

# The Spirit in

## Regeneration

Jamie Buckingham

Acts 29

*It sounds like wind moving gently through the leaves of a forest. It is the sound of people worshipping.*

*Three hundred people have gathered in a simple concrete-block building. All kinds of people: a rough-looking man with bulging muscles, a bearded ex-drug addict, a college boy with short hair, a dignified woman in an expensive suit, a beautiful blonde in jeans and sweatshirt, a black man with a bristling Afro, a young mother with four children, a radiant middle-aged businessman – all are sitting together on folding chairs with heads bowed or upraised, praising God.*

*It is eleven o'clock Sunday morning, the time some clergymen have called "the deadest hour of the week." But there's life here, in this building known simply as a tabernacle, located on the east coast of Florida at the southern tip of Cape Kennedy.*

*The sound waxes and wanes. Silence. Then spontaneously, the people break into a simple song. The strongest voice is that of a former professor of music at a Southern Baptist seminary who has*

*recently moved to the town of Melbourne "on faith," trusting God to provide for him and his family as he ministers in the local Body of Christ. The harmony sounds like a giant choir as the people sing, "He is Lord, He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and he is Lord. . . ."*

*Then the tempo changes. The sound of tambourine and piano join the handclapping crowd as they sing verse after verse from the Scriptures, concluding with Psalm 63, "thy lovingkindness is better than life. . . . I will lift up my hands in thy name." All over the room, hands are extended upward in worship.*

*There is silence again. A man speaks haltingly, "My people, hear my voice. . . ." It is prophecy. As he finishes, a murmur of assent wafts through the room. Another man speaks. He is a former minister with the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana, who has ministered in the local Body of Christ for more than five years. Like all the other ministers or elders, he receives no salary, simply trusting the Lord for enough offerings to provide his needs. He speaks, this time in a language that sounds like a mixture of French and Hebrew. Someone murmurs, "Give us your interpretation, Lord." Silence. Then a woman speaks. She is a Roman Catholic housewife whose*

*husband is an engineer at the nearby Space Center. "My children, stand fast upon my Word. Heed not those who mix my blood with water. . . ."*

*More silence. Then there is music – angelic, ethereal. It starts softly from the far corner of the room where a Presbyterian elder is sitting with his wife and family. It floats across the room as many voices blend in singing songs of praises. The words are sometimes understandable, "Hallelujah! Praise God!" but more often in strange languages. The sound rises and falls like waves on a gentle sea as each voice sings solo praise, yet in perfect harmony like a majestic orchestra under the Master Conductor.*

*A man rises with a Bible in his hand. He is a former Methodist who gave up his job as a prospering stockbroker to devote his full time to ministry. He preaches an impassioned sermon, speaking about ten minutes and then sitting down.*

*Another man rises to his feet. He is a local building contractor. "Last night in my quiet time the Lord spoke to me giving me these Scriptures to share with the Body today."*

*Another song, this time from the Baptist Hymnal, as the majestic strains of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" roll heavenward. Then an offering. Before the*

---

Pastor, author, Jamie Buckingham's latest book, *Shout It From the Housetops*, will be published later this year.

plates are passed, a simple announcement is made.

*"This Body of Christians has no membership, nor does it have a budget. If the Lord leads you to designate your offering, please do so. All monies that are given undesignated will be prayed over by a group of men who will seek the Lord's will for distribution. None of it will be held in savings; every penny goes immediately into ministry. If anyone here has a need, we urge you to take out of the plate as it is passed. Others will be giving twice as much while some will give all they have."*

*The offering is a joyous affair, with most of the giving in cash. Occasionally a diamond ring will appear in the offering plate. Then a former Southern Baptist pastor stands. "The Holy Spirit has told me there are several persons here who have never made a public profession of their faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus says to confess Him publicly. We now give you that opportunity."*

*What seems like an eternity of silence passes, but all over the room hundreds of lips are moving in silent prayer. Then a man rises from the congregation and with much emotion says, "Today I want to declare my stand for Jesus Christ." The room bursts into rejoicing and the sound of hosannas is mixed with warm applause. Another man rises to his feet. "I've been a member of a church for thirty years but have never said publicly that Jesus is my Savior." A hippie-looking girl stands and tries to speak, but her body is shaking with emotion. Immediately four or five others rise and stand with her, laying on hands and praying. Suddenly she breaks forth in praise shouting, "I give my life to Jesus!" Others stand to lay hands on her, and moments later she bursts forth in tongues as her newfound Savior baptizes her in the Holy Spirit.*

*By this time, the altar is filled with kneeling people, some receiving healing, some seeking salvation, others being baptized in the Holy Spirit. All are being ministered to by members of the Body who come forward spontaneously to lay on hands, pray, and counsel.*

*Even though the service lasts almost two hours, when the final prayer is said the people still linger, counseling at the altar, praying in a back room, drinking*

*coffee from a nearby urn, or just standing around hugging each other. A stranger whispers to his neighbor, "I've never seen such love."*

*The neighbor replies, "It must be Jesus."*

But it wasn't always like this. Four years ago the church was a normal, struggling Southern Baptist church looking for new concepts of church renewal. However, the people had committed themselves to a trust relationship with each other and their pastor and were determined to study the Bible to find the secrets of spiritual power.

Then the pastor, attending a regional convention of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He returned to the church and told them what he had experienced. Although the people knew nothing of the baptism in the Holy Spirit or spiritual gifts, they recognized it as scriptural and therefore valid. The search was on.

Gradually it became apparent that there were others in the city of Melbourne who had received the same experience. Since they were not allowed to exercise their new joy in the institutional churches, they were worshiping in small home groups. They had called a former Church of God minister who had been ousted from his denomination because he spoke in tongues as their leader. A former Methodist youth director, a mother with three children, was also teaching this group of charismatics. Both leaders were supported by love offerings only.

### **Walking in the Spirit**

When the word spread that a Baptist church was now beginning to walk in the Spirit, the interdenominational group began attending the services. Realizing the need for teaching, the pastor and deacons of the Baptist church invited the leaders of the other group to preach and hold classes. Bit by bit, most of the

*(Continued on page 28)*

Baptists received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and began to exercise the gifts of the Spirit in the church service.

Then came freedom. The printed order of service was thrown away. All services were Spirit-led. The Baptist remnant met, and after fasting and praying for a week, decided to drop the name Baptist and simply be Jesus people. A week later, the church was voted out of the local Baptist association — a move which proved to be the key to allow other charismatics from all over the area to come and worship freely.

By common consent, the membership roll and all attendance records were destroyed. The pastor, now serving as just one of several elders in the flock, said, "We are to invite people to join the Kingdom of God, not some manmade institution. When a local body sets itself up as an end rather than a means, and demands loyalty to the institution, then it becomes an idol and must be cast down."

All the old offices and committees were dissolved, and the people determined they would have no officers, no elders or deacons, until the Lord specifically directed. The budget was laid aside, and all money began going immediately into ministry as the Lord directed on a week-by-week basis. In a short while, the offerings and the crowd tripled in size.

### **The Lord Calls**

A former Southern Baptist seminary professor who held a secular job in the city announced that the Lord was calling him to British Honduras as a missionary. A Canadian couple, former independent missionaries in South America who had been sent back to the states because they spoke in tongues, announced that the Lord was telling them to return to Brazil. A young Presbyterian, an engineer with an aerospace industry, announced that the Lord was telling him to resign his job and go to Brazil and preach. All left without a promise of any financial support, but trusting God to supply their needs — most of which are being met through the local Body in Melbourne.

A boy's house, "HIS HOUSE,"

ministering to drug users and runaways, was opened and directed by an ex-school-teacher. Later it evolved into a training school for youth, directed by another former Southern Baptist pastor and an ex-alcoholic. A former Methodist pastor and his wife opened a youth ranch west of town and began ministering to homeless boys and girls by taking them into their home. Many other families began doing the same thing with just one or two homeless youths or troubled people moving in on temporary schedules. A bookstore was opened in the business district, and later a branch opened on the beach. One of the men in the Body invested much of his savings to purchase sophisticated tape recording and reproducing machines, and soon tapes of the teachers in the local Body and visiting speakers were being sent out all over the nation to those who requested them.

People began driving in from miles around to attend the Believers' Meetings, as the Sunday meetings were called. Home prayer groups met morning and night through the week, with ministry in deliverance, healing, and evangelism. Many of those attending were still active in various denominational churches, coming to the Believers' Meetings or prayer groups for spiritual food and fellowship. Others felt led to break free from the denominational church and devote their full ministry to the local Body of Christ. However, excellent rapport was maintained with many of the local denominational ministers since no one was ever encouraged to leave his church. Although there were many problems, the theme, "We are one in the Spirit," prevailed — and still does.

Recently a Pentecostal pastor from another state drove to Melbourne to spend a week observing the ministry. On the Monday he was to leave, he stopped by the New Life Book House for a cup of coffee. Seeing one of the men in the local Body come in to purchase a book, he asked, "When did you people have your last revival meeting?"

The man thought for a moment and said, "Yesterday morning."

"Oh," the visiting pastor said. "How long has it lasted?"

"Four years," the man said, "and it's just getting started." 