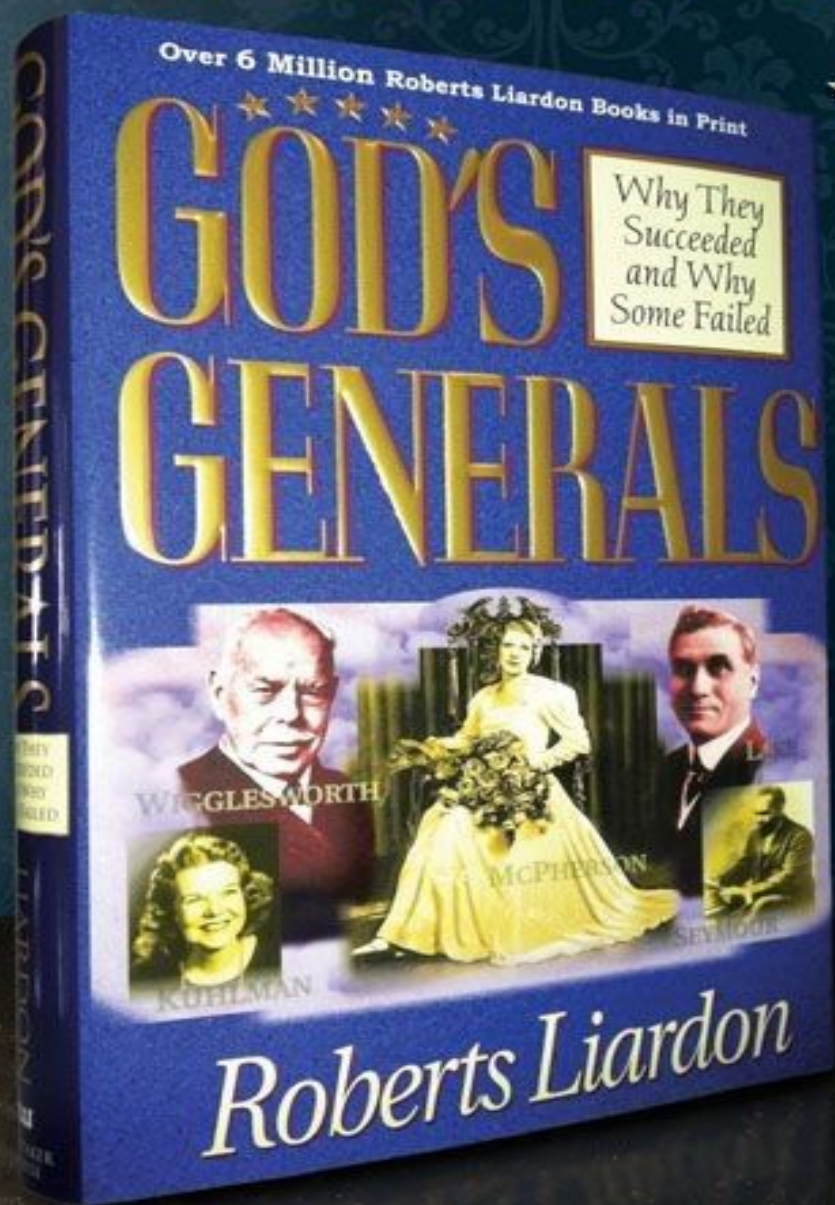


GOD'S GENERALS



AIMEE SEMPLE
MCPHERSON

ROBERTS LIARDON

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AIMEE SEMPLE
MCPHERSON

ROBERTS LIARDON



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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God's Generals: Aimee Semple McPherson
Excerpted from *God's Generals: Why They Succeeded and Why Some Failed*

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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

Aimee Semple McPherson

“A Woman of Destiny”

“Somebody must have seen her marching up Main Street from the direction of the bank and the barbershop; she was a very young woman in a white dress, carrying a chair.

“Standing on the chair, she raised her long hands toward heaven as if calling for help.... And then she did nothing.... She closed her large, wide-set eyes and just stood there with her arms straight up, like a statue of marble...

“Even with her eyes closed Aimee could feel the critical mass of the crowd when it grew to be fifty spectators gaping and hooting...The young woman opened her eyes and looked around her.

“People,’ she shouted, leaping off the chair, ‘come and follow me, quick.’

“Hooking her arm through the back of the chair, she pushed through the crowd and started running back down Main Street. The people chased her, boys first, then men and women.... They followed her right through the open door of the Victory Mission. There was just enough room for all to be seated.

“Lock the door,’ she whispered to the usher. ‘Lock the door and keep it locked till I get through.’¹

Aimee Semple McPherson has been described as a woman born before her time. Actually, Aimee was the spiritual pioneer who paved the way for the rest of us, and

she should be considered largely responsible for the way we demonstrate Christianity today.

Aimee defied all odds. Her life story portrays her as a woman alive and dramatic. There was nothing mellow about her. To her, a challenge was fair game to be taken and conquered. She rode on the wave of the media and actually directed its course. If publicity seemed bad, she hyped it further, smiling all the way. If everyone warned her against doing something, she was apt to do the opposite, refusing to bow to fear. In fact, there was nothing “too radical” for Aimee Semple McPherson. Whatever it took to “get the people,” Aimee did it. She sat with the “publicans and prostitutes,” showing up in places where the average Christian was afraid to go. The poor, the common, and the rich all loved her for it, and they showed up at her meetings by the thousands.

But, of course, the “religious” hated her. When denominational politics seemed to hinder and wound so many ministers, Aimee rarely gave them a thought. She demolished religious seclusion and narrowness, seeming to almost pity those controlled by its grip. Aimee set about building a ministry so vast and so great that even Hollywood came to take notes.

In a time when women were recognized only as an “accessory,” to ministry, Aimee built Angelus Temple to welcome them in. The Temple was built and dedicated during the Depression and was an elaborate building that could seat five thousand people. When the building filled three times each Sunday, Aimee ventured even further: she built the very first Christian radio station in the world and also founded one of the fastest growing denominations today.

Aimee lived during the height of the Pentecostal movement, which was full of the “dos” and “don’ts” of religion, when women in general weren’t accepted in the ministry. And to make matters worse to the religious mind-set of the day, she was divorced.

A NEW GENERATION IS BORN

Aimee’s life began in controversy and scandal. She was born to James Morgan and Mildred “Minnie” Kennedy on October 9, 1890, near Salford, Ontario, Canada. The only daughter of James and Mildred, Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy grew up in a town that roared with gossip because of those who took issue with the circumstances surrounding her birth. Her father, age fifty, had married her mother, Minnie, when she was only fifteen years old.

Prior to their marriage, the orphaned Minnie had been a fervent laborer with the Salvation Army. Feeling the call to the ministry, she evangelized day and night in cities throughout Ontario. Then she read in the paper one day about the Kennedys’ need for a live-in nurse to care for the ailing Mrs. Kennedy. So she accepted the position and moved in with the family, setting her ministry aside.

After Mrs. Kennedy’s death, Minnie remained in the Kennedy home. Not long after, the older man asked Minnie to become his wife. The town roared with gossip, but James Kennedy simply let them talk.

The day after their marriage, Minnie got down on her knees and prayed. She confessed that she had failed in her call to the ministry, and she asked God’s forgiveness. Then, she prayed,

“If You will only hear my prayer, as You heard Hannah’s prayer of old, and give me a little baby girl, I will give her unreservedly into Your service, that

she may preach the Word I should have preached, fill the place I should have filled, and lived the life I should have lived in Thy service. O Lord, hear and answer me...."2

Soon Minnie was pregnant. She never doubted that she was carrying a girl, so everything she designed, bought, or received for the baby was pink. Then, in answer to her prayers, a little girl was born on October 9 in the Kennedys' Canadian farmhouse near Salford.

The Salvationists came to visit the baby and brought with them the sad news that Catherine Booth, wife of the great General William Booth, had died. Catherine had been the cofounder of the Salvation Army, and one of the visitors suggested that Aimee could very well be her successor.³

Whatever plan God had for the child, it was especially clear to Minnie after hearing these words that Aimee would certainly grow far beyond her expectations.

BULLFROGS AND SCHOOL SLATES

When Aimee was three weeks old, Minnie dedicated her to the Lord at a Salvation Army service. Her childhood was picture-perfect. She was raised as an only child on a large country farm in a rambling farmhouse with farm animals as playmates. She grew up with the stories of Daniel in the lions' den, Joseph and Pharaoh, and Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. By the time Aimee was four, she could stand on a street corner, in the middle of a drumhead, and draw a huge crowd by reciting Bible stories.

Aimee was a spunky little girl full of headstrong ideas. Nothing intimidated her, except the realization that no matter where she was, God could see everything she was doing.

Once, when she was sick in bed, a hired man poked his head through her door, asking if he could do anything for her. Aimee sighed in a spoiled way and said, "I would like to hear the frogs sing. Do go down to the swamp and bring me three or four frogs and put them in a pail of water by my bed."

The man did as she asked. About an hour later, he came back into her room with a large pail, complete with lilies and frogs. But as he left for work, he failed to hear Aimee screaming for him to retrieve the frogs, which had jumped out of the bucket and were now bouncing around the room! It was Aimee's mother, Minnie, who had to catch the slimy intruders!⁴

As a young girl in school, Aimee was always in charge. When other children teased her, calling her a "Salvation Army child," Aimee got angry. But instead of fighting back, she would play along with them. In later years, it was just this sort of response that caused Aimee's popularity to soar.

Once, when Aimee was made fun of, instead of retaliating against her classmates, she got a box, a ruler, and a red tablecloth. Then, she appointed a boy to carry a "red flag," and she marched around banging on her box like a drum while singing at the top of her lungs. At first, the boys fell in behind her, making fun of the march, but then they started to enjoy it. Soon, the girls stepped in and joined her lively parade. And from that day forward, no one teased Aimee about the Salvation Army. Her faith always embraced, never repelled.⁵

When Aimee was a young girl, she loved to watch her mother, who was the Sunday school superintendent at the Salvationists' meetings. As soon as Aimee came home from church, she would gather up chairs and set them in a circle

in her room. Then she would imitate her mother by preaching to her imaginary crowd.

In her school picture, Aimee, then eight years old, is seated in the middle of the group of students and holding the class slate. The children seated on either side of the teacher look noticeably angry and upset. The reason? Before the picture was taken, an argument had broken out over who was going to hold the slate. As they bickered, Aimee suddenly jumped into the middle of the group and grabbed it! Then, when the others tried to take it from her, the teacher corralled them all and seated them long enough to snap the photo.

The photo serves as somewhat of a prophetic snapshot of Aimee Semple McPherson's future ministry. The children surrounding her sit aggravated by her bold, determined action, while there in the middle, between the protective knees of her teacher, sits Aimee—full of joy and confidence in triumphant victory!

GO FOR THE GOLD!

Throughout her youth, Aimee's dogmatic character began to surface. She had a sportive, playful attitude toward authority. If you were chosen to be a leader over her, you would have to impressively prove you could do it before expecting any submission from her!

Aimee wasn't completely disrespectful or rebellious, and she never truly meant to be a challenge to authority. It was just that her leadership ability was so great that those around her were automatically challenged and left speechless. Even as a child, Aimee could walk into a room and capture everyone's attention without speaking a single word.

Some say Aimee was a spoiled child, and that it was her father, James Kennedy, who was to blame. He certainly took great delight in his spunky little girl. Others say Aimee simply wore her parents out with her high spirits and creativity. But to them, Aimee Elizabeth was an answer from God, and they treated her like a treasure.

Minnie Kennedy watched over Aimee like a hawk. She was a good mother to Aimee, but learning to stand up to Minnie was no small feat. Just holding her own around Minnie served to groom Aimee for answering the many hard questions that she would later face as a Christian leader.

Because of her zeal for life and emotional strength, Aimee soon began to enjoy the applause. As a preteen, her dramatic personality became well-known through local theater productions. And she was a popular orator while in grammar school.

At the age of twelve, Aimee won the silver medal for a speech that she presented at the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada. She would go on to compete in London, Ontario, to win the gold medal.

By the time she was thirteen, Aimee was celebrated as an outstanding public speaker. She was invited to entertain at church suppers, Christmas auctions, festivals, picnics, and other events. The communities of Ingersoll and Salford soon realized that people would come from miles around to be entertained by this specially gifted girl.⁶

DARWIN OR JESUS?

But Aimee's training in the Methodist church in Salford would soon cause her some confusion. Though the Methodists encouraged speech and entertainment within

their building, they absolutely condemned movie theaters and plays outside of it. In fact, Minnie had been led to believe that “moving pictures” were the most sinful thing ever created. So Aimee grew up in a generation that believed in strict religious rules. Church authorities and others had solemnly warned her that if she ever visited a movie theater, she would end up in hell. Nevertheless, once when she was invited to a movie, she consented to go. And when she did, she recognized several other members from her church. One was a Sunday school teacher. The hypocrisy of it all touched her deeply.

When Aimee entered high school in 1905, Darwin’s theory of evolution had just been popularized. Suddenly, every new textbook was filled with Darwin’s theory that claimed life on earth began from an amoeba and that man was cousin to the chimpanzee.

Aimee was shocked. Though she was not yet a born-again Christian, she had been raised on the Bible and was truly insulted by Darwin’s claims. She approached her science professor and gallantly questioned him on the matter. As far as he was concerned, “biological research had superseded ancient superstition.”⁷ But Aimee cornered the poor man to such a degree that he finally had to sidestep her, then handed her a library list of books to study.

Aimee accepted the challenge. Not only would she read these secular authors and their theories, but when she was finished, no one but those authors would know more on the subject of Darwin’s theory than she did. This would become a pattern throughout her life. Aimee was diligent and unbeatable.

But in her reading, Aimee finally decided that Darwin’s theory had to be true. After all, the church no longer practiced what the Bible said. It seemed the church was

only a social gathering for plays and entertainment, and there were no miracles being worked like those she read about in the Bible. So, she began debating with visiting ministers and questioned why they preached if there were no miracles today.

When questioned, one minister cleared his throat and explained how miracles had passed away, describing it as the “cessation of charisma.” Then, when Aimee challenged him with other Scriptures, he finally told her that these matters were completely over her head. The man obviously didn’t know of Aimee’s determination.

Another night after an evening church service, Aimee challenged a visiting preacher in such a manner that her parents were mortified. “If the Bible is true, why do our neighbors pay good tax money to tear down our faith?” she asked the trembling minister.⁸ Again, Aimee had the last word. But she was miserable, because no one seemed to have the spiritual ammunition to address her confusion.

Aimee finally came to the conclusion that, according to her beliefs, if portions of the Bible were no longer true, then none of the Bible could be true. She further reasoned that if there was a leak in one place, the whole thing should be thrown out. So she decided to become an atheist.

Arriving home after this one last searing battle of words with the minister, Aimee sprinted into her room, opened the shutters, and peered out into the night. As she surveyed the magnificence of the stars, Aimee was moved within herself. Someone had to have made the heavens, and she longed to know what, or who. No more stories; no more hearsay. She wanted facts.

So Aimee prayed, “O God—if there be a God—reveal Yourself to me!”⁹ Two days later, God would answer her

plea.

THE HOLY ROLLERS ARE HERE!

Aimee was a “study in relaxed determination.” At seventeen, she was a beautiful girl who seemed to have everything she wanted. Unlike the other girls of the district, she never spoke of marriage and children. She was very intelligent, and her family was financially comfortable. Her tailored clothes were stylish, and her parents adored her. She also had the ability to speak and capture an audience with a sentence or two, and she had won every speaking competition she ever entered. She went around to dance halls, finding them full of church members. In fact, the first person who whirled her on the dance floor was a Presbyterian minister. But, more than ever, Aimee needed the Lord. And soon she would find Him.

The day after Aimee had prayed for God to reveal Himself, she was driving home from school with her father. As they traveled down Main Street in Ingersoll, she noticed a sign in a storefront window that read: “HOLY GHOST REVIVAL: ROBERT SEMPLE, IRISH EVANGELIST.”

Aimee had heard how these Pentecostal people fell on the floor and spoke in unknown languages, and she had heard the wild stories of their shouting and dancing. She was very curious, so the next evening, before Aimee’s Christmas program rehearsal, James Kennedy took his daughter to the mission. They sat on the back row.

EVEN THE BIRDS SMILED

At the meeting, Aimee was all eyes. She was amused as she saw certain townspeople singing and shouting “Hallelujah!” with their hands uplifted. What a show! she thought. Had she not been an atheist, Aimee thought she would shout herself! She was thoroughly enjoying this

naive show from her intellectual tower. Then, Robert Semple walked into the room.

At that moment, everything changed for Aimee. Semple was about six feet two inches tall, with blue eyes, curly brown hair, and, as she would soon discover, a wonderful sense of humor. Years later, Aimee would still affectionately describe his blue eyes as “having the light of heaven.”

An Irish Presbyterian, Semple had left his homeland by boat to sail to New York and then had traveled over land to Toronto, Canada, and then to Chicago, Illinois. It was in 1901 that the Pentecostal manifestation of speaking in other tongues spread from Topeka, Kansas, to Chicago. And it was here in Chicago that Robert Semple had first spoken in other tongues. God called him to the ministry while he had been working as a clerk at Marshall Field’s department store in the city. He became a very successful evangelist who was known throughout the northern U.S. and Canada. And now, he had come to Aimee’s hometown.

When Semple walked into the little mission, it seemed that Aimee’s whole world stood still. Rev. Robert Semple strode up to the pulpit and opened his Bible to the second chapter of Acts. Then he repeated a simple command: “Repent...repent.” Aimee began to squirm uneasily. Every time Semple spoke, his words pierced her heart like an arrow. Later, Aimee said, “I had never heard such a sermon. Using the Bible as a sword, he cut the whole world in two.”

The young evangelist saw no middle ground between serving the world and serving God. If you loved one, then you couldn’t love the other. You were either for Him or against Him. It was as simple as that. Aimee hung on his every word. Then, the young evangelist turned his head

toward heaven, and began to speak in tongues. As she watched, his face seemed to glow with an inner light.

As Semple spoke, Aimee could understand perfectly what was being said. It was the voice of God, showing Himself to her, answering her prayer. She later said, "From the moment I heard that young man speak with tongues, to this day, I have never doubted for the shadow of a second that there was a God, and that He had shown me my true condition as a poor, lost, miserable, hell-serving sinner."¹⁰

Three days later, Aimee stopped her carriage in the middle of a lonely road, lifted her hands toward heaven, and cried out for God's mercy. Then, suddenly, as she later explained, "The sky was filled with brightness. The trees, the fields, and the little snow birds flitting to and fro were praising the Lord and smiling upon me. So conscious was I of the pardoning blood of Jesus that I seemed to feel it flowing over me."

Aimee had finally been born again.

SHAKING WITH THE POWER

Seeking direction for her life, Aimee prayed and received a vision. As she closed her eyes, she saw a black river rushing past with millions of men, women, and children being swept into it. They were being helplessly pushed along by the river's current and falling over a waterfall. Then, she heard these words: "Become a winner of souls."¹¹

Puzzled as to how she could accomplish this task, Aimee began to seek the Lord even further. Women couldn't preach. It was simply not allowed. But Aimee believed that if Peter, a fisherman, could preach, maybe a Canadian farm girl could, too. So she searched the New Testament. And as she did, she came to the conclusion that the only

requirement necessary for the one called to preach was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Against her mother's wishes, Aimee started attending "tarrying" meetings, which had been going on in Ingersoll, Ontario, for some time.

There were manifestations in abundance at Ingersoll's tarrying meetings. They had been instituted for the purposes of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and in 1908, they were viewed by most as extremely radical. Even the Salvation Army approached Minnie to discuss her daughter's sudden Pentecostal behavior.¹²

But Aimee never cared what anyone else thought. All she really wanted to do was to please God—and Robert Semple. It was Robert's love for God that caused Aimee to fervently pursue God. She fervently wanted to know Him as Robert did.

Aimee's school grades were now slipping because she was spending so much time at the tarrying meetings. One morning, as Aimee passed the house of the woman who held the tarrying meetings, she felt she just couldn't go on to school—she wanted to speak in tongues! In fact, she wanted to speak in other tongues so much that she turned back from the train and rang the woman's doorbell. Now she was skipping classes to tarry in prayer.

Once Aimee had been invited in and had explained her heart's cry, she and the tarrying group leader started to seek God and pray. Aimee even asked God to delay school so she could continue to tarry there to receive. And when she did, a blizzard hit Ingersoll. The icy blast not only prevented her from traveling to school; it also kept her from going home. Aimee was thrilled! She had been snowed in for an entire weekend to tarry for the Spirit.

Early the next morning, a Saturday, while everyone else was asleep in the house, Aimee arose early to seek the Lord. As she lifted her voice in adoration, her praises came deeper from within her, until at last there was a thunder that came out of her that vibrated from head to toe.

Aimee slipped to the floor, feeling as if she were caught up in billowy clouds of glory. Then, suddenly, words began flowing out of her mouth in another language—first in short phrases, then in full sentences. By now, the whole house had been awakened by her sounds, and the group came shouting and rejoicing down the stairs. Among them was Robert Semple. It isn't known exactly how much time Robert Semple spent in Aimee's town. But he must have traveled back and forth because of his being there when Aimee was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

"ELECTRIC" DANCING

Robert traveled extensively, but corresponded regularly with Aimee throughout the winter. In early spring of 1908, Robert returned to Ingersoll and proposed to her. In fact, he proposed to Aimee in the same house in which she had received the baptism a few months earlier. Six months later, on August 12, 1908, Aimee married Robert Semple in her family's farmhouse.

Aimee would not finish high school because of her love for Semple. In fact, she left behind everything in order to love, honor, and obey her new husband. Robert was all she needed for a fulfilled and enriching life.

"He was my theological seminary," she would later write, "my spiritual mentor, and my tender, patient, unfailing lover."¹³

Before their marriage, Aimee and Robert had convinced her parents that speaking in other tongues was scriptural.

But it took much more to convince Minnie of God's will concerning the couple's call to China.

In preparation for their trip, Robert worked in a factory by day and preached by night. Soon, his ministry took them to London, Ontario, where they ministered in homes. Robert would preach, while Aimee would play the piano, sing, and pray with the converts. In just a few months, a hundred people had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with many more saved. They also saw many remarkable healings.¹⁴

In January 1909, the Semples went to Chicago, Illinois, where Robert was ordained by Pastor William Durham. They ministered there for several months in an Italian neighborhood and were content and happy.

Later that year, the Semples traveled with Pastor Durham to Findlay, Ohio, to work in another mission. It was here that Aimee had her first experience with divine healing, after she fell down some stairs and broke her ankle. The physician who set her cast told her that she would never have the use of four ligaments again. He also told her to stay off of her foot for at least a month. But Aimee continued to hobble to the prayer meetings, even though the slightest vibration on the floor would cause her tremendous pain.

Finally, at one meeting, the pain became so intense that she had to return to her room. As she sat and stared at her black and swollen toes, she heard a voice saying, "If you will go over to the [mission] and ask Brother Durham to lay hands on your foot, I will heal it." Recognizing it as the voice of the Lord, Aimee did as she was told.

At the mission, Brother Durham had been walking up and down the aisles. When Aimee came in, he stopped and

placed his hand on her foot. A feeling like a shot of electricity struck her leg, and immediately the blackness left her toes. She felt the ligaments pop back into place as her bone mended together, and she suddenly ceased to feel pain.

Aimee excitedly asked for someone to cut away the cast. After some debate, they finally agreed to do so. Once the cast was removed, they were shocked to see a perfectly healed foot. Aimee put on her shoes and danced all over the church!¹⁵

DEMONS, CATERPILLARS, AND BURNING HINDUS

In early 1910, the Semples, who were now expecting a child, set sail for China. En route, the couple visited Robert's parents in Ireland, then stopped over in London, where Robert preached at several meetings. While he was away at one of these meetings, a Christian millionaire asked Aimee to preach in Victoria and Albert Hall. Aimee was just nineteen years old and had never preached in public before, but she didn't want to turn down an opportunity to serve God. Nervously, she accepted.

Standing before the crowd in the hall, Aimee opened her Bible to Joel 1:4 and then began to teach on the restoration of the church throughout the ages. In fact, she was so caught up in the moment that, after the meeting, she could remember nothing else but the tremendous anointing that had inspired the message. She couldn't remember what she said, but she could see the audience clapping and wiping their eyes.

In June 1910, the Semples arrived in Hong Kong. But Aimee wasn't prepared for what she saw. The Chinese diet of caterpillars, bugs, and rats revolted her, and their apartment was very noisy, so they got very little rest. They

eventually determined that their residence was “haunted” by demon spirits that were making some of the noises heard day and night.

One day, the local Hindus burned a man alive right outside the Semples’ kitchen window. This, along with everything else, had Aimee living on the edge of hysteria most of the time. She had grown to hate the mission. Soon, because of their poor living conditions, she and Robert both contracted malaria. Robert’s case was worse than hers, and on August 17, only two months after they had arrived, Robert Semple was dead.

Aimee was now left alone to fend for herself in this strange and foreign land. Her grief was unbearable, and she was pregnant with Robert’s child. One month after Robert’s death, on September 17, 1910, she gave birth to a baby girl weighing only four pounds. She named her Roberta Star.

Robert’s death had flooded Aimee’s life with grief. Nothing could describe her misery as she lay in her hospital bed overcome with the horror of the reality of having to carry on alone. At times, she would turn toward the hospital wall and scream into it.¹⁶

Aimee’s mother, Minnie, sent her the money she needed to travel home. As the forlorn missionary widow steamed across the Pacific, the tiny baby she brought with her was her only source of hope.

HOME SWEET HOME

Once home, Aimee mourned the loss of Robert for over a year, but she also continued to search for God’s will in her life. She went to New York and then Chicago, hoping to minister in the churches Robert had left. When the baby’s health began to suffer, she returned to her childhood home.

But Aimee's grief wouldn't allow her to sit still for long, and she eventually returned to New York.

While in New York, Aimee met Harold McPherson of Rhode Island. He was known as a solid, clear-thinking man, great in strength and very kind.

On February 28, 1912, Aimee and Harold were married. Aimee gave her new husband the nickname "Mack," and Roberta would call him "Daddy Mack." The family moved to Providence, Rhode Island, and settled in a small apartment. Harold secured a job in a bank, and Aimee stayed home as a housewife. By July 1912, Aimee was expecting her second child.¹⁷

According to Aimee, the only real problem that she and Harold had to contend with in their marital relationship was their vastly different goals. She described the three years following their wedding as being much like the story of Jonah. Aimee had run from God and, as a result, was suffering from depression. She was plagued with illnesses, and she finally experienced an emotional breakdown.

"Will YOU GO?"

The couple's son, Rolf, was born March 23, 1913. Aimee began to realize that an emotional maturity and stability was being built within her that would benefit her future. Not long after the birth of her son, Aimee began to hear the voice of the Lord telling her, "Preach the Word! Will you go? Will you go?" She would hear the voice especially when she was cleaning the house.

The sensitivity to the voice of God's Spirit that Aimee developed in those years would eventually shake a sleeping nation. It has been said that she spoke to the thousands in her ministry as tenderly as a mother speaking to her children.

In 1914, Aimee worked around the community, preaching and teaching Sunday school, but this didn't satisfy the voice, which by now had begun to boom, "Do the work of an evangelist! Will you go?"

But it was also in 1914 that Aimee became gravely ill. After several surgeries, she grew no better and became despondent to the point of begging God to let her die.

The physicians called Harold's mother and Minnie to inform them of Aimee's approaching death. As Minnie listened to their report, she vividly remembered praying to God for her little girl. And she remembered her vow—that Aimee would fulfill the call Minnie had rejected herself. She held on to God's promise, refusing to let Aimee die. The nurses wept as they watched Minnie standing over Aimee's body, crying and renewing her promise to God.

With hope almost gone, the interns moved Aimee from her room to a ward where they took the dying. It was then that Aimee began speaking out of the lifelessness of her coma. She was calling the people to repentance—and she was hearing the voice again: "Will you go?" She mustered the energy to whisper that she would. Then, she opened her eyes, and all the pain was gone. Within two weeks, she was up and about again, entirely well.

"I WAS ON MY BACK IN THE STRAW"

By now, Harold had a good job, and he wanted Aimee to be like other women who cleaned house and cooked in the kitchen. But Aimee felt she could not remain so confined if she was planning to fulfill the call to "go." So, in the spring of 1915, one morning after Harold left for work, Aimee bundled up Roberta and Rolf, packed up their belongings, and left for Toronto.¹⁸

Before leaving to attend her first Pentecostal camp meeting, she wired Harold the following message: "I have tried to walk your way and have failed. Won't you come now and walk my way? I am sure we will be happy."¹⁹

Minnie agreed to take care of the children while Aimee started her ministry. It was months before Harold responded to Aimee's wire. By then, they had drifted so far apart, Harold could not catch up to her. After months of trying to work out their differences, they faced up to the inevitable.

With her future now committed, Aimee was concerned she would never again operate in the power that she had while married to Robert. She feared God's anointing had left her. But her fears ended when she was welcomed warmly by her friends at the camp meeting. She was inspired when she heard their hearty praise and sensed God's fire ignite within her.

Still, she felt the need to confess her laxity to the Lord, and at the camp meeting's first altar call, she was the first one down. When she knelt at the altar, she felt God's grace and acceptance.

"Such love," she recalled, "was more than my heart could bear. Before I knew it I was on my back in the straw, under the power."

Aimee remained at the camp meeting for weeks. She washed dishes, waited tables, and prayed for people. It had been a long time since she had been so happy.²⁰

A RIPPED TENT & SPIRITUAL POWER

Soon, Aimee began preaching on her own. She would use any method to draw a crowd, and people traveled from all over the countryside to hear her. In 1915, one of her

meetings drew more than five hundred people. She had become a novelty. Besides having a dynamic personality, she was a woman, and woman preachers were hard to find in those days. Naturally, everyone was curious to see and hear her.

At one of her meetings, she collected an offering of \$65, which she put toward the purchase of a tent that cost \$500. Thrilled that she had found such a bargain, Aimee unrolled the seasoned canvas to set it up, only to find that the canvas had been ripped—to shreds, in some places. Undaunted, she assembled her volunteers, and together they sewed the holes hut until their fingers were stiff and sore. By sunset, the patchwork tent was up.

One time, as she looked out over the crowd, Aimee saw Harold. He had traveled to one of her meetings to see her preach. Before the night was over, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he joined her briefly in the meetings.

There was a natural empathy in Aimee that accentuated her ministry mannerisms and drew huge crowds of people from every walk of life. People could relate to her, because, after all, everyone had a mother. And those who came would experience the power of God through amazing manifestations. Many would come just to sense the presence of God, and thousands received the baptism.

THE ROLLING CHURCH

Over the next seven years, Aimee crossed the United States six times. Between 1917 and 1923, she preached in more than one hundred cities, with meetings ranging in duration from two nights to a month.

Her first ministry experience with divine healing took place with a woman afflicted by rheumatoid arthritis. The woman's neck was so twisted that she was unable to look at

the evangelist. Immediately following the prayer of faith, she turned her neck and looked Aimee in the face. God had healed her, and Aimee knew it.

Aimee would state emphatically that she never sought a healing ministry and hardly relished the idea of one.²¹ But healing came with her evangelistic call, and after hearing of the unusually successful results in answer to her prayers, people came in droves for prayer.

In one meeting, the offerings were large enough to buy a 1912 Packard Touring Car. It would soon become her “rolling church.” Aimee would stand in the backseat and preach eight to ten meetings a day. Then, between meetings, she would pass out tracts and handbills, inviting all to come.

Though Aimee conducted her meetings with grace, she was also very strong. She had developed a great deal of strength from hauling her tent and from hammering its stakes into the ground during setup. In fact, she was louder and stronger than most men.

BURNS, BLISTERS, & MARDI GRAS

As discussed earlier, Aimee was noted for her affectionate preaching. She would often treat her audiences as a mother would her child. She was never condemning or threatening; she always encouraged her listeners gently to fall in love with the grace and mercy of God.

But, like a strong mother, Aimee wasn't weak. Once, a lamp exploded in her face, covering her with flames. She quickly plunged her head into a bucket of water, but not before blisters developed on her neck and face. To make matters worse, all of this happened as hecklers were watching and jeering. The tent was full the night this

occurred, so she exited behind it, being in great pain. One of the hecklers jumped on the platform and said, "The lady who preaches divine healing has been hurt. She burned her face, so there will be no meeting tonight."

Furious, Aimee rushed back inside through the tent flaps and leaped onto the platform. She was in agony, but she was able to draw enough strength to sit down at the piano and cry out, "I praise the Lord who heals me and takes all the pain away!" Then, after she had sung only two to three stanzas of a song, the crowd witnessed a miracle: Aimee's face went from lobster-red to the color of normal flesh!²²

Aimee used every opportunity to draw a crowd. Even during a Mardi Gras parade, she had a plan. She noticed the many parade floats being entered with the themes of different states and local businesses. So she quickly turned her 1912 Packard into a floating church! Her staff helped her quickly cover the top, making it appear to be a hill with a tent on its summit, then decorated it with green palms and Spanish moss. On the sides, she painted the phrases "Jesus is coming soon" and "I am going to the Pentecostal camp meeting. R.U.?" Then inside, Aimee played her baby organ, while Harold drove the car into the parade line, unnoticed by the policemen. The crowd loved it and shouted their approval with raucous laughs and cheers! And that night, they packed the tent! "The very audacity of the thing which we had done," Aimee recalled, "seemed to appeal to them."²³

FROM HAROLD TO MINNIE

It was around this time that Aimee started printing *The Bridal Call*, a publication that began as a four-page newspaper but within three months grew to become a sixteen-page magazine complete with photos, sermons, poems, and a subscription price. Aimee's intentions in

publishing it were to reshape the church by taking “away the damnation and sin to take on the tone of a celebration, a happy wedding.”²⁴

Aimee’s reputation for freedom in the Holy Spirit attracted people from many different backgrounds. Soon, every sort of thrill seeker, rover, and thug in the area would show up at her tent. When the meetings were small, she could control them. But when they grew to over a thousand in attendance, the only way she could calm their emotional outbursts was to resort to music and singing, and she did it very masterfully. Before long, she was incorporating narrative and drama into her preaching.

Aimee found herself at ease among the black culture. She loved visiting in their homes, usually finding herself much poorer than any of them. They knew she loved them, too. They thronged her in the South as she visited and worked with them in the cotton and tobacco fields.

Now the crowds were soaring in numbers. But Aimee’s personal life began to suffer again, this time due to disagreements she had with Harold about the ministry. He didn’t like the vagabond life they were leading, nor did he understand her vision for the future. Finally, after an all-night confrontation, Harold packed his belongings and left.

Several years later, Harold filed for divorce, claiming that Aimee had deserted him. But she countered the suit, stating the opposite. Harold would go on to remarry and live a much more “normal” family life.

Minnie now joined Aimee’s ministry and brought along with her Aimee’s daughter, Roberta, now seven years old. She hadn’t seen her mother in two years, but, now that she was with her, she was immediately filled with the

excitement of her mother's ministry, and she loved to watch her preach.

People continued to throng to Aimee's meetings by the thousands, and she desperately needed someone to help manage them. It soon became apparent that Minnie Kennedy was a natural at the task. She believed evangelism was more than faith—it required organization! Minnie's meticulous ways were up to the task of Aimee's anointing, and her skills would eventually take her daughter from tents to coliseums.

STRETCHED SHOES & A BOTTLE OF CLOUDS

Amid all the frenzy of the ministry, Aimee's children said they always felt secure with their mother on the road. They loved traveling with her. Some accused Aimee of making life difficult for them. But the truth of the matter was, both were greatly disappointed when they couldn't go with her!

Rolf and Roberta both have wonderful memories of their mother. Roberta remembers the stories her mother told her as they drove down the highway. Once, Roberta wanted to catch a cloud after her mother had described one so beautifully. So, Aimee promptly steered to the side of the road, grabbed an empty bottle, and got out of the car. She held the empty bottle up in the air until the mist and fog surrounding her formed tiny droplets on the inside of the bottle. When she brought it back to the car, she presented it to Roberta: a genuine cloud.

Rolf remembers how badly he once needed shoes, and how he received a pair as a gift. When the box arrived, the family was excited. But when Rolf tried to put them on, they wouldn't fit. Disappointment set in until Roberta asked, "Mother, what did the Israelite children do for shoes in the wilderness?...their feet must have grown." Without

thinking, Aimee replied, "God must have stretched their shoes." Roberta then asked if God would do the same for Rolf's shoes. "I don't know," Aimee said, "but let us kneel and ask Him." Rolf tried the shoes on again, and this time, they fit perfectly!

On another occasion, Rolf was playing barefoot in the tall grass of a campground when he stepped on a rake and pierced his foot, which began bleeding profusely.

When Aimee learned of Rolf's accident, she rushed to his side and carried him to his cot in their little tent. Rolf fondly remembers how his mother held his foot while kneeling in prayer to ask God for his healing. After she prayed for God to heal her son, Rolf fell asleep.

Many hours later, Rolf was awakened by the distant roar of the masses in the tent meeting. When he sat up, he saw the bloodstains on his bed, and he grabbed his foot, checking the sole, where the rake had pierced him. There was no sign of a wound! Thinking he must have looked at the wrong foot, he grabbed the other one, but it, too, was smooth. He was elated by the realization that his foot was completely healed!

DRESSING THE PART

The only early Pentecostal belief Aimee was ever known to take a stand against was the doctrine of sanctification as a second work of grace. She felt strongly that those who claimed or pursued "Christian perfection" often turned their backs on the people of the world, creating a religious isolationism.

Aimee wanted the gospel to "fit" everyone. And she didn't want anyone to feel intimidated about coming to hear about God's Word. She was burdened by the elite attitude she had seen in the church that tended to repel

needy sinners. She called sin “sin” and invited everyone to repent, saying,

“Whatever fancy name you give it, sin is sin.... God looks on the heart and as for holiness, why, without holiness no man shall see the Lord. We must be saved, we must be sanctified, but all through the precious atoning blood of Jesus Christ.”²⁵

In 1918, when World War I was raging in Europe, and America was plagued with an outbreak of influenza, Aimee was viewed as a ray of hope because of her doctrine. One of her major thrusts of ministry appreciated by everyone was that of servanthood. To demonstrate this, the Lord directed Aimee to purchase an outfit that would announce her position as a servant. While she was out shopping for a new dress, the Lord spoke to her heart, saying, “You are a servant of all, are you not? Go upstairs and ask to see the servants’ dresses.”

Aimee obeyed and bought two servant dresses for \$5. From that time on, she was always distinguished by her white servant’s dress and cape.²⁶

I DID PROMISE YOU A ROSE GARDEN

One afternoon, when Roberta was suffering with influenza, she asked her mother why they didn’t have a home like everyone else. As Aimee prayed for Roberta’s healing, God spoke to her and proclaimed that He would not only raise up her daughter but would also give them a home in sunny Southern California. She even received a vision of their new home, seeing a bungalow with a rose garden.

When Roberta recovered, the group set out for California. Roberta would later say they had no idea of how much of a miracle the house really was because, “When

mother told us something would happen, it was like money in the bank.”²⁷

The trip was no small exploit. Road maps were scarce, towns were far apart, and the conditions of the roads were questionable. But none of this hindered Aimee.

On the way to the West Coast, Aimee drove into Indianapolis just as the influenza ban was lifted. It was then that she met Maria Woodworth-Etter. It was the thrill of her life to finally meet this woman who had so inspired her—and to hear her preach!

When she finally arrived in Los Angeles, in late 1918, Aimee’s fame had preceded her. By now, the Azusa Street Mission was just a memory. Its members had scattered throughout the city, but they were waiting for the person whom God would use to pull them back together. And when Aimee arrived, they believed she was the one.

Two days after she arrived, Aimee preached a message to seven hundred people entitled “Shout! For the Lord Hath Given You the City.” By early 1919, the aisles, floors, and windowsills of the Philharmonic Auditorium were packed with people who came to hear her.

The people of Los Angeles couldn’t do enough for Aimee and her family. Less than two weeks after she arrived, a woman stood up in one of her meetings, saying the Lord had impressed her to give the evangelist some land on which she could build a home. Others stood and pledged their labor and the necessary materials. Even the rose bushes in her vision would be donated, and by April, the house with gabled porches and a fireplace was a reality.

A COAT OF MANY COLORS

By now, Aimee could see that a permanent place to preach was a great need. So, between the years of 1919 and 1923, she traveled across the U.S. nine times, preaching and raising money for the building of Angelus Temple. And everywhere she traveled, people loved her.

Aimee's tone in preaching ranged from the "baby talk" and girlish stories she used to delight older audiences to the solemn, deep-toned demeanor of a dynamic, soulwinning prophetess. God gifted her in her delivery to accommodate many different situations.

The press discovered Aimee in 1919. And when they did, they were invited into what was to become in later years one of America's most celebrated media love/hate relationships ever on record. Aimee loved the media, but they were never sure of what she was doing to them! They weren't accustomed to anyone taking advantage of their methods, and they would try to trip her up with trick questions such as, "Aimee, are silk stockings evil?" In response, she would gracefully cross her legs and reply, "It depends altogether on how much of them is shown."²⁸ This sort of coverage worked to make Aimee a national phenomenon.

In Baltimore, Maryland, Aimee preached in an auditorium for the first time. It sat three thousand people, and many more people were turned away because of a lack of space. So, she rented another auditorium—one that seated sixteen thousand. It was here that Aimee shocked the Baltimore masses by pointing out the demonic behavior in an overly demonstrative worshipper. Up until then, it had been considered unethical to confront someone who was "ecstatic" for God. But Aimee rebuked the woman openly and called for a choir member to retain her in a smaller room.

After prayerfully observing the woman, Aimee challenged the leadership ethics of her day and called the church to spiritual maturity, saying, “The woman proved to be a maniac who had been in an asylum.... Yet this was the kind of woman many of the saints would have allowed to promenade the platform fearing lest they quench the Spirit.”²⁹

While Aimee was in Baltimore, a national healing campaign began. Incredible, highly unusual miracles occurred. The newspaper headlines screamed the results of each meeting.

It has been said that when Aimee would enter the hall before a meeting, there were often throngs of desperately ill people seeking to touch her, and when she saw them, she would run back to her dressing room, overwhelmed, to pray for God’s help.

Everywhere Aimee went, crowds pressed in to touch her. She would watch in regret as the police were forced to bolt the doors in order to protect her.

After a while, when she closed her eyes at night, all she could see were the seventeen hundred people who were packed into a place that was built to hold a thousand. She would see the altars and basements overflowing with the sick and would wake up thinking of how Jesus had dealt with all this: “Wouldn’t you just realize how Jesus had to get into a boat and push away from land, in order to preach to the people?”³⁰

In 1921, Aimee held a three-week meeting in Denver, Colorado, at which sixteen thousand people filled the Municipal Auditorium two and three times each day. One night, eight thousand people had to be turned away.

“MINNIE,” NOT A MOUSE

During these great days of ministry, Minnie Kennedy guarded her daughter's health aggressively. She considered it the highest of priorities because, if Aimee's health were to fail, so would the ministry. They were more like sisters than mother and daughter, but they would never truly bond in a spiritual way.

As I said earlier, Minnie was an incredible organizer. She ran Aimee's ministry from the rafters to the basement, keeping their finances in the black. She was tough, sometimes sleeping only two hours a night. She screened every sick person before every service to weed out any troublemakers, and she spent long hours with the invalids before every service began.

Minnie never sat down for a meal. She would grab food at the oddest of moments between registering invalids, greeting delegates, and organizing the ministry of helps. She worked diligently to establish a business foundation for the ministry. But she never fully grasped Aimee's call in its entirety, nor did she ever really understand why Aimee did what she did.

If anyone ever got too close to Aimee, Minnie would harass her daughter until that particular relationship was broken. Many employees quit or were fired because of Minnie. Perhaps this was the reason Aimee never had a close friend for very long. Her relationship with her mother involved much stress, and in the years to come, Aimee's sense of being "owned" and "controlled" would eventually cause them to part.

In 1921, Aimee was weary from her time on the road and began searching for the land on which they would build Angelus Temple. She found it adjoining Los Angeles' prestigious Echo Park area, which was surrounded by abundant grass, picnic grounds, and a beautiful lake.

A “FIRST”—FROM THE KKK TO HOLLYWOOD

Aimee was a “first” in many areas. While Angelus Temple was being constructed, the Oakland Rockridge radio station invited her to be the first woman ever to preach on the air. This would ignite another fire within her, and in time she would build her own radio station. But first, she would build the Temple.

Everyone contributed to the building project. Mayors, governors, Gypsies, and even the Ku Klux Klan were quick to give. Though Aimee didn’t agree with the KKK, they loved her. But it was this “love” for her that caused them to commit a crime.

After another meeting in Denver, in June 1922, Aimee was in a side hall with a woman reporter when someone asked her to pray for an invalid outside. She took the reporter outside with her because she wanted her to witness the prayer. But when they walked out the door, the two were abducted, blindfolded, and driven to a meeting of the KKK.

As it turned out, all that the KKK wanted was a private message from the evangelist. She gave them a message out of Matthew 27, on “Barabbas, the man who thought he would never be found out.” After she preached, Aimee listened politely as the Klan pledged to her their national and “silent” support. To them, this simply meant that wherever Aimee went in the U.S., she could depend on them to observe and protect her. Then, they blindfolded the two women once again and took them back to the hall in Denver.³¹

The reporter published a great story about the kidnapping that hurled Aimee to even greater heights and brought more money in for the Temple.

In late 1922, Aimee's five-thousand-seat temple was finally completed. It was dedicated in an extravagant service on New Year's Day, 1923. Those who couldn't attend saw its likeness on a flower-covered float that was ridden by singing choir members in Pasadena's Tournament of Roses parade. The float won first prize in its division.³²

The New York Times gave the dedication full coverage, and from then on, Angelus Temple's five thousand seats were filled four times each Sunday.

The Temple had perfect acoustics. It was said that many Hollywood producers were hoping Aimee would fail so they could simply acquire the building to turn it into a theater. But Aimee wouldn't fail, and she herself would eventually have the building transformed into a theater—a theater for God.

According to Aimee, the entire Bible was a sacred drama that was meant to be preached and illustrated dramatically. And it was here that she believed denominational churches had lost their cutting edge. Aimee truly believed the church had grown too cold and formal, while the world's love of entertainment brought them encouragement, joy, and laughter. She also felt this to be the reason that so many Christians were hungry for entertainment.

In July 1922, Aimee named Angelus Temple "The Church of the Foursquare Gospel" because of a vision she had received while preaching from the first chapter of Ezekiel. The first signing day of her new association produced one thousand pastors.

Two meetings were set aside each week at the Temple to pray for the sick. Though she had twenty-four elders on staff, Aimee would personally conduct most of these meetings until her passing in 1944.

The healing results in Los Angeles were astounding, but they were less observed by the general public than they had been in Aimee's national campaigns. In the Temple's larger services, the focus was on soulwinning and on the training of soulwinners.

SOME TEMPLE TALES

Without question, Angelus Temple was a very busy place. Aimee had a prayer tower that was manned twenty-four hours a day. She also formulated a hundred-voice choir and a brass band of thirty-six members. The sanctuary was filled with music in every service. She also purchased costumes, props, and scenery to accent her sermons in Hollywood. Most of Los Angeles knew attending a service at Angelus Temple was an epic event.

Aimee had a remarkable sense of humor, and though there were many flaws in her early illustrated sermons, she always made the best of them. Once, to add some life to her garden of Eden scene, she ordered a macaw from a visiting circus. But she didn't know that this talking bird had picked up a vocabulary of coarse, vulgar language while working with the circus! In the middle of her oratory, the macaw turned to her and said, "Oh, go to hell."

The five thousand in attendance froze in disbelief. Then, as if the bird wanted to be sure that everyone had heard it, it repeated itself! But Aimee was not to be outdone, especially by a bird. She made the best of the mistake, just as she did every blooper, by proceeding to "witness" to the bird, encouraging it to respond. Then, when it replied with the very same words, the audience was hysterical! She finally "persuaded" the rented bird of the true Christian way by promising it a bird perch in heaven for its part in her show.³³

Of course, certain ministers persecuted Aimee for her methods. To them, she responded publically, saying,

“Show me a better way to persuade willing people to come to church and I’ll be happy to try your method. But please...don’t ask me to preach to empty seats. Let’s not waste our time quarreling over methods. God has use for all of us. Remember the recipe in the old adage for rabbit stew? It began, first catch your rabbit.”³⁴

TWINKLING STARS, BIBLE SCHOOL, & RADIO

Many Hollywood stars were interested in what Aimee had to say. Frequent attendees at the Temple were Mary Pickford, Jean Harlow, and Clara Bow. Charlie Chaplin was able to slip into a few of her services and would later become good friends with the evangelist. In fact, Chaplin would later help Aimee with the Temple’s staging for her illustrated sermons—and Aimee would show him the truth of life.

Also, Anthony Quinn played in Aimee’s band prior to his great debut as an actor. While Quinn was a teenager, Aimee took him along on a Spanish crusade to be her translator. The world-renowned actor would later say that one of the greatest moments of his life was when Aimee noticed him. And, he would write:

“Years later, when I saw the great actresses at work, I would compare them to her...Ingrid Bergman... Katharine Hepburn...Greta Garbo...they all fell short of that first electric shock Aimee Semple McPherson produced in me.”³⁵

In February 1923, Aimee opened her school of ministry, which would eventually become known as L.I.F.E.

(Lighthouse of International Foursquare Evangelism) Bible College. Aimee was an avid instructor.

At the school, “Sister,” as she was called, served as a teacher and openly revealed her weaknesses as well as her strengths to the student body. Her favorite Christian authors were Wesley, Booth, and a Canadian revivalist by the name of Albert Benjamin Simpson. Aimee often quoted these men and taught from their writings.

Sometimes she would test the students by leaving early and ask them to remain and pray. Then she would hide in a hallway. As the students left, she would watch for those who left frivolously, and for those who were attentive enough to pick up a piece of trash she had planted there. The attentive ones would receive her praise because of her belief that attention to detail produced a valuable, sensitive minister.

In February 1924, Aimee opened Radio KFSG (Kali Four Square Gospel), with the first FCC license ever issued to a woman. It was also the first Christian radio station ever operated.

IS AIMEE DEAD?

By 1926, Aimee was in need of a good vacation, so she traveled to Europe and the Holy Land. She ended up preaching during most of her trip. Then, upon her return, in 1926, the greatest scandal and controversy of her ministry took place. On May 18, while enjoying an afternoon at the beach with her secretary, Aimee made some final notes on a sermon to be given that night. She asked her secretary to call the information back to the Temple, and when her secretary returned, Aimee was gone. Thinking Aimee had gone for a swim, the secretary scanned the water, then notified the authorities.

Over the next thirty-two days, Aimee's disappearance became the hottest news story in the world. The beaches of Los Angeles were combed, and the outlying waters were searched, but no trace of her was found.

In the meantime, a ransom letter for \$25,000 was received at Angelus Temple. Minnie threw it away with the rest of the crazy mail that was now pouring in. Then another letter came from a different source demanding \$500,000, and the press went wild. "Aimee sightings" were the order of the day. Once she was reportedly seen sixteen times on the same day, from coast to coast.

KIDNAPPED!

A memorial service was finally scheduled for Aimee at Angelus Temple on June 20. Then, three days after the service, Aimee walked into Douglas, Arizona, from the desert at Agua Prieta, Mexico.

When questioned about her whereabouts, Aimee explained that after her secretary had left her on the beach that day, a man and a woman had approached her to pray for their dying child. She said the woman was crying, and the man offered her a cloak to cover her swimsuit. She consented to help the couple and followed them to her car. Aimee added that she had done something similar many times in her ministry and had never thought much of it.

But when the three of them arrived at the car, Aimee noticed that it was running. She said there was a man at the wheel, and that the woman posing as the mother got inside. Then, Aimee was told by the supposed father to get inside as he roughly pushed her in. The next thing she knew, someone was holding her head back, and the woman pushed a chloroform-soaked pad into her face.

When Aimee awoke, she was being held in a shack by a woman and two men. She said they threatened her, cut off a piece of her hair, and burned her fingers with a cigar. She also said that when they moved her to another place, the two men left, and that she was able to make her escape when the woman went shopping. The woman had tied Aimee up with bed cloths before she left, but Aimee was able to cut through them with the jagged edge of a tin can. Once she was free, Aimee left through a window, then walked through the desert for hours until she came upon a cabin in Douglas, Arizona.

When she finally received cooperation from the police, who took a while believing she was who she claimed to be, Aimee phoned Minnie in Los Angeles. But even Minnie didn't believe it was really her daughter, until Aimee revealed a secret that she alone could have known.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Upon her return, Aimee spent one night in the hospital. The following day, some fifty thousand people welcomed her back to Angelus Temple. But her ordeal had just begun.

Aimee had described her accused kidnappers, but they were never to be found. And when the police accompanied her in an attempt to retrace her footsteps in the desert, they never found a shack matching the description of the one in which she said she'd been held.

Then, Los Angeles District Attorney Asa Keyes accused Aimee of lying and went to great lengths to discredit her. She had been reportedly seen in a Carmel bungalow with her radio producer, Kenneth Ormiston, and Keyes produced many witnesses in an attempt to confirm the fact.

So far as possible kidnappers were concerned, it is true that Aimee had made many enemies in the underworld.

Gangsters in the Los Angeles area had a huge network of prostitution, drug trafficking, loan sharking, and bootlegging, and they weren't happy that Aimee had won several of their key leaders to the Lord.

It's also true that Aimee regularly opened the airwaves of her radio station to allow new converts to give salvation accounts. But when these former underworld converts broadcasted their testimonies, they would often give not only their salvation accounts—they would expose the criminal deeds of their former associates, many times calling them by name.

Aimee's kidnapping story never varied. In fact, hers was the only story that never changed. Reporters, detectives, and prosecutors all changed their accounts time and time again. Even the witnesses who testified against Aimee changed their testimony. And when they did, her charges of corruption of public morals, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy to manufacture evidence were finally dropped.

Some interesting side notes concerning this scandal include the facts that District Attorney Keyes would eventually be sentenced to San Quentin. And Aimee's attorney would later be found dead—incidents that many believe point to the mob's involvement.³⁶

DID SHE BREAK MINNIE'S NOSE?

Following her return to the ministry, Aimee would wear the robes of a true apostolic evangelist. She would show up at night clubs, dance halls, pool halls, and boxing matches to advertise her meetings during intermissions. Managers liked the publicity, and their clientele adored her.

Aimee wasn't afraid of the world's sinners and now would seek with even greater fervor to bring Jesus to where they were. She thought it funny that so many

Christians set boundaries as to where the gospel should and shouldn't be preached.

But in the latter part of 1926, lawsuit after lawsuit was assaulting her, and her promoters were involving her in all kinds of business ventures. When their plans failed, the blame and unpaid bills always fell on Aimee. Attorneys only seemed to make matters worse. And now more than ever, Aimee desperately needed a friend. She needed someone she could trust. It seemed that everyone she had ever been close to was either betraying her or withering under the criticism.

Even Minnie, Aimee's mother, was now wavering back and forth in her support of her daughter. Minnie kept crossing back and forth between her role of the devoted, helping mother, and the malevolent overseer of a ministry that she didn't understand. She was always quick to criticize her daughter when she saw things differently. And soon she would do so publicly.

Aimee had always honored her mother in public, but when Minnie went public with her antagonistic jabs, things reached a breaking point. Now that Aimee's own mother was fighting her in the public square, she felt totally betrayed. Furthermore, the church started to split. Those serving under Minnie were torn in their loyalty, while the Temple's Board of Elders sided with Aimee. In fact, when the end came, the elders would help work out Minnie's "permanent retirement plan."

Miraculously, in the midst of all of this, Aimee would compose her first opera in 1931 and name it Regem Adoratge, or "Worship the King." This was followed by another visit to the Holy Land. But she was reluctant to come home this time because of the growing difficulty with her mother. And her apprehensions proved to be well-

founded, because when she did get home, she and Minnie finally had it out.

It was a well-known fact that when Minnie got angry at Aimee, her words were cruel and vicious. But following this final round of their famous disagreements, it was made known in the press that Minnie ended up with a bruised and bandaged nose. The headlines accompanying her front-page picture deceitfully read, "MA SAYS AIMEE BROKE HER NOSE!"

But things were not as they seemed. In fact, Minnie had just undergone plastic surgery on the eve of their argument, and would later deny the whole thing.³⁷ All the same, that was it. Minnie was finished. Now she was gone.

Following Minnie's forced "retirement," a series of managers would file through to take her place. Coupled with the expense of settling with her mother, the depression, and lawsuits, Aimee's debts quickly mounted up. In fact, it would take the next ten years to settle all the lawsuits and to pay off her debtors. When it finally happened, there was a celebratory notice placed atop the Temple.

SHE'S NOT BIONIC

But the strain of it all had simply turned out to be more than Aimee could bear. In 1930, she suffered a complete emotional/physical breakdown and was confined to a Malibu beach cottage under a physician's constant care.

Following this ten-month ordeal, Aimee returned to Angelus Temple and recovered, to an extent. But she would never regain the vim and vigor she had formerly enjoyed. Aimee's physician explained her problem by simply stating she "could not get her needed rest."³⁸

By the time 1931 arrived, Aimee was very lonely. The price of fame was high, she had no close friends, and she desperately wanted companionship.

Rolf married a Bible school student in the middle of that year, much to Aimee's elation. Then, on September 13, 1931, she married again, this time to a Mr. David Hutton. It has been said that because of Aimee's loneliness and her desperate need for love and protection, she imagined all sorts of virtues in this man. But in reality, they simply weren't there.

Not long after they were married, Hutton was sued by another woman he had promised to marry. The court proceedings lasted a year, and the ruling went against him. But Aimee carried on in her calling around the nation. She experienced tremendous success in New England, as thousands came to hear her. Due to her health concerns, on April 22, 1927, she offered to resign as pastor of Angelus Temple.

This offer was refused. Then, in January, she set sail for Europe, in accordance with her doctor's advice. Again, thousands crowded her meetings. While she was away, Hutton, amid scandal, filed for divorce.

THE QUIET WAR QUEEN

The years between 1938 and 1944 were very quiet for Aimee. There was little said about her in the press.

Aimee was sued by disgruntled employees, associate pastors, and whoever else thought they could make a dollar on her. So, she hired a new business manager, Giles Knight, who kept her out of the public eye. Every reporter had to go through him to see her, and everyone was refused. Aimee would keep Knight informed of her whereabouts, then stay away to live a halfway anonymous life.

Rolf McPherson still speaks highly of Knight for the service rendered his mother that brought so much peace into their house.

Many of Aimee's efforts during these years were given to pastoring, training future ministers, establishing hundreds of churches, and sending missionaries around the world. In 1942, she also led a brass band and color guard into downtown Los Angeles to sell war bonds. She sold \$150,000 worth of the bonds in one hour, so the U.S. Treasury awarded her a special citation for her patriotic endeavor. She also organized regular Friday night prayer meetings at Angelus Temple for the duration of World War II, gaining the expressed appreciation of President Roosevelt and California's governor for doing so.

A GREAT ONE IS RESTING

By 1944, Aimee's health was very poor. She was suffering from tropical infections that she had contracted during her missionary trips. In February of that year, she named Rolf as the new vice president of the ministry. Rolf had proven his faithfulness and served his mother well over the years. In fact, he was the only person who stayed with her through both good times and bad.

In September 1944, Rolf flew to Oakland with his mother to dedicate a new church. There was a blackout in the city because of the war, so Aimee and Rolf spent the evening together in her room for some ministry and family talk. Huge crowds and the work of the ministry always exhilarated Aimee, and she was in high spirits. When the evening drew to a close, Rolf kissed his mother good night and left the room.

Aimee had always been plagued with insomnia. She was taking sedatives from her physician, and she had obviously

taken a couple of pills this night to sleep. She probably didn't know how many it would take, and she was scheduled to preach the next day. So she must have decided she needed more to fall asleep.

According to the physicians, it must have been about dawn when Aimee figured out that something was wrong. But instead of calling Rolf, she placed a call to her physician in Los Angeles. He was in surgery and didn't respond. She called another physician, who referred her to a Dr. Palmer in Oakland, California. But before she could make this third call, Aimee lost consciousness.

At 10:00 a.m., Rolf found his mother in bed, breathing hoarsely. He tried to wake her but was unable to revive her. He called for medical assistance, but it was too late. On September 27, 1944, at the age of fifty-three, Aimee Semple McPherson went home to be with the Lord.

Aimee's body lay in Angelus Temple for three days and three nights as sixty thousand people filed by to pay their last respects. The stage on which her open casket rested, the orchestra pit, and most of the Temple's aisles were filled with flowers. Five carloads of them had to be turned away.

On the anniversary of Aimee's birthday, October 9, 1944, a motorcade of six hundred automobiles drove to Forest Lawn Memorial Park, where this frontline General of God's Christian army was finally laid to rest. The cemetery admitted two thousand people, along with seventeen hundred Foursquare ministers whom Aimee had ordained.

The complete story of Aimee Semple McPherson could never be told in just one chapter. As with God's other great Generals, only heaven will reveal everything she accomplished. But for our purposes here, let me say that in

her lifetime, Aimee composed 175 songs and hymns, several operas, and thirteen drama-oratorios. She also preached thousands of sermons and graduated over 8,000 ministers from L.I.F.E. Bible College. It is estimated that during the Depression, some one and a half million people received aid from her ministry. And today, the Foursquare denomination is continuing to expound the truths of God's Word as they were revealed to Sister McPherson, in her revealed Foursquare Gospel's original Declaration of Faith. The four squares are: "Jesus is Savior, Jesus is healer, Jesus is baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is coming King."

DIRECT YOUR DESTINY

In conclusion, I want to focus on an important point that Aimee would always make to her Bible school students: "Stay in the middle of the road."

From all you have now read about her, it should be clear that this statement is not referring to compromise. Sister Aimee was talking about the strength it takes to stand firm in one place. And the statement had a twofold meaning to her. First, she would say, be bold in the mainstream of life, but don't allow the secular world to clone you in their mold. Be uninhibited and freely demonstrate the love and freedom that Jesus brought to the earth. And stand firm in the face of pressure, never flinching in the face of fear. Also, be bold to perform the plan of God for your life in the strength of what heaven has called you to do.

Second, be passionate in the gifts of the Spirit, but never be excessive. Don't intimidate the crowd just because you have the power. Aimee often used the example of an automobile and its power to make this point. Although it could easily go 80 miles an hour, one would have to be very foolish to drive it at that speed in the middle of a crowd. She would point out that such power from the Holy Spirit

was always there, but that it was meant to be used over the long haul of ministering God's service to others.

What Aimee was literally telling us when she said to "stay in the middle of the road" was this: Being excessive might skyrocket you, but you will eventually explode and plummet to earth. The Christian faith is a way of life, so run it like a marathon—not a sprint.

Let us now take the torch Aimee has passed to us, never settling for the mediocrity of a "religious" life. Shake your world for God with the freedom, boldness, and wisdom that God has given you. And stand strong in the "middle of the road" as you fulfill your personal destiny in the call of God.

1 Daniel Mark Epstein, *Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson* (Orlando, FL: Daniel Mark Epstein, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1993), 3, 80-81.

2 Epstein, *Sister Aimee*, 10.

3 *Ibid.*, 11.

4 Epstein, *Sister Aimee*, 21.

5 *Ibid.*, 22-23.

6 Epstein, *Sister Aimee*, 28.

7 *Ibid.*, 30-31.

8 Epstein, *Sister Aimee*, 36.

9 *Ibid.*, 39.

10 Epstein, *Sister Aimee*, 41-47.

- 11 Ibid., 48-49.
- 12 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 50.
- 13 Ibid., 55.
- 14 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 57.
- 15 Ibid., 57-59.
- 16 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 67.
- 17 Ibid., 73.
- 18 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 75.
- 19 Ibid., 76.
- 20 Ibid., 77-78.
- 21 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 111.
- 22 Ibid., 119.
- 23 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 120.
- 24 Ibid., 122.
- 25 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 134.
- 26 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 144.
- 27 Ibid., 145.
- 28 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 159.
- 29 Ibid., 172.
- 30 Ibid., 201.
- 31 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 241-243.
- 32 Ibid., 248.

33 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 256–257.

34 Ibid., 259.

35 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 378.

36 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 312.

37 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 340.

38 Epstein, Sister Aimee, 343.