

THE LAKELAND REVIVAL: OUR SPIRITUAL 9/11



By Rev. Mel C. Montgomery

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INTRODUCTION:

The Lakeland Revival, like the tragedy of the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, was a shocking and a preventable disaster. Had leaders taken seriously the danger of our Enemy, and had they been willing to listen to the repeated warnings of seasoned individuals, both catastrophes would have been avoided.

As with New York's 9/11, we watched in horror as the Twin Towers of the Apostolic Movement and the Prophetic Movements went up in flames and came crashing down as two planes smashed into them; one piloted by greed and the other piloted by pride. Ministers were discredited. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was brought into an open reproach. Multitudes of Christians had their faith shattered. Now we observe the ghost-like figures--humans covered with the dust of unimaginable destruction--wandering around in the rubble, dazed, trying to figure out what went wrong.

We're working through the immediate and normal reactions to this debacle: shock, grief, and anger. After the anger passes though, there needs to come an honest examination and a steely resolve to never allow this to happen again. Let's set aside the anger, and take an honest look at how we came to this place.

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CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF THE TWIN TOWERS

As the tower named the “Prophetic Movement” was being built in the 1980’s and 1990’s, many of us warned of the shaky foundation underneath it. Although at the time, Kenneth Hagin, Sister Goodwin, and many other prophets were alive and well and ministering in the genuine prophet’s ministry, those who launched the “New Prophetic Move,” claimed that the prophet’s ministry had been “lost,” and that they were commissioned from Heaven to restore prophets and prophetic ministry to the Body of Christ. Thus the builders chose for the cornerstone of their building an utter falsehood, and began building from there.

They completed their foundation by embracing the teachings and errors of Paul Cain. Decades previously, this man had sat at the feet of William Branham, who had started out as a genuine prophet of God but who had gone off into error and had died in disgrace. Kenneth Hagin had prophesied Branham’s death date. Branham didn’t listen, and sure enough, Branham had died on the day Hagin said that he would. Paul Cain took up Branham’s mantle of error, and saturated it with decades of immorality and alcohol, and then handed that error-and-sin-soaked mantle to the builders of the New Prophetic Move. They embraced it, praised it, and ridiculed anyone who refused to submit to their new “revelations” and “anointings.”

As floor after floor was erected over this fraudulent foundation, with nothing level or square by any scriptural standard, the building creaked and groaned and swayed with the wind. As seasoned prophets, apostles, and other ministers pointed out that the Prophetic Movement tower was in danger of collapse; they were roundly laughed at and mocked. They were called “Stuck in the Past! Out of touch! Jealous of the new thing God is doing!” Kenneth Hagin, the prophet who had prophesied back in the 1960’s that Branham would die before his time due to God judging Branham for his extreme teachings, wrote a book in the 1980’s, entitled “Apostles, Prophets, and Pastors.” In this book he warned of the extreme teachings of the New Prophetic Move. Just as Branham scorned Hagin’s warnings in the 1960’s, so his spiritual descendants the “New Prophets” scorned Hagin’s warnings in the 1980’s.

As the builders continued to build the Prophetic Movement Tower, their movement was rocked by sex scandals involving some of their leaders. The movement was further warped by increasingly bizarre teachings. Yet they assured us that all was well. They seemed to always have new excuses for each new outrage. As their false prophecies piled up one atop another, they explained that they were “learning to prophesy,” and were trying to get their “accuracy level” up. They argued that if they prophesied false prophecies hard enough, and long enough, eventually true prophecies would begin to flow. We are still waiting for the true prophecies to emerge. As the sex scandals piled up, the teachings became more ridiculous, and the prophecies went unfulfilled, the outrages finally forced the New Prophets to admit that they needed accountability. So as they finished off the top

level of the Prophetic Movement Tower, realizing they dared build no higher on this clittering, clattering, clanking, shaking, dangerous edifice, they birthed out the “Apostolic Movement.”

As this Apostolic Movement Tower arose, it paralleled the Prophetic Movement in every way. They reflected the same prideful refusal to receive any counsel or correction from seasoned ministers. They mirrored the same teaching errors of the Prophetic Movement, which were flatly refuted by Scripture. The Apostolic Move, rather than correcting the Prophetic Move, turned out to be nothing more than a rubber stamp for the errors of the group they were supposedly created to correct. The inhabitants of the Prophetic Tower reciprocated by addressing the inhabitants of the other tower by the lofty titles of “Apostle this,” and “Apostle That.” Rather than bringing order, structure, or accountability, each tower and each move simply served to provide cover and make excuses for the other. Indeed, some of the New Prophets simply took on the title of “New Apostle” and took up joint residency in both towers.

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CHAPTER TWO

LAKELAND – OUR SPIRITUAL 9/11 ARRIVES

The Lakeland Revival broke out, headed up by Evangelist Todd Bentley at Igniter Church in Lakeland Florida. GOD-TV began broadcasting it live. Many hopeful and hungry Christians tuned in to GOD-TV and also visited the services in person hoping to find the real blessings of God coming down from Heaven. The immature and the undiscerning were thrilled with Lakeland. But those with maturity and discerning were disappointed to find that this was just more of the same manipulations of men built around a man yelling “Bam! Bam! Bam!,” coupled with extreme appeals for money, along with outrageous and violent behavior.

Todd Bentley's numerous claims of healings, miracles, divine visitations, signs, wonders, and even of 27 people being raised from the dead, necessitated an objective examination to confirm or refute the claims. If true, the revival should be celebrated and embraced by all. But if false, the truth needed to be exposed.

Robert Ricciardelli, in cooperation with Charisma Magazine, went to Lakeland to get the stories of the healings and resurrections down on paper in order to share the miraculous news with the world. However, as his investigation proceeded he could confirm no resurrections, and few if any miracles. Instead, he discovered misconduct and sin behind the scenes, and lies spewing from the platform. Worse, Todd Bentley was drinking heavily, and was in an adulterous affair with a female staff member—his second adulterous affair in three years. Bentley's staff now admit that he was a “pathological liar”—their words, not mine.

With Robert being a member of C. Peter Wagner's “International Coalition of Apostles,” he approached them as they sought to become involved in the Lakeland Revival. He made them fully aware of his findings of sin, lies, and exaggerations at Lakeland. Robert writes:

I was fortunate that on this occasion, we had information early on of the deception that was going on. We witnessed how this was in fact perpetrated by man, for man's agendas. We shared this with many of leaders involved, and many would not listen. Instead they warned us to not come against Todd Bentley, his lifestyle, his methods, or his doctrine, because he was God's choice to mess with our religion. We were called “revival police,” and other names for asking questions.

The leaders of the Apostolic Movement were uninterested in the fact that the Lakeland Revival was rank with sin and lies. Rather than thanking Robert for bringing this misconduct to their attention, they warned him to stay silent. As you can see from Peter Wagner's own statement, the leaders of the Apostolic Move were determined to insert themselves into center stage at Lakeland and endorse Todd Bentley no matter what. Peter Wagner's statement reads:

At this point [mid-June 2008] some disagreements arose. I have already mentioned that I was consulting with several apostolic colleagues whom I trusted and whom I know trusted me. It is very necessary for us to understand exactly what the disagreement was about. It was about the most appropriate apostolic protocol for the occasion. After prayerfully listening to the different points of view with careful consideration of what was being said, the decision had to be mine. I believe that God's word to me about "Alignment!" had to be directional. I concluded that the best protocol was to do the alignment first, then deal with the issues that had been raised. My other friends disagreed and urged me to deal with Todd's problems first then do the alignment. I respected their point of view and I was very sorry that I had to follow God's leading for me personally instead of taking their advice. It was not a comfortable decision." Wagner's full statement can be accessed at: www.globalharvest.org

Wagner was indeed "consulting with several apostolic colleagues" one of which was Robert Ricciardelli who was telling Wagner that Bentley was an adulterer, a manipulator, and a liar. Yet stunningly, Wagner so no reason not to publicly endorse—or as he puts it, give "apostolic alignment" to—Todd Bentley.

Peter Wagner tells us that a voice--which he assumed was God--told him to give Todd Bentley Wagner's apostolic "alignment." However, the God of the Bible speaks, He always speaks in line with His written word. God's will concerning Todd Bentley and other such cases had already been made clear:

Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.—I Timothy 5:19,20.

Sin in leadership requires a public rebuke. Sin in leadership makes commissioning, endorsement, or even "apostolic alignment,"--whatever that is--utterly unthinkable. Worse, the Bible tells us that when you ordain or give a public endorsement in "questionable cases" you actually become a participant in that person's sin:

Do not be in a hurry in the laying on of hands [giving the sanction of the church too hastily in reinstating expelled offenders or in ordination in questionable cases], nor share or participate in another man's sins; keep yourself pure. (I Timothy 5:22 Amplified Version)

The Bible says that when you knowingly ordain or publicly endorse a minister through the laying on of hands, and he is in sin, you become a partaker of his sin. The "apostles" did not lend Todd their credibility. They instead took on the responsibilities and consequences of his sin. The Bible makes it clear that no man should ever be ordained, commissioned, or "aligned" unless he has a well-established

and honorable Christian testimony, and is well known to the leaders who are endorsing him. Wagner admits that he did not know Todd Bentley, and the other “apostles” on the platform with Bentley that night barely knew him either. In a video, Che Ahn seems to say that he had met Todd Bentley only seconds before the service started.

Never the less, in defiance of the clear directives of scripture that forbid individuals like Todd Bentley from being ordained or endorsed in any way by legitimate Church leaders, the New Apostles including Peter Wagner, Rick Joyner, Che Ahn, flew in from around the world to appear on stage with Bentley and endorsed him. Please examine for yourself the video of the conduct of these “apostles” in the commissioning service of Todd Bentley. Some of those who knew of his adultery and misconduct lavishly praise Todd Bentley’s “virtue,” his “purity,” his “integrity,” and so on. The first three videos are each 10 minutes long, with the fourth video about 3 minutes in length.

Here are the videos of the Commissioning Service:

Part I: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVdY9ufJmz8

Part II: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-A05WQYi7aQ

Part III: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gj15wKso9eU

Part IV: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAnNSiZfgvI

After viewing these sickening videos, please consider another command Paul gave concerning the conduct of prophets and the exercise of the gift of prophecy in a public service:

Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. (I Cor. 14:29).

Only two or three prophets should prophesy or minister in a public service. In these videos you see not 2 or 3 but numerous “apostles” and “prophets” speaking or prophesying over Todd. In these videos, when Che Ahn asks the assembled “apostles” and “prophets” to step forward if they have a “prophetic word” for Todd, ten individuals line up and speak to and/or prophesy over Todd. One woman even shakes uncontrollably and screams a prophecy at Todd in the third video. This is blatantly unscriptural behavior, a reproach to Jesus Christ, and a disgrace to the Spirit of God.

Peter Wagner's opinion of the conduct of himself and his "apostles" at Lakeland? Read for yourself:

In the Lakeland I case, I am elated at the way things are turning out. . . The final question is: Was it successful? Looking back, I praise God for using me and others to help bring order to confusion, which is one of the chief biblical tasks of an apostle.

In my opinion, Lakeland is nothing to be "elated" about. I would think sackcloth and ashes along with deep repentance would be the biblical response. Wagner sees the present as bright and getting brighter by the moment. He assures us that he has placed an "Apostolic Team" consisting of eleven of his "apostles" in charge of the meetings. He believes they will bring "order to confusion." However, this is impossible. This "Apostolic Team" consists of the same "apostles" who endorsed Todd Bentley in violation of scripture, who refused to confront his sin, who spoke numerous false prophecies over him far exceeding the number of even true prophecies to be spoken in a single service, who praised Todd's character and virtue when they knew he had none, and who laid hands on him, entering into his sin with him, and misleading the entire world into thinking that everything was on the up and up.

The most grotesque, unbiblical, fleshly, and confused people in this entire picture are the so-called apostles who are now supposed to "bring order" to this charade.

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CHAPTER THREE

WHY DID THE “APOSTLES” ENDORSE BENTLEY?

It is beyond dispute that most if not all of the “New Apostles” present at Bentley's commissioning service had been informed by Ricciardelli of Todd's vile character and the misconduct associated with the Lakeland meetings. Yet they enthusiastically endorsed Todd Bentley anyway. Why? Only they can answer that. So far, they have issued written statements that gloss over the whole affair. So we are left to examine the evidence and draw our own conclusions.

It is possible that they were motivated by greed. Lakeland had the Christian world's attention. If you can insert yourself center-stage into something that has everyone's attention, it will raise the profile of your own ministry, thus increasing the sales of your books and CD's, boosting your TV ratings, and bringing in additional invitations for speaking engagements. These ministers stood to indirectly make tons of money by endorsing Todd Bentley. A source in the Lakeland Revival told me “Mel, it was all about money, money, money.” This might explain also why they pressured Ricciardelli not to go public with the truth. As we all know from the children's story of Jack and the Beanstalk, you don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg. Todd was that goose, and there were plenty of golden eggs to be enjoyed and put in the bank if the truth could be kept from the public.

Another motivation may have been pride. These New Apostles had scorned for years the warnings of Kenneth Hagin and numerous other seasoned ministers. Perhaps when some of the same voices were raised against Lakeland, their pride and egos would not permit them to think that those voices could be right yet again.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE END RESULT

The modern twin-towers of Babel called the Apostolic Move and the Prophetic Move came crashing down by the actions of their leaders at the Lakeland Revival. The end result of Lakeland is that the leaders of the New Prophetic and New Apostolic Moves who knew of Todd's sins but appeared center-stage with him anyway and lavished their praise and endorsement on him have been utterly discredited. Were they corrupt or were they deceived? Does anyone really care anymore? I don't.

The bottom line is that whether they were corrupted or deceived, they clearly do not exhibit the incorruptibility and discerning of genuine Apostles and Prophets of the Lord Jesus Christ. So what are they?

In the Book of Revelation Christ said to the Church at Ephesus:

. . . thou hast tried them which say they are apostles,
and are not, and hast found them liars: (Rev. 2:2).

In his second letter to the Corinthian Church, Paul speaks of false apostles. He writes:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers,
transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. (II
Cor. 11:13).

Christ told us that some Christian leaders who claim to be apostles are actually liars. Paul adds that some "transform themselves into the apostles of Christ."

How do you categorize men who claim to be apostles of Jesus Christ, but who refuse to obey His word, teach contrary to the Bible, do not value the truth, speak forth numerous false prophecies, gleefully endorse ministers they know are living in deep sin, and pressure others to cover-up wickedness? And what do you call Christians who follow such discredited leaders?

One thing is for certain--the leaders who built the Apostolic and Prophetic Towers of Babel are backpedaling, denying, excusing, busily sifting through the debris, and rolling out their plans to rebuild their discredited movements. If they succeed, God will only knock those new towers down also. Christ made it clear that only spiritual habitations that are built on integrity, purity, and sound doctrine will withstand the storms of life and the attacks of the enemy. I hope we will realize that the last thing we need is another man-made tower. So I counsel that we lay down our trowels, bricks, and mortar, and humble ourselves before God and allow Him to build His Kingdom as He sees fit. The Great Architect needs from us nothing except humility and obedience to His word.

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About the Author

The ministry of author, lecturer, entrepreneur, and revivalist preacher, Mel Montgomery is an example of God fulfilling a word of prophecy.

Mel was mentored in ministry by Sister Goodwin. She and her late husband, the Rev. J.R. Goodwin had sat in meetings conducted by Smith Wigglesworth, Raymond T. Richey, and other early Pentecostals. Then God had used the Goodwins as a bridge to the leaders of the Word of Faith move. The Goodwins taught John Osteen and Kenneth Hagin Sr. about the gifts of the Spirit. Kenneth Hagin patterned his prophetic ministry after the spiritual flow he had witnessed in the Goodwins.



Before her passing, Sister Goodwin laid her hands on Mel, asked God to use him in spiritual gifts, and prophesied that Mel would have “a strong ministry, and an anointed ministry, like *some of the men of old.*” Years after Sister Goodwin’s passing, the Goodwin descendants and others asked Mel to host on his website rare audio recordings of early Pentecostal preachers that were recorded at the Goodwins’ church and elsewhere. Mel uploaded the recordings to his website, www.brothermel.com, making these treasures available to the world by download, for free.

Mel’s message and concept of ministry began to change as he listened to the recordings of the “men of old” like Howard Carter, Stanley Frodsham, F.F. Bosworth, the Goodwins, and others. He discovered that what the Pentecostal giants preached bears little resemblance to the extreme teachings common today in the Charismatic and Word of Faith branch of Christianity to which he belongs. Sister Goodwin’s prophecy is fulfilled as Mel continues to speak in churches, preaching as did the “men of old,” the transforming power of the Cross and Pentecost. He authors articles and e-books, identifying which of our teachings are biblical and which ones are not. Brother Mel calls for a Reformation in Charismatic and Word of Faith circles.

Mel’s teachings have been well received, with some being translated and published in foreign countries. In 2007 and 2008, Mel’s website received over 723,000 hits from people in 78 countries. Mel’s monthly e-mail newsletter currently goes out to subscribers around the world.

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