

John Alexander Dowie

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John Alexander Dowie (25 May 1847 – 9 March 1907) was a Scottish evangelist and faith healer who ministered in Australia and the United States. He founded the city of Zion, Illinois, and the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church.^[1] He was an eloquent speaker.^[2]

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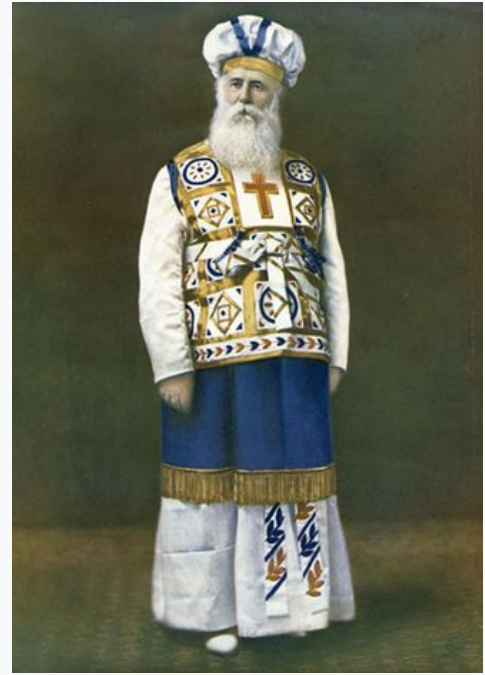
Biography

Dowie was born in Edinburgh to John Murray Dowie, a tailor and preacher.^[1] He moved to Adelaide, South Australia with his parents in 1860 and found work in a prosperous shoe business run by an uncle, Alexander Dowie. After a few months, Dowie left the employment of his uncle and had various jobs through which he advanced his position. At length, he became confidential clerk for the resident partner of a firm that was doing a business of \$2 million a year.^{[2][3]}

His father was president of the South Adelaide chapter of the Total Abstinence Society in 1867, and John Alexander an active member.^[4] Around 1868 at the age of 21, Dowie returned to Edinburgh to study theology. He then returned to Australia and was ordained pastor of a Congregational church at Alma, South Australia (near Hamley Bridge) in 1872. Dowie received and accepted a call to a pastorate at Manly, New South Wales in 1873, and at Newtown in 1875.^[2] He married his cousin, Jane Dowie, on 26 May 1876. They had three children, Gladstone (1877–1945), Jeanie (1879–1885), and Esther (1881–1902).

He published *Rome's Polluted Springs* in 1877, the substance of two lectures given at the Masonic Hall, Sydney. In 1879 he also published at Sydney *The Drama, The Press and the Pulpit*, revised reports of two lectures given the previous March. About this time he gave up his pastorate as a Congregational clergyman and became an independent evangelist, holding his meetings in a theatre and claiming powers as a faith healer.^[1] He was for a time involved with the Salvation Army.^[2] Coming to Melbourne in the early 1880s,

John Alexander Dowie



Alexander Dowie in his robes as Elijah the Restorer

Born	25 May 1847 Edinburgh, Scotland
Died	9 March 1907 (aged 59) Zion, Illinois, United States

he attracted many followers.^[1] In 1882, he was invited to the Sackville Street Tabernacle, Collingwood. His authoritarian leadership led to a split in the church, and Dowie was fined and jailed for over a month for leading unauthorized processions. He gave his account of the incident in *Sin in The Camp*.^[2]

After an arson scandal in which his church burnt down in suspicious circumstances (thereby enabling him to pay off large debts)^[5] he moved to the United States in 1888. He first settled in San Francisco and built up a following by performing faith healings across the state.^[6] His ministry, the International Divine Healing Association, was run largely as a commercial enterprise. All members were expected to tithe and, if they did, were eligible to request Dowie's aid in healing their ills. Such requests were made by mail or telegram (or later, by phone). Dowie would then pray in response to requests by paid-up members. Although Dowie funded his lifestyle largely through tithes, he also liked to buy up securities of bankrupt companies and sell them off to his constituents.^[7] Unfortunately for Dowie, two women whom he had defrauded in this way took him to court and successfully sued him. In this aftermath of this legal and public relations defeat, Dowie moved to Chicago in 1890.

After a few unsuccessful years in Chicago, Dowie gained fame by renting property adjacent to the World's Fair in 1893. There he staged elaborate "Divine Healings" in front of large audiences. Many of these "healings" were staged using audience plants and other dubious methods. At other times carefully screened individuals were brought on stage to be healed.^[8] By all indications Dowie could cure a range of psychosomatic illnesses with his stagecraft.

Dowie's following grew, and in 1894 he established the Zion Tabernacle downtown, was holding regular services for large crowds at Chicago's Central Music Hall,^[9] and launched Zion Publishing with his weekly newsletters *Leaves of Healing*.^[10] Dowie disbanded the International Divine Healing Association to form the Christian Catholic Church in Zion in 1896. (He would rename it the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in 1903.)

By the late 1890s, Zion headquarters had moved to the seven-story Zion Home on Michigan Avenue, which also housed many worshippers in residence from all walks of life; nearby were the New Zion Tabernacle, Zion Junior School, Zion College, Zion Printing, and the Zion Hall of Seventies; scattered around Chicago were the Zion Home of Hope, more Zion Tabernacles, and various healing homes, while Dowie was now leasing Chicago's Auditorium Building to accommodate swelling crowds attending his services; and, beyond Chicago, his teaching spread through evangelists and publications across the U.S. and around the world.^{[9][11]} As his following expanded, Dowie also met with considerable opposition, and spent much of 1895 in court fighting allegations that he was practicing medicine without a license.^[12]

Now with a following of some approximately 6,000, he sought land north of Chicago and bought up a large amount of real estate secretly. In 1900, he announced the founding the city of Zion, 40 miles from Chicago, where he owned all the property personally. He established a theocratic political and economic structure and prohibited smoking, drinking, eating pork, and any form of modern medicine. He also established a range of businesses, healing homes, and a large Tabernacle. Followers from across the world descended on Zion. Zion has been characterized as "a carefully-devised large-scale platform for securities fraud requiring significant organizational, legal, and propagandistic preparation to carry out."^[13] To this end Dowie forced his followers to deposit their wealth in Zion Bank, which had the veneer of being a registered entity but

which was in fact an unincorporated entity under his control. He also sold worthless stock in an array of Zion's businesses.^[14] The entire structure of Zion was continually in debt, and eventually crashed as he became increasingly senile.

In 1905, he suffered a stroke, and travelled to Mexico to recuperate.^[15] While absent, he was deposed by Wilbur G. Voliva, his chief lieutenant,^[2] Voliva and official investigators maintained that anywhere from \$2.5 to 3.4 million was unaccounted for. Dowie attempted to recover his authority through litigation but was ultimately forced to accept an allowance until his death in 1907.^[1] Dowie is buried in Lake Mound Cemetery, Zion, Illinois.^[16]

Theology and influence

Dowie was a restorationist and sought to recover the "primitive condition" of the Church. He believed in an end-times restoration of spiritual gifts and apostolic offices to the Church.^[17] In 1899, he claimed to be "God's Messenger" and in 1901, he claimed to be the spiritual return of the Biblical prophet Elijah, and styled himself as "Elijah the Restorer", "The Prophet Elijah", or "The Third Elijah".^[1]

He was also an advocate of divine healing and was highly critical of other teachers on healing. This criticism largely stemmed from differences of opinion on the use of "means" or medicine; Dowie was for total reliance on divine healing and against the use of all forms of medicine. He opened a number of healing homes where people could come for instruction in healing and for specific prayer.^[18] He emphasized faith in God, "entire consecration", and holiness.^[19]

Dowie was a forerunner of Pentecostalism, and many of his followers became influential figures in the early twentieth century revival.^[20] Though Dowie did not visit South Africa, his emissary Daniel Bryant between 1904 and 1908 established churches at Wakkerstroom and on the Witwatersrand.^{[21][22]} After Bryant left these churches proliferated into a number of denominations of Zionist Churches, all claiming their origin in Zion, Illinois, which together constitute the largest group of Christians in South Africa.^[21]

"Prayer Duel" with Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

Dowie is of particular significance to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Herein the Ahmadiyya find a sign of God and a proof of their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's claim to be the Promised Messiah and Mahdi.^[23] Dowie had claimed to be the forerunner of Christ's second coming. He was particularly hard on Muslims, whom he believed Christ would destroy upon his return. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had claimed to be the coming of Christ in the spirit (as well as the promised Imam Mahdi), who would establish the final victory of Islam on earth. Ahmad challenged Dowie to a prayer duel, which he rejected, stipulating that the false claimant would die in the lifetime of the truthful. Dowie died in March 1907 and Ahmad died in May 1908.



Editorial cartoon by Bob Satterfield, depicting Dowie leaving Chicago with his pockets full of money

In popular culture

Dowie's life is the subject of a song by NYC-based, indie rock-folk band Nehedar in a song entitled "Man from Zion". [1] (<http://music.nehedar.com/track/man-from-zion>)

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Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

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External links

- John Alexander Dowie American First Fruits (<http://www.revivalpress.net/>)
- JOHN ALEXANDER DOWIE: A MINISTER OF DIVINE HEALING (<http://www.johnalexanderdowie.com/page1.php>)
- Leaves of Healing: the Life, Ministry, and Message of John Alexander Dowie (<http://sites.google.com/site/leavesofhealing/>)
- Leaves of Healing: A Weekly Paper Edited by the Rev John Alex. Dowie (http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/leaves_of_healing/) - archives 1894-1909



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