid the graves of others from many nations and continents. The words on his tombstone simply read, "Our Pastor." Sadly, only two hundred people attended William Seymour's funeral, but they gave many testimonies of God's greatness through this front-line General's ministry.

## SHADOWS AND WOLVES

Following the years after Seymour's death, Mrs. Seymour carried on as pastor of the Azusa Street Mission. Everything continued smoothly for eight years. Then more problems arose in 1931. Through a series of legal battles waged by someone trying to take over the Mission, city officials became annoyed with the group and declared the property a fire hazard. Later that year it was demolished, but not before it was offered to a Pentecostal denomination, who replied, "We are not interested in relics."<sup>39</sup> Today only a street sign stands over the property which is now nothing more than a vacant lot.

Five years later, Mrs. Seymour was admitted to the county hospital for terminal care. Jennie died of heart failure and joined her husband in heaven on July 2, 1936.

## THE LEGACY OF POWER

Though the legacy and ministry of William J. Seymour seems heartbreaking, the results of his efforts between 1906 and 1909 produced and exploded the Pentecostal movement around the world. Today, many denominations attribute their founding to the participants of Azusa. Most of the early Assembly of God leaders came out of Azusa. Demos Shakarian, founder of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship, said his grandfather was an original Azusa member.

The evangelistic efforts of the Valdez family, the Garr family, Dr. Charles Price, and countless others are also linked to this revival.

Probably everyone in the Pentecostal movement today can attribute his roots, in some way, to Azusa. Regardless of all the controversy and Azusa's peculiar doctrines, whenever Azusa is mentioned, most immediately think of the power of the Holy Spirit that was poured on their ranks.

### GOD IS NOT A RACIST

Some have tried to make the Azusa Street Revival and the ministry of Seymour a racial issue. Unfortunately, sometimes a pure move of God gets hidden under racial overtones. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons Azusa lasted for only three short years. God won't allow His glory to fall prey to the arguments of men. If that should happen, He leaves—end of discussion.

Some who seem racially influenced get upset that Seymour is called the “catalyst” of Pentecost instead of the “father” of it. According to Webster's Dictionary, a “catalyst” is something that “precipitates a process or event, and increases the rate at which a reaction takes place.” That is exactly what Seymour did. William Seymour's Pentecostal ministry increased public awareness to such a degree that it not only turned around a major U.S. city, it also spread throughout the world at an incredible pace. It seems that every continent was touched in some way by the revival at Azusa.

As was mentioned earlier, racial issues were only a small part of the many interferences that visited Azusa. I believe a great error is made when this revival is looked upon as primarily a black-and-white issue. No particular race can claim the patent on a move of God. God has never worked according to the color of man; He operates through the heart of man.

As we continue to explore the great Generals of our past and determine to learn from their successes, don't allow yourself to be counted among their failures. Refuse to listen to the voices of yesterday and today who see only appearances. Rather, follow those who press into God's Spirit. Let us go on to maturity and fight for the prize rather than personal glory.

Only eternity will fully reveal the fruit of William J. Seymour's ministry. One thing is clear: he was an able stick of dynamite who God could use to send the explosions of Pentecostal revival around the world. And he did.

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5 Tinney, *In the Tradition*, 14.

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12 Shumway, *Critical Study*, 175–176, and Cotton, *Personal Reminiscences*, 2.

13 Cotton, *Personal Reminiscences*, 3.

14 Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, 46.

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- 20 *Ibid.*
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- 25 *Apostolic Faith*, September 1906.
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- 27 Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, 71.
- 28 Interview with Mrs. Pauline Parham.
- 29 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 154.
- 30 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 163.
- 31 Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 163–170.
- 32 *Apostolic Faith*, December 1906.
- 33 *Ibid.*, June 1907.
- 34 *Apostolic Faith*, January 1907.
- 35 *Ibid.*, October 1907–January 1908.
- 36 Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, 117.
- 37 Valdez, *Fire on Azusa*, 26.
- 38 Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, 118.

39 Tinney, In the Tradition, 19.