

Lakeland: The “Apostles” Were Wrong, But Moses Was Right

By Mel C. Montgomery

The Lakeland “Revival” bubble has burst. And the melt-down has left prominent “Apostles” and “Prophets” with egg on their faces.

For those of you that are unaware of recent developments, the story is as follows. An evangelist named Todd Bentley began holding a revival April 2 as a guest speaker at Igniter Church in Lakeland Florida. The meetings grew in size and intensity until it became necessary to move to much larger accommodations. Astonishing reports emerged from the revival of angelic visitations, Heavenly encounters, countless healings, multiplied miracles, and even numerous people being raised from the dead.

Todd claimed that the same angel who appeared to William Branham years ago in Branham's prophetic ministry was appearing regularly to him, along with a female angel named Emma, and they were guiding him and revealing deep truths to him. Seasoned Charismatic leaders questioned the extremes of Todd's methods which included slapping, kicking, punching, and “drop-kicking” people in prayer lines. One old woman was kicked in the face. A man had a tooth knocked out. They warned of the danger of following any angel who claimed to have personally led William Branham into deep error. All their cautions and warnings were roundly shouted down as being “anti-revival,” and “stuck in the past.”

In the midst of the arguing and hysteria, C. Peter Wagner, Rick Joyner, and Chuck Pierce suddenly flew down to Lakeland and gave to Bentley their unqualified endorsement. [Charisma reports:](#)

Wagner said to Bentley on the platform: “This commissioning represents a powerful spiritual transaction taking place in the invisible world. With this in mind, I take the apostolic authority that God has given me and I decree to Todd Bentley, your power will increase, your authority will increase, your favor will increase, your influence will increase, your revelation will increase.

“I also decree that a new supernatural strength will flow through this ministry. A new life force will penetrate this move of God. Government will be established to set things in their proper order. God will pour out a higher level of discernment to distinguish truth from error. New relationships will surface to open the gates to the future.”

Source: <http://www.charismamag.com/cms/news/archives/0624082.php>

Wagner stated “God will pour out a higher level of discernment to distinguish truth from error.” Would to God some of that “discernment to distinguish truth from error” had been present among the assembled ministers on the stage that night. The “Apostles” and “Prophets” were themselves endorsing a lie, and standing in the midst of a charade which was beginning to unravel privately, even as they endorsed the Lakeland Revival publicly. Strangely however, they “discerned” nothing amiss.

Behind the scenes, the truth was being uncovered by Robert Ricciardelli. Robert is the founder and president of Vision Advancement Strategies, a Spirit-filled ministry that endeavors, among other things, to promote respect between differing ministries, and to draw the various branches of Charismatic Christianity together in unity. Robert is a spiritual bridge-builder between ministries and is closely associated with J. Lee Grady, Editor of Charisma Magazine. As a matter of disclosure, I will let my readers know that I have had some private communications with Robert over the last year or so. Our communications centered mostly around him asking me to make CD copies for him of some of the rare recordings on my site, and I did so. However, we have never met.

Robert's Eye Witness Accounts and Conclusions:

Robert has said in a radio interview, in comments on blogs, and in other formats, "Truth is there are very few people being healed in Lakeland. I have worked with Charisma Magazine editor Lee Grady in discovering how many false reports have been released as facts."

Concerning Bentley's claims that 20 or more people had been raised from the dead in his meetings or as a result of them, Robert comments ". . . Charisma reporters and a few others like myself have tried to get these verified and cannot. . . We actually had offered to help, because any news of a resurrection in my opinion is world news if it can be validated. But then when the totals continued to mount which led to hype and embellishment, they began to ask us to stop asking questions."

Robert adds, "Friday night, Todd said that God said there were 1000 people that were to give \$1000, and they were to receive a 1000-fold blessing. The one hour drama on this giving subject was so deceptively evident that it was embarrassing to watch. On top of that, those that would give that money were able to come to the platform to be recognized."

"We have investigated the 20 plus "raised from the dead" claims as we want to report them to the media, and they cannot be verified, but were only called in, or sent in from an email. This is not responsible reporting, and leaves many questions, which also adds to the claims of hype and embellishment."

"I am praying for Todd, because he really is an evangelist, and he is a gifted evangelist. But he cannot go on embellishing, speaking untruths, hyping, manipulating, shoving, kicking, slapping, leg dropping, and bawling his way on the pulpit without consequences. God will not be mocked, and Todd and others must answer to Him for everyone led astray."

"The biggest thing about Lakeland is the lack of the fear of our Awesome God, lack of repentance and humility. Many have exchanged the truth for a lie and chosen experience over content. Angels, trances, and 3rd heaven focus has replaced the gospel as a focus . . . Lord do what only you can do to bring your divine alignment to all of us in Jesus name . . . "

"It is my opinion that it was man-orchestrated and demonically influenced from the very beginning. The worship has been good and Roy Fields is an awesome worship leader, so many in the worship and even watching from afar can sense God in the worship of His people. The truth is God has been engaged in the worship and has touched and healed some. This is why it has been so confusing to some. I have heard that Roy Fields has stated a few times that when the worship ends, God's presence leaves the platform, and then Todd Bentley operates void of His presence. That is why most all of what they have claimed cannot be verified, because it just is not happening.

"We have heard a few people getting well, being touched and so on. There is a church here in North Carolina that brought 27 sick down there for a week. Some with cancer, leukemia, diabetes and such. None got healed and most were worse when they came back. The emperor is not wearing any clothes and the truth must be known. Many are claiming that Todd is the new thing that God is doing. The fact is he is still operating in the old thing, and operating with less integrity and character than the previous one man shows.

"God is about nameless and faceless people who are operating without any agenda but the Lord's. Preaching about the King and His Kingdom, and moving supernaturally after Him, and as they do, signs and wonders follow. The problem in Charismania is that they seek the sign, they seek the thrill, they seek the craft supply quality gold dust, feathers and gems. They may get the chills and frills, but leave with nothing more than goose bumps and really little spiritual change. When they seek the King, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, you begin to see transformation take place at the heart level. This is God's way and always has been... Bentley is just a product of the Charismatic/ apostolic/ prophetic trending away from Plumb line truth. At the same time the fact is, none of us amount to much, no not one. But in Him and dying to self and living His agenda, we can move mountains... The church is getting there, I wrote an article for Charisma that everything that can be shaken is being shaken, and this is what is happening in a great way right now..."

So Robert and numerous other individuals who have taken a close look at Lakeland, hoping to witness the true blessings of Heaven raining down on men, have discovered instead to their deep disappointment only more hype. . . untruths . . . orchestrations of men . . . demonic influence . . . phony claims of resurrections . . . unverifiable healings . . . genuinely sick people not healed . . . 1000-fold blessings promised in return for large offerings . . . combined with the Gospel being replaced by Angels and trances.

Ministers present and fully endorsing this "man-orchestrated and demonically influenced" situation reads like a Who's Who of the modern Prophetic Movement. Charisma reports:

Participating leaders at the ceremony included Wagner; Ché Ahn, pastor of Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena, Calif.; John Arnott of Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship in Canada; Bill Johnson, pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, Calif.; and Rick Joyner, of MorningStar Ministries in Charlotte, N.C.

How is it that these Apostles and Prophets, if indeed that is what they truly are, could not recognize hype and “demonic influence” when they were standing in the midst of it?

I asked a similar question nearly ten years ago when a major “Prophetic” church announced that sin had been discovered in their leadership. It came to light that one of the “prophets” of their church had prophesied false prophecies in their church services for years in order to gain money and in pursuit of sexual favors. How is it that they could have false prophecy spewing from the mouth of a false prophet in their midst *for years*, and no one recognized false prophecy when they heard it? How is it that the leading “prophets” of the Prophetic Movement came and went from that church countless times, and could not recognize a false prophet as he “prophesied” right under their noses? I believe the only answer then and now that explains their blindness is that many of these “prophets” are not prophets at all. In spite of the numerous “How to” books they have written about prophecy, and regardless of the “Prophetic Conferences” and “Prophetic Networks” they have organized, I believe that many of these individuals do not recognize false prophecy because they have actually had very little exposure themselves to genuine prophetic ministry.

How Can These Things Be?

People may ask me, “But Brother Mel, I went there! I was blessed! It was God! It had to be.”

I think Robert’s observation explains a lot. He has commented, “The worship has been good and Roy Fields is an awesome worship leader, so many in the worship and even watching from afar can sense God in the worship of His people. The truth is God has been engaged in the worship and has touched and healed some. This is why it has been so confusing to some.” Just because God’s presence is in a service is no indicator of God endorsing *all* that is going on. You have to understand the nature of God. The Lord is merciful and full of grace. He is not looking for ways to keep people out of His kingdom. He is looking for every opening possible through which to draw people to His kingdom. In accordance with His nature of mercy, love, and grace, God will move to a certain extent in numerous church situations. He will even move strongly sometimes, for a season, in meetings that are full of error. But if men refuse to see to it that sound doctrine is preached, integrity is maintained, and all things are done decently and in order, the error and phoniness will eventually far outweigh God’s activity in the meetings.

Why Did God Allow Believers To Be So Deceived?

I believe God’s actions at Lakeland are reflected in His actions described by Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy:

"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;

Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."—Deut. 13:1-3.

Notice my friends that in the example Moses gave, the "sign or a wonder" did actually come to pass. There was a genuine spiritual manifestation which would seem to indicate the presence of God. However, the deciding factor as to whether it was truly of God or not was *the message* the prophet attached to it. The false prophet said, "Let us go after other gods. . ." Todd Bentley said, "See all these manifestations? See the falling, see the laughing? Feel the presence? Well, that is proof that my message is from God. Now, listen to what this angel has told me . . ." and the message and the methods degenerated down to slapping and kicking people and attaching God's presence to sickening appeals for \$1,000 offerings with promises of 1000-fold returns.

I believe the Bible shows us that God allows experiences like Lakeland to occur in order to identify to us the idolatry of our own hearts. The question presented to us in questionable ministry situations like Lakeland is:

"Which do you love more, God's Word or His Spirit?"

That's a trick question because you see, you can never choose between the two. They always go together. If what is manifesting in a service is truly the Holy Spirit, then integrity, truth, and solid scriptural preaching from the Bible will be right there alongside Him. The Word and the Spirit go together, and in that order. The Bible always comes first.

I believe many failed the test at Lakeland. God provided the presence of His Spirit in praise and worship. However, what felt like the presence of God was attached to error, exaggeration, ridiculous behavior, and flat-out lies. All of this going out on live TV. To some people attending the meetings, it "felt" like God. So instead of sitting in the meetings with their eyes and Bibles open, Christians closed their eyes and figuratively threw their Bibles and common sense right out the window, along with integrity and truth.

So what did this test prove?

It proved, as Moses said it would, ". . . whether you love the Lord with all your heart and soul." Well, many Christians loved manifestations and hype so much that when given the opportunity they chose lies over the truth, hype over reality, and

error over truth. They loved spiritual manifestations more than they actually loved God.

My friends, we all long for a genuine move of God. We are intensely praying for it and looking for it. But what we need to realize is that God offers a genuine Revival only as a package deal, giving it to us on a take-it-all or leave-it-all basis. When the real thing comes, there will be first of all, solid preaching of God's word. It will contain sound doctrine. It will focus people's attention on the Cross at Calvary, not on a man yelling "bam! Bam! Bam!" The manifestations will be genuine ones consistent with scriptural principles and with Church history. If it clucks like a chicken, then it IS a chicken—it is not the Holy Ghost. So go chase chickens if you want to. When I want chicken, I go to the Colonel's. When I go to church, I want God.

Genuine revival, when it comes, will be saturated with humility. It won't be ruled by an attitude of "don't tell me what to do! Don't tell me anything! Shut up! You are stuck in the past. So what if what is being preached here is not supported by the Bible! I'll believe and do whatever I want!" Lastly, it won't have to be propped up by the appearance of ministry mega-stars exercising their so-called "apostolic authority." When you see too many high-profile ministers show up all at once, excusing away error and nonsense, RUN--do not walk-TO THE NEAREST EXIT. Don't give such services a second thought, and don't look back over your shoulder as you leave. Remember Lot's wife.

My Attitude Up To Now

Numerous people have e-mailed me, asking my opinion of Lakeland. I've been far too busy to give this revival much of my attention. I've watched some of the videos on U-Tube, and I've asked the opinions of individuals who have gone there. One friend called me with an exciting testimony. She had not visited Lakeland, but her church leadership and several from her congregation had gone there. They took with them a woman my friend had known for years who was confined to a wheelchair, twisted up with Cerebral Palsy. The Church leadership called my friend and told her that the crippled woman had gotten up out of her wheelchair and walked in front of everyone, perfectly healed. However, when she saw the woman at her church several days later, she was still in the wheelchair. She asked her pastor, "I thought you said she was healed. Why is she in this wheelchair?" The leadership told her, "Well we never said she was *actually* healed. [Yes they did.] We're just saying that *through the eye of faith, we see her* up out of her wheelchair and walking right in front of everyone!" So the only report I had heard of Lakeland from someone I know turned out to be just another grievous exaggeration.

Could This Revial Be Rescued Yet?

Possibly, but it is doubtful. You can't build a level house on a slanted foundation. The foundation of this has never been Jesus Christ and his Gospel. It has been about men, hype, ego, ignorance, and hysteria. Anything not built on Christ and on his word shall surely fall. But if those involved in this thing would humble themselves

before God, seek His face, allow other balanced ministers to bring in some wise counsel, and return the focus from angels and nonsense to preaching the clear-cut truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it might be transformed into a genuine revival. Clearly God wants to move. He has demonstrated that already. If those in Lakeland would go outside the tent, pick back up their Bibles and the common sense they previously threw out, repent of their arrogance, ego, and error, God might return in great power. I hope this is the path they pursue.

In the absence however of taking these steps, I would urge people to realize that this wasn't the real thing. It is time to return to praying and earnestly seeking God until the real thing comes.

As a closing thought I would like to add that these "prophets" and "apostles" who joined with Todd Bentley in leading people into this "demonically influenced" deception, owe everyone an explanation. Were they so blind that they couldn't recognize Satan and the flesh as each pranced around them on the platform? Or were they so seduced by money or the flattery of men that they just didn't care what was God and what was not?

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