



New V

During the years immediately after World War II, the United States and the world in general witnessed a widespread move of God that came to be known as the "healing revival," in which the ministries of such men as William Branham, Oral Roberts, Gordon Lindsay, and T.L. Osborn became prominent.

When the healing revival broke out, Ern Baxter was pastoring a large evangelical church in western Canada. At William Branham's invitation, he traveled extensively with the Branham team, although he maintained his position at his home church.

At a time when denominational divisions were clearly defined along strict theological lines, Ern was not actually a pentecostal minister. However, he was not a traditional evangelical either because he had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. In Ern's own words, "I was a kind of 'pre-charismatic charismatic.'"

Significant historical events preceded the present charismatic renewal. Most people are unaware of

those events. In this interview, Ern describes the spiritual climate of those days. From an insider's viewpoint he describes the healing revival. As a man with an appreciation of history he reveals the lessons we in the charismatic renewal today can learn from the experiences of that movement.



In his book *All Things Are Possible*, which is a historical look at the healing and charismatic revivals in modern America, David Harrell makes this statement: "Few learned observers recognized the significance of the huge healing campaigns of the 1950's not many of those enthralled by the charismatic movement today understand its origins." Can you tell us what kind of religious "climate" there was in the post-World War II years, and what circumstances made the era of the healing revivals possible?



The atmosphere and religious "climate" at that time was one of low spirituality. All supernatural happenings around the world were reported on as being quite significant.

In my opinion, the whole supernatural element in pentecostalism generally was very low. There were pockets of blessing, but there was no widespread revival. One of the reasons for the impact which the healings accompanying the healing movement made, was that there had not been a wave of healings for a long time. In 1933 at a big pentecostal conference, much of the delegates' time was spent discussing reasons why people weren't getting the baptism in the Holy Spirit anymore and the lack of healings and conversions. Consequently, I would have to say that the spiritual climate was very low. This provided a backdrop, then, for the advent of the healing revival.

When William Branham¹ came on the scene, he was the only one who had a genuine healing ministry at that time. Even the Jeffreys brothers from Great Britain had passed the peak of their ministry which was in the late 1930's.

meeting and arrived around nine o'clock at this rather large church. (I think it seated about two thousand.) The sight I saw was, for those days, very impressive. There was a crowd of people outside, listening to Branham by loudspeakers because they couldn't get in. I stood there in the darkness and listened to him.

What I heard was unique, unusual! I had never heard anything like it before. It was simple and direct. He was talking about demons and God's power to heal. Though it was basic, there was something very attractive about it.

As I stood in the darkness, I said to my host, "I have a sense that I am going to have something to do with this man." We went on home and made no attempt to contact him. Shortly after I returned to Vancouver. Later, Branham came to Calgary, Alberta. By then, of course, his reputation was well known, and I decided to take some of my people to Calgary.

At that time Branham had one or two men traveling with him, whose responsibility centered in arranging the meetings. Branham was doing the bulk of the ministry. He would pray for several thousand people each night. Because his load was so heavy, other ministers who could handle large crowds were invited to share the afternoon meetings. Because I

Five Interviews Ern Baxter

So the "religious" climate was one in which the supernatural had seemed to cease.

Then when Branham broke in on the scene with the quality of supernaturalism that he demonstrated, it was newsworthy because of its relative novelty.



What led up to your joining his team? Did he ask you, or did you just have contact with him and then a relationship developed?



I was going on a vacation and read about him in *Time Magazine* on the airplane. I was on my way with my wife to Winnipeg, Canada, to visit friends there. During dinner with them, my host, a prominent

businessman in Winnipeg, said, "There's an unusual minister down at Zion Church. His name is William Branham."

I said, "I just read about him in the airplane." So we decided to attend. After dinner, we left for the

was known in Calgary, I was invited to take one afternoon service. I recall the theme I spoke on: "This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." I pointed out that this was the gospel day and the day in which we should be enjoying all the blessings of God's grace. Presumably, the men that heard me took word back to him.

After staying for two or three days, I went back home, again making no attempt to contact Branham personally. When I arrived back in Vancouver, a number of ministers came together and said, "We must bring William Branham here." I was asked to lead the meetings, which I did.

Later, Branham asked to see me personally. He said that he had been in prayer and the angel of the Lord had spoken to him and told him that I was to be his companion in ministry. He invited me to join him.

At the time, I was pastor of a large church, and obtained leave from them, joining Branham in Ashland, Oregon. I started to travel with him as often as I could be away from my church. One year I was away eight months.

When he would speak, especially in those early

1. William Branham (1900-1965) was an ordained Baptist minister who had a significant international healing ministry from May 1946 until around 1955.

days, he would say some things that were terribly provocative. To me, unnecessarily so. So when we talked together, we agreed that apart from his giving testimonies and relating his life story, I would do all of the speaking, and he would do all of the ministering to the sick. That was the way it was when we were together.

I was with Branham from 1947 until I had to leave him, in about 1953 or 1954. F. F. Bosworth joined up later than I did and shared in some of the meetings.



Could you briefly describe Branham's ministry and some of its high points? What caused him to break in on the national scene?



Well, Branham had a tremendous word of knowledge. Before praying for a person, he would give accurate details concerning the person's ailments, and also details of their lives—their home town, activities, actions—even way back in their childhood. Branham never once made a mistake with the word of knowledge in all the years I was with him. That covers, in my case, thousands of instances.

Branham's use of the word of knowledge actually started out as a phenomenon in his hand. He would take the hand of the person in his. Immediately at the base of his thumb, in the thick part of his hand, there would be a specific manifestation according to the sickness or need. From seeing the phenomenon so often, I began to pick up what these were and became adept at reading them. Tuberculosis was a light pink flush. Cancer was an angry red appearance in which the ball of his thumb just seemed to surge like a wave.



Left to right: Charles Simpson, Kevin Ranaghan, Derek Prince, Ern Baxter and Steve Clark.



It was actually visible?



Yes, you could see it. Then this gave way to the straight oral word where he would give accurate details concerning the person. He never missed, and this made a tremendous impact.

Branham also probably introduced deliverance in its form at that time. He cast out spirits. This made the large congregations very sensitive to the presence of demonic powers. There was a lot of primitiveness about it. For instance, he would insist the audience bow their heads during exorcism lest the spirits get in another person! The whole ministry was so new and so powerful that, when I met him in 1947, his mail was enormous.

Many of the subsequent healers received their initiative from him. He was really the fountainhead of the healing revival of the 50's and 60's. Many of the men who began to hold healing meetings subsequent to Branham's had short-lived ministries. Many of them couldn't handle what the ministry and its consequent recognition did to them personally.

The prominence and visibility it created was unbelievable. Many people did not know healing or anything supernatural existed. The ministry reached out and touched people in the denominations. It was very effective that way. People, of course, care about their bodies, so they came—some hundreds and others thousands of miles. It was hard to handle the adulation and the praise. It was almost like Barnabas and Paul's experience when they were considered "gods from heaven."



Can you recount some of the most memorable times with him and some of the events you vividly remember from your time together with him?



Well, to try to remember or to pick out a few outstanding supernatural occurrences with Branham is somewhat difficult because it was just a parade of the supernatural. On one occasion, we were down in the southern states, in a big auditorium meeting. The first or second night there, Brother Branham came to a certain man in the healing line. He looked at him and

said, "Sir, I see you have come into this line tonight to trick me. In fact, I see you last night in a room sitting around a table with four other ministers. You are a minister of such and such a denomination." He pointed up to the balcony and said, "Those four men sitting up there are your friends, and you plotted last night how to trick me. I was going to tell you what was wrong with you, and you were going to deny it." They just turned around and fled the building.

I was with him in South Africa at a time when a large number of religious people rejected the ministry of healing, creating real pressures. There was a man in the meeting who was interested. He was of a denomination that was coming down on us very heavily. On the way home from the meeting, this man felt a hand on the back of his shirt. He turned around and there was no one there. But when he got home, he took off his shirt and found a handprint there—just as if a hot iron had left its imprint on his shirt. The shirt was shown in the next day's newspaper.

Once in Des Moines, Iowa, a missionary from the South Seas who had just flown home because of a very serious ailment was standing in front of him. Branham started out by saying, "Oh, you're a missionary. You just flew in today," and then he named the place the man had come from. At that, the entire crowd went into jubilation.



Had Branham had any contact with any of the earlier men, like Smith Wigglesworth or the Jeffreys? Would that have been the inspiration for his ministry?



I was very careful to check that out at the time. Branham had no direct link with pentecostalism in terms of his gift. In his home there had been no deep spiritual life, but he told me stories that indicated this gift was with him as a child. (He made some very significant prophecies, for instance, concerning the collapse of a bridge in his area of Ohio.) He once said to me, "If anybody ever writes my biography, you're the only one I've ever told everything to." He and I had many sessions that were hours long. During one of these, he told me he didn't believe that tongues was the evidence of the baptism. So I asked him about speaking in tongues, and he said that he had gone to a pentecostal mission and had told God, "These are apparently the only people that will accept my gift—let me talk in tongues so I'll be acceptable." And he said God let him talk in tongues, but he never

NEW WINE



Ern and Ruth Baxter

talked in tongues again. That seemed to be his introduction to the pentecostals, and they apparently accepted him because of it. Few people would know that story, but I mention it because as his gift became more apparent as he grew older, he saw that the pentecostal people were probably the only ones who would receive it.

He was a relatively illiterate man, and so had not read widely. He was a great hunter. His abilities were in the realm of natural and intuitive abilities. I questioned him about many people. He didn't know Dr. Charles Price, who had had quite a healing ministry back in the 1920's-30's, or any others whom I mentioned.

I do not see any inspiration for his ministry coming from any of these earlier men, certainly not in the realm of his word of knowledge. Concerning whatever God may have done in the Spirit, I have no knowledge. But in the realm of his word of knowledge, there were no apparent human models he could have patterned himself on. He just seemed to break from a whole new source. He was missionary Baptist, so his tradition would not link him into historic pentecostalism.



How was he received by the people in the 50's?



He was received gladly by the common people because of the manifestation of God in his ministry. But to most ministers he was an enigma from the very beginning. First of all, he was theologically, as well as academically, illiterate. When he would speak, his English grammar was bad, and his theology worse.

(continued on page 22)

A lot of ministers gnashed their teeth and wrung their hands when he preached. One of the reasons I joined him was to try to articulate and provide an apologetic for his ministry.



What were some of the personal experiences that you had with him as his friend and companion in ministry?



We had a great personal friendship. We hunted together and walked a great deal. Branham was a very simple man. He had maintained and checked the lines for the power company in his area and walking in the outdoors was his life. So we walked and talked together. We were real friends.



Who were some of the other men with whom you had contact at the same time as your time with Branham? What were some of the things God was doing and saying through them at that general period?



This is an important question. Before Branham came on the scene, I was finding that there was a group of men that were sensitive to a need for more of God experientially. The pentecostal churches were opting for religious education and music. The supernatural, as I've already said, seemed to be absent. In the

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forties, I was bumping into certain men—men like Rufus Moseley and others who were opening supernatural horizons yet in their traditional Christian forms.

Rufus Moseley had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He wrote the books *Manifest Victory* and *Perfect Everything*. Rufus Jones was a unique person.

E. Stanley Jones, of course, was very controversial, but to my mind he was a man who knew and loved God. In my view with his preaching and writing he made a significant contribution. I found these men very refreshing for the pioneering spirit they showed. I was criticized by my fundamentalist friends, both evangelical and pentecostal, for having anything to do with them.

But these men were really significant. They were a type of bridge.



Were other things that these men were involved in laying a groundwork for the present-day charismatic renewal?



In my judgment there was as much connection between the Camps Farthest Out element and the charismatic as there was between the healing revival and the charismatic.

I think the healing movement was a supernatural, prophetic call to the world to say, “God is alive and He’s here.” Healing in the ministry of our Lord was the introductory act that opened people up to the totality of the Kingdom of God. I believe the healing movement alerted the people, in a very real sense, to the renewal of the supernatural.



What brought about the end of that era of the healing revival and what prompted the decline of William Branham’s ministry and others like him?



Well, the healing movement began with such a spectacular display that the men involved in it faced major unprecedented problems. Men were suddenly ushered into very prominent, eye-catching, supernatural ministries. Many of them couldn’t handle it personally. One of the sad aspects of the healing movement is the personal shipwrecks and breakdowns. I think the healing movement began to subside because of the way it was mishandled.

Men could not handle the pressures and personal temptations. In addition a number of extraneous elements came in, such as exaggeration, false reports, misrepresentation. Right at the beginning of the healing movement, I saw this starting to emerge. The healers could not meet together in any meaningful

way. They would have a conference together, but it was not meaningful. They began to publish competitive exaggerated statistics on tent size, numbers, results and other things.

At that time Gordon Lindsay, who was still relating to Branham, started the *Voice of Healing Magazine*. Because I was prominently involved with Branham, I was asked to contribute. I wrote an article out of my conviction and concern entitled, "The Curse of Carnal Comparisons," in which I pointed out that there was a good deal of Corinthianism already in the healing movement. And that if something was not done by the healers to remedy it, this movement would self-destruct.

As a result of that article I was *persona non grata* from there on as far as the healers were concerned, so I confined myself to Branham. Tragically, as these men violated the principles of plurality, each of them had his turn at the pinnacle of fame, but most of them were easily picked off by the enemy. Satan's aim is good.

I remember in the beginning of the healing movement, simply to report a healing would produce great jubilation and praise from congregations. However, the cynicism became so deep that the people's confidence was diminished. Even to this day, people are affected. People began to circulate healing testimonies which, when they were checked out by reputable journalists and reporters, even those who were friendly to the movement, were found to be false. The percentage of healings that stood up after investigation was embarrassingly low. As a result, disillusionment set in, and the healing movement as it was known in the beginning declined in momentum until today you can't say it really amounts to anything as a movement.



Aren't there still a few "healers" in ministry today?



That's right. As I watch what's going on, I see that people are still trying to promote the same kind of activity that was so prominent back there. But from my position as one who witnessed the quality, depth and effectiveness of that great wave of the early 50's, this is a far cry from that wave. Yet a new generation of Christians has risen up who know not those days and therefore know nothing better.



What brought William Branham's ministry to a close?



I believe there's a Bible principle involved. No matter who we are, if we don't relate to the principles of truth, we pay for it. We either fall on it and break in repentance, or it falls on us and breaks us in judgment.

The measure of faith Paul talks about in Romans 12 where he says, "to each man is given a measure of faith . . . he that prophesieth, let him prophecy according to the measure of faith," indicates that we all have been given a grace gift. But we must walk within the confines of our gift. For instance, if a miracle worker, who may be used mightily in working miracles, steps over the boundaries of that gift and presumes to be a teacher when God has not called him to teach, then he is violating the rule of walking within his grace.

Branham saw himself as a teacher of some kind of "in" truth. To me, some of it was quite esoteric. I became aware early in his ministry that there was a mixture. I urged him not to say some things in public. As long as we worked together he refrained. One of the reasons for my leaving him was that he was starting to say some seriously wrong things. When that, coupled with other circumstances, eventually became unbearable, I resigned.

I think there can be a lesson in this. Branham, as a miracle worker, had a real place. Branham as a teacher was outside of his calling. The fruits of his teaching ministry are not good.



What do you think is one of the main things that we can learn from the healing revival and the ministry of Branham and others?



That's an excellent question. I think we need to learn out of it the absolutely mandatory nature of the principle of plurality. No man, no matter how gifted, can afford to violate plurality and walk alone.

Number two, I would say it points up the great necessity of staying in your calling or gift, and not making use of whatever accrues to you from that gift to get into other areas.

I think it also points up the need of having responsible community to receive the fruits of this kind of evangelistic ministry. If the converts are not brought into a New Testament biblical community or church, they become followers of a man who cannot develop them into maturity.

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I believe these principles are very basic. In addition, man does not live by miracles alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Miracles and signs and wonders are not food. They are signs to tell you where the food is. If you try to live on the signs, you get unbalanced nutrition.



By your definition has the charismatic movement learned some of those things from the healing revival and is it thus prepared for the next step? Or, do you think we still have a long way to go?



I think the charismatic renewal is an advance on the healing movement. But I see in the charismatic renewal a tendency to fall back into the same philosophy of the healers and not make use of what God has given supernaturally to launch out into His purposes. I believe God is saying that we have to incorporate the supernatural into the normal life of the supernatural community. I believe that the healing revival touched men personally in their bodies. I believe that the charismatic renewal was a real quickening in the realm of the spirit.

In the healing revivals quite a few received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but healing was the feature. In the charismatic renewal, the baptism in the Spirit is a feature. Healings were to attract attention. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was to empower and initiate into a dimension of supernaturalism. Now we have to find the intention of God for the corporate. God intends to equip a people corporately. So I think our next step is for maturity and the

corporate expression of Christ to the world.



Through your years with the healing revival, and then with the charismatic renewal, do you see God's people moving toward that end?



Yes, I do. While the renewal has a lot of problems that are more interpersonal than having to do with truth, the emphasis on the Body of Christ, unity and maturity is present. It is prominent. It is being spoken. You are hearing a great deal about the need for unity. I think people are recognizing that you can have all of the charismatic gifts—healing and tongues and prophecy—but that there will be no real impact on the world—quite apart from not really getting our own lives together—until we can do something about our divisions and can come into a mature unity.



Is there anything else you would like to say in summary that we haven't touched on?



Well, I think we have to recognize that God's servants and God's people, when they are healthy, have always been prophetic. They have always been stating and asserting and affirming God's purpose in the earth. Charismatics today need to realize that God has visited us for more than just a personal experience. What God has done has a corporate dimension. He did not just touch one or two in isolation. He has touched men and women all over the world. His prophetic purpose is to bring together in one all things in Christ. (See Eph. 1:10.)

If we, as a people, don't hold that position, we'll have to go through the same judgmental processes that have been experienced by rebellious people for centuries. Israel came up to times of awareness of their prophetic place in the earth, and they missed it. The Church has done it from time to time. Now, I think the charismatic movement is in serious danger of ebbing again, and God is going to have to do something else. But the something else will always be moving toward the Lord's intention as expressed in John 17:21—that we may be one, so that the world might believe that Jesus is the Son of God. ▼