

International House of Prayer (IHOP)

By Keith Gibson

Founder: Mike Bickle

Founding Date: 1999

Organizational Structure: Mike Bickle is the primary leader at the International House of Prayer. Other key members of the leadership team include: Daniel Lim, CEO; Allen Hood, President of IHOPU and Associate Director; Misty Edwards, Senior Worship Leader; and Lou Engles, Director of “The Call”.

Unique Activities: 24/7 worship and prayer “in the spirit of the Tabernacle of David”. Emphasis on modern prophetic revelation. Training forerunners to be the end-time apostles and prophets who will participate in the end-time judgments upon the earth performing great signs and wonders. The Joseph Company, a ministry aimed at producing leaders in the marketplace with the goal of preparing these individuals to store wealth for the preparation of end-time cities of refuge. Intercessory missionaries who are trained to start 24/7 prayer rooms in other areas around the world.

Unique slogans: Bridal Paradigm, Forerunner Ministry, Friends of the Bridegroom, Anna anointing, Prophetic Singers, End-Time cities of refuge, and many more. The name “IHOP” is an acronym standing for intercession, holiness, offerings and prophetic.

HISTORY

The history of the International House of Prayer is intimately connected with that of its founder Mike Bickle. Bickle, a native of Kansas City, began his formal ministry in St. Louis. While pastoring a church he had started, Bickle was visited by Augustine, a prophet who prophesied that he was to come to Kansas City.¹

Before coming to Kansas City, Bickle took an extended trip overseas. While in Cairo Egypt, Bickle relates that he heard, “the internal, audible voice of the Lord.” He claims he heard the very words and the intonation of the voice. The Lord said, “I am going to change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the whole world in one generation.”² This is the first of many personal encounters with God that provide the direction for IHOP.

Upon arriving in Kansas City, Bickle established South Kansas City Fellowship (KCF). While IHOP is not a church, it is important to understand that the groundwork for all that is happening in IHOP now was being set in place in those early days. Bickle states that the majority of the pivotal prophecies were given in 1983 and 1984. One such prophecy, known as “The Blueprint Prophecy” was received on March 26, 1984 in written form from a prophet Bickle claims was unknown to him. This prophecy reportedly gives God’s blueprint for the ministry. This prophecy was not released publicly until approximately 2003. It has never been released in full and three differing versions of it can be found on the internet.³

One of the most important occurrences in the first days of Bickle’s ministry in Kansas City was his introduction to Bob Jones. Space will not permit a discussion of the prophecies and alleged supernatural signs that occurred at that time. Upon their first encounter, Bickle was certain that Jones was the false prophet Augustine had warned of.⁴ However through a series of signs, Bickle became convinced that Jones was truly a prophet of God.

In a relatively short amount of time other people claiming prophetic giftings joined KCF. Men like John Paul Jackson, Jim Goll, David Parker and, eventually Paul Cain joined Bob Jones as prophetic voices to Mike Bickle.⁵ They became known as the Kansas City Prophets. These men began to prophesy in other churches. In some cases, evidence exists that they

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prophesied that God was calling these churches to merge with KCF or that God would write, "Ichabod" over their churches.⁶ Letters from that time indicate that some ministries did join.⁷ In time the ministry changed its name to Metro Christian Fellowship.

In the late eighties controversy began with other Charismatic ministries in the area. This erupted in 1990 when pastor Ernie Gruen preached a message entitled "Will We Smile and Say Nothing?" in which he related a series of charges concerning Bickle's ministry. Tapes of this message circulated widely. Gruen followed this message with a series of letters and publications including an open letter to a number of nationally recognized leaders within the Charismatic/Pentecostal community at that time known as the "Apostolic Presbyters of the Network of Christian Ministries." Gruen charged KCF with false doctrine, false prophecies, manipulative prophecies and more.⁸

Out of this controversy, Bickle joined his movement with that of John Wimber and changed the name to Metro Vineyard. It appears that this merge had the original intent of resolving the conflict by bringing more of a Biblical emphasis to the ministry. What is certain is that this connection gave Bickle and his prophets even wider notoriety.

Bickle eventually withdrew from Wimber after the "Toronto Blessing" occurred at the then, Toronto Airport Vineyard led by John and Carol Arnott. Wimber found some of the manifestations to be excessive. Bickle supported the Toronto Blessing because of prophetic words he had received from Paul Cain and Bob Jones.

In 1999 Bickle left Metro Christian Fellowship to develop the ministry of the International House of Prayer. Today the ministry reports between 450 to 500 staff, most of whom raise support. The ministry is world-wide in its impact and Houses of Prayer have been started in multiple U.S. cities and other nations.

DOCTRINES

The formal doctrinal statement of the International House of Prayer is relatively standard among Evangelical Christianity. However some of the doctrines actually taught and the practices that occur at IHOP are in contradiction to these stated beliefs. Further, these central doctrines do not factor largely in the teaching ministry which is focused primarily on intimacy, the prophetic and eschatology.

24/7 Prayer: The aspect of the ministry for which IHOP is most well-known is the 24/7 night and day prayer and worship. It should be noted however, that a significant amount of what is labeled prayer is not what the typical Evangelical would expect. In addition to standard prayer practices, IHOP advocates Contemplative Prayer; a form of passive, mindless meditation,⁹ Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare or Spiritual Mapping; in which the participant discerns the demons controlling the spiritual atmosphere of the city which are then bound,¹⁰ and Prophetic Decrees in which prophetic authority is used to speak the decree of the Lord over geographic regions, to elements of nature, to release the power of God, and much more.¹¹

Bridal Paradigm: The Bridal Paradigm is another key doctrinal construct that influences virtually all of the teaching at IHOP. In this understanding of redemptive history, God is a fiery lover who desires to have a bride equally yoked to Jesus in love. Jesus is the bridegroom with a ravished heart. The Bride is understood to be the primary identity for believers of this generation. In fact, this generation will be the first to really walk in this identity. God is no longer to be seen in a master-type of role.¹² The cross is understood in terms of a dowry or bride price.¹³ This teaching becomes a key for interpreting all Scripture and spawns other doctrines such as "bridal intercession," "the cross in bridal perspective," "the global bridegroom fast," and many more. The Biblical book of Esther is interpreted as a type of the end-time church reigning through intimacy. Song of Solomon is allegorized as depicting Christ and the Church. While this is not uncommon, what is unique is that the allegory is applied to the individual believer and then literalized so that the relationship between Jesus and the individual is seen in romantic terms. IHOP and other similar ministries have begun having marriage ceremonies to wed individual believers to Jesus.¹⁴

Scripture: IHOP's approach to interpretation is very important. Teachers at IHOP frequently interpret Scripture by way of personal revelation. Context, history and word meanings may all be ignored. For instance, in the early days of the movement Bob Jones spoke

to Bickle that God was giving him Psalm 27:4. Jones said that Bickle would eventually have a ministry involved in 24/7 prayer and fasting with worship in the spirit of the tabernacle of David with prophetic singers. He said that out of this movement, revival with signs and wonders would break out and spread throughout the earth. Bickle admits that he couldn't see all of that in Psalm 24:7. He asked Jones how he came to that understanding and was informed, "The Lord told me." Bickle came to accept this based on Jones's record as a prophet. He states that he continues to have people question whether this word is truly found in Psalm 27:4. He tells them, "You take that up with Bob Jones. I know that's what this is about."¹⁵

IHOP's understanding of the nature of prophecy is also very important. While affirming that this generation will be the greatest apostles and prophets in history and that no disease known to man will be able to stand against them, IHOP teaches that New Testament prophets can err and are not subject to the tests given in Deuteronomy 13 and 18. Thus the failure of a prophetic word does not disqualify the speaker as a true prophet of God.¹⁶ These new prophetic words form the basis for much of what occurs and even the doctrines that are believed at IHOP.

End-time generation: The uniqueness of the end-time generation is another foundational doctrine. This teaching, which has been variously called "The Elected Seed," "The New Breed," "Joel's Army" and "Apostolic Pre-millennialism" is the understanding that the final generation, which is believed to be now, will be the greatest generation of apostles and prophets who have ever lived. One of IHOP's missions is to raise up ten thousand apostolic evangelists in the last days who will

....stand in the counsels of the Lord. They will walk with such authority in the courts of heaven that they will be invited to partner with God in His end-time judgments. Their lives will shake heaven and earth. Creation will bow to the word of the Lord. Their prophecies will broadcast the news-reports of heaven and the headlines of earth.¹⁷

They believe, based on personal prophecy, that God is establishing end-time cities of refuge, Kansas City being one, which will be places of abundance of food, economic provision, open heaven prophetic activity, and safety to which people can flee during the last days. Based on personal prophecy they believe the Antichrist will rise through an alliance between communism and Islam.¹⁸

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

One of the difficulties encountered when seeking to understand IHOP is the complexity and volume of the issues involved. Space does not permit a detailed evaluation of the entire ministry and its' doctrine. However, some things are quite apparent.

Scripture: The foundation rests, not on Scripture, but on prophetic words by modern-day prophets. None of the leadership will admit this but it is demonstrably true. Bickle came to Kansas City as the result of personal prophecy. He understood the nature of his ministry through prophecy. The name "IHOP" came by personal revelation as did the names of other aspects of the ministry. The Blueprint prophecy is believed to be God's direction for the entire movement. But most troubling is that, despite claims to the contrary, doctrine is frequently established by personal prophecy. IHOP's belief in end-time cities of refuge, in the alliance between communism and Islam to bring forth the Anti-Christ, and its acceptance of the manifestations of the Toronto Blessing are just a few of the examples where doctrine is established by new revelation.

Regardless of one's view on the continuation of spiritual gifts, this is problematic. It is the Scripture that is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The fact that personal revelation is frequently used to interpret Scripture, as in the case of Psalm 24:7, is troubling. If passages are not kept in context, the Scriptures can be manipulated to mean whatever the particular prophet wants them to mean. The Bible cannot fulfill its purpose of instructing believers if passages are torn from their context and reinterpreted. This fundamental problem is the groundwork for much of the doctrinal error and false practices at IHOP.

IHOP's belief that prophets can be errant is also a problem especially in light of the claim to be hearing the audible voice of God, receiving an "open heaven", or having visitations to

heaven. If a prophet is truly hearing the voice of God, then that word must be without error for God is never wrong and never lies. To claim such an exalted status for one's revelations while at the same time affirming that one does not have to meet the Biblical criteria for such revelation is inconsistent.

Bridal Paradigm: The Bridal Paradigm, despite its popularity and apparent scriptural support, is actually very concerning. First, because of its de-emphasis on legal acquittal and justification in favor of a dowry. The Bible never uses the concept of a dowry or more properly a bride price to illustrate the work of Christ on the cross. A bride price is paid because of the worth of the bride. According to the scriptures, we did not have anything to commend us to God. We deserved only punishment. God saved us as a response of grace not because of our beauty. There is no doctrine of sin and repentance in the bridal paradigm. Additionally, while the bride metaphor is used in the Bible to speak of the church as a whole, it is never used of the individual. The overly romantic emphasis of the bridal paradigm is out of balance. Further, the idea of having marriage ceremonies to Jesus has no support in Scripture.

24/7 Prayer: It should also be noted that the concept of 24/7 corporate prayer and worship is not mandated in scripture. Nowhere in the New Testament did anyone set up houses of 24/7 prayer. And despite attempts to find it in Amos 9:11, the Bible really knows nothing of the re-establishment of Davidic worship among New Testament believers. Additionally, many of the prayer practices such as Contemplative Prayer, Prophetic Decrees, and spiritual mapping find no support in scripture. The fact that these are done 24/7 only compounds the problem. Doing a great deal of something wrong doesn't cause it to be right.

Summary: The ministry of IHOP is out of balance. The main things in scripture both for salvation and sanctification are not the main things at IHOP. Many of the doctrines such as the uniqueness of the end-time generation are blatantly man-centered and man-exalting. The notion of end-time cities of refuge is thoroughly unbiblical despite the use of a biblical phrase. Cities of refuge in the Old Testament were places to which the man who committed murder accidentally could flee for protection from the avenger of blood, not places of economic and agricultural abundance and open heaven revelation.

Paul instructs the church in Romans 16:17 to note those who cause divisions by bringing doctrines contrary to those of the apostles and to avoid them. This is certainly the case with the International House of Prayer.

Notes

- ¹ Mike Bickle, *Cairo Egypt: Radical Change in the Expression of Christianity*, CD-ROM, Friends of the Bridegroom, 2003.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Mike Bickle, *Prophetic Blueprints for the Future* CD-ROM, Friends of the Bridegroom, 2003. The three different versions are compared side by side at <http://beyondgrace.blogspot.com/2010/02/revisionism-and-blueprint-prophecy.html>
- ⁴ Mike Bickle, *Supernaturally Establishing the Prophetic Ministry-Spring of 1983*, CD-ROM, Friends of the Bridegroom, 2003.
- ⁵ David Pytches, *Some Said it Thundered: A Personal Encounter with the Kansas City Prophets*, (Nashville, TN; Oliver Nelson, 1991), 104-115.
- ⁶ Letter by Word of Life Christian Fellowship dated February 27, 1990 and signed by four elders. This letter was included in a packet of information distributed by Ernie Gruen under the title, *What's the Problem?* in 1990. These documents can be seen here: www.birthpangs.org/articles/kcp/Abberent%20Practises.pdf
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Mike Bickle, *Contemplative Prayer: The Journey into Fullness*, 4 CD set, International House of Prayer Missions Base, no date. A separate 4-page Profile has been published on this subject: Bob Waldrep, "Centering / Contemplative Prayer," *Profile Notebook* (Arlington, Texas: Watchman Fellowship, Inc. 1994-2011). A complete Profile Notebook (over 400 pages) is available at www.watchman.org/notebook.htm.
- ¹⁰ George Otis, JR, *Informed Intercession*, (Ventura,CA; Renew Books 1999). This book is sold at IHOP and the principles used in training intercessors.
- ¹¹ Mike Bickle, *Authority of the Believer*. Printed sermon notes used to instruct intercessors. Forerunner Christian Fellowship, date not given.
- ¹² Kirk Bennett, *Prophecy and the Arts*, CD #1 of a four-CD set. Also found in *The Prophetic Seer Training Course* by Bennett.
- ¹³ Allen Hood, *The Tenacious Pursuit of the Bridegroom* CD-ROM, Friends of the Bridegroom, 2003. This is only one example among many that could be given. This is a recurrent theme in IHOP teaching.
- ¹⁴ One such instance was at "The Call: Nashville" in 2007
- ¹⁵ Mike Bickle, *Supernaturally Establishing the Prophetic-Spring of 1983*, CD-ROM, (Friends of the Bridegroom, 2003). I chose this example because of its brevity. The practice of interpreting scripture prophetically is systemic within the ministry of IHOP.
- ¹⁶ Mike Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic*, Lake Mary, FL; Charisma House 1996 pages 93-103. This book is a seminal work by Bickle. It is important also because it discusses the role of doctrine in the prophetic. On page 51 Bickle asserts that prophets must be clear on the major doctrines yet on page 63 of the same book he affirms that William Branham was a true prophet despite admitting that Branham denied the Trinity.
- ¹⁷ Mike Bickle, *Thunder from Heaven*, 5 CD series, Friends of the Bridegroom, date not given. The quote is from the back cover.
- ¹⁸ Mike Bickle, *Introducing Bob Jones and Paul Cain: Global End-Time Drama*, CD-ROM, Friends of the Bridegroom. 2002



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