

“I AM” the LORD Your GOD

Written on: July 1, 2022

Article by: Paul Birston

Exodus Introduction: Our God, Deliverance, Covenant and Worship

God opens Exodus, as He concluded Genesis, with Jacob and His family in Egypt beginning in a personal way with the names of Jacob’s twelve sons, and so the Hebrew title is “**Names**” (*Sh’mot*) from verse 1: “**These are the names...**”

A lot has changed over the four centuries since Jacob and his family came down to Egypt as refugees seeking famine relief. God fulfilled His promises in Genesis 12 to 50 to multiply Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’s descendants from a family to a mighty people. They came as an extended family of seventy persons (Exodus 1:5; Genesis 46:26–27; Deuteronomy 10:22), “**But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them**” (1:7).

The dynamics of Israel’s relationship with Egyptian leadership changed dramatically. Whereas Joseph had found favour with the Egyptians, Potiphar, the prison warden and Pharaoh (Genesis 39:21; 40:16; 41:1–45; 50:4) four centuries later, “**Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.... and they made their lives bitter with hard labour**” (Exodus 1:8.... 14). Israel “**cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel and God knew (took notice)**” (Exodus 2:23b–25).



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In response to His people's cries, and to fulfil His eternal purposes, God does four critically important things in Exodus. He reveals Himself, His character and His presence with them in deeper new ways as Israel's God who is always with them and goes on before them. God sends a redeemer-leader and delivers His people from bondage of slavery in Egypt (chapters 1–18) passing over them because of the blood of a lamb on their door jams and lintels (12). He establishes a new covenant relationship with them based on blood sacrifice (12; 19–24). He teaches them how to worship Him and cautions them to avoid idolatry (25–40).

Everything God does for His people in Exodus foreshadows everything He does for His people in the New Covenant. He sends us a redeemer-leader, Jesus Christ who delivers us from the bondage of slavery to sin. He establishes a New Covenant with us in Jesus' blood, the blood of The Lamb, our Passover **"This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in My blood"** (Matthew 26:28; Mark 12:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 5:6–8; 11:25). He teaches us how to worship Him and gives us skills in avoiding idolatry (1 Corinthians 11–14; Ephesians 3; Colossians 3; Revelation 4–5; 1 John 4:1–6; 5:21). He is always with us and goes ahead to prepare our way to eternal glory with Him (Matthew 28:18–20; John 14–17).

Like the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Exodus begins with the birth narrative of God's redeemer-leader whose life is threatened in infancy. Moses is born about 1525 BC. He

spends about 40 years growing to manhood in Pharaoh's palace (Exodus 2:1–15; Acts 7:23) followed by 40 years of training in the wilderness of Midian and Sinai (Exodus 2:16–3:1ff). In His prior work in Moses' life of dual citizenship God equips Moses with skills ideally suited to walk back into Pharaoh's palace to negotiate with him over Israel's release and then lead them through the wilderness for forty years. Exodus covers this approximately eighty year journey from the birth of Moses to the exodus from Egypt ca. 1445 BC and God meeting His people at Sinai to receive the Ten Words (Commandments), regulations and instructions for the tabernacle, worship and leadership. Like Jesus, through Moses God did many miracles.

Throughout Exodus, God reveals more and more about who He is,



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His nature, and what He does for His people. Meeting Moses at the burning bush and commissioning him, God tells Moses, **“I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, ‘This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you’”** (3:14). He is YHWH, the eternally existing One, Father of the eternally living Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In direct parallel with the New Covenant, “I AM” foreshadows Jesus’ seven “I AM” metaphors and seven absolute “I AM” statements in John’s Gospel.

To celebrate God’s deliverance through the exodus, Moses and the sons of Israel sing a song in chapter 15 exalting God for who He is: **“He is highly exalted.... my strength and song, my salvation, my God.... The LORD is a warrior”** (Exodus 15:1–3– 18). This beautiful song foreshadows the Song of Moses and the Lamb in Revelation 15.

While delivering Israel from Egypt God sends ten plagues to reveal His power, glory, judgment and vindication of His people in Egypt just as He sends similar plagues to reveal His power, glory, judgment and vindication of His people to the Roman world in Revelation 15–16. When caught between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, Israel can only trust God to deliver them and He does. In his excellent article, “Divided Waters,” Tim Johnson offers us helpful insights from God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt through the Red Sea and lessons we can apply today.

In response to Moses’ request to see Him at Sinai, **“the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth; 7 who keeps faithfulness for thousands, who forgives wrongdoing, violation of His Law, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, inflicting the punishment of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations’”**(34:6–7). These attributes are manifest in Jesus whom God sends as Saviour, advocate and judge.

Beginning in Exodus and continuing to Deuteronomy, God reveals His covenant law, His Torah, in detail. Torah

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God begins His Ten Words (Commandments) saying, **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me..."** (20:2). The first four commands guide Israel's relationship with God and six to ten their relationships to one another. God follows them with many practical details.

Moses spent forty days twice with God on Mount Sinai (24:18; 34:8) where **"He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God"** (31:18). Ironically, despite God's deliverance, signs and wonders, in Moses' absence, with Aaron's complicity, Israel resorted to idol worship of the golden calf (34). Moses intervened by disciplining the people and interceding to God on their behalf in one of his brilliant dialogues with God. On this note, we appreciate Kim Hulganga's article On Exodus 4:1–17, **"I will be with your mouth"** (4:12).

God's details for worship include the construction of the tabernacle. In his insightful article, Sam Mulligan shows us the rich perfection of the tabernacle is not about a tent but about the holy presence of God. Exodus 40 brings us to where **"the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle"** (40:34). God's presence in the tabernacle foreshadows God's presence in the Temple and ultimately in His new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem where **"the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb"** (Revelation 21:22–23).

God's revelation of Himself, His deliverance, covenant and worship in Exodus find their ultimate fulfilment in the New Covenant by which we know Him, worship Him and walk with Him today, the great "I AM," the LORD your GOD!

Winnipeg MB

Links for further reading:

Moses' Authorship: <https://app.box.com/s/4eh1l3uafy7jf0z0orjgraubm38czl9>

Date of the Exodus: <https://app.box.com/s/7qpayjvtv59jf9wxn28ribpgbwy6b8qo>

Lessons from the Plagues

Written on: July 1, 2022

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

Exodus 7–10, Part 1

Some teachers are popular because they are easy. Some are popular because they are interesting. Tom Olbricht was certainly not an easy teacher, and his methods of presentation were not always very interesting. Yet he was fairly popular, at least with the more studious graduate students. Tom Olbricht was popular because he had something worthwhile to say. He attacked some of the common beliefs we had grown up accepting. He was not always right, but one belief he attacked relentlessly and effectively was the conventional idea that “the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, while the God of the New Testament is a God of love.”¹

All parts of the Scriptures testify both to the love and severity of God. The Old Testament story of Nadab and Abihu being killed for offering unauthorized worship (Leviticus 10) is matched by the New Testament story of Ananias and Sapphira being killed for attempting to lie to the church (Acts 5). The New Testament story of the prodigal son is balanced by Hosea’s relationship with his wife. God’s love as well as his severity was demonstrated in the Mosaic era (Exodus 34:6-7). His severity as well as his love is taught in the New Testament era (Romans 11:22). In both testaments, God is love. In neither testament is his love mushy, weak permissiveness. Such emotionalism is wrongly called love. The New Testament has a manger; it also has a cross (Luke 9:23). The Old Testament has the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, but the Egyptians are drowned in that same event.

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Many people do not like the idea of the plagues, especially of the last plague. But we need the lessons of the plagues as much today as when the events happened.

Nature Is Not God

Perhaps the first lesson of the plagues is that nature is not God.

The Egyptians worshiped the Nile. They worshiped cattle. They worshiped the Sun. The plagues showed that the Lord was over all of these.

Because people worshiped nature, they did not advance scientifically. People who worship nature are afraid to interfere with nature. Biblical religion taught people that nature is not a god to be worshiped. We should not speak of “mother nature.” Nature is not our mother. It was not nature that brought us into being. God brought all into existence. In teaching thus, biblical religion prepared the way for scientific advancement that had been hindered by nature religions.

Today we are in grave danger of reversing the progress. Christianity has been slandered as the enemy of science. As a result of this slander, superstitions are creeping back into the mainstream of life. Nature worship has made a major comeback. This is not a small matter. It is disrespectful toward God (Exodus 20:3-4). It leads to

disrespect of human life. It leads to the perversion of natural relationships (Romans 1:22-23). Ultimately, it will halt the real progress of science, as science (viewed as a god) will be used to oppress rather than to serve mankind. Science has often been a great servant to mankind. But science taken as an all-encompassing master is a slave-master.

Government Is Not God

The plagues also showed that government is not God.

The Egyptians, like many ancient people, worshiped their ruler as a god. His rule was virtually unlimited. It took a long time for the biblical idea of limited government to take hold, but eventually it did take hold. Saul, the king, had to listen to Samuel, the prophet. David, the king, had to listen to Nathan, the prophet. John the Baptist confronted King Herod.

We often overlook this aspect of the story in Exodus; but historically it was of great importance. The biblical

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account of the struggle between Israel and Pharaoh, as it was presented in the Geneva Bible, was one of the main reasons why King James wanted a new translation of the Scriptures. Puritans, pointing to the midwives disobeying Pharaoh as it was presented in the Geneva Bible, felt that they were justified in disobeying their earthly king if he overstepped his proper sphere.² King James wanted a new translation of the Scriptures that would justify him as a totalitarian ruler.³

The Bishop who headed King James' translation project chose the translators carefully – assigning those with Puritan leanings either to the apocryphal books or to parts of the Bible where this issue of the extent of a king's authority would not come up. But still, the truth could not be hidden. The Bible (even in the KJV) does not support the idea of an absolute monarch, or of any form of government with absolute power. The government is to have limited powers (see Romans 13). If a government oversteps those proper powers it forfeits the right to rule.

Pharaoh would have been respected if he had kept to his proper sphere (Romans 13:1–2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–14). But in demanding that his authority be recognized in all aspects of life he lost his right to rule and ultimately his right to live (see Acts 5:29).

Christians today should not be asking the government to do more and more. We should not be needlessly disrespectful of government, but we ought to be striving to keep government limited to its proper sphere. Every new role the government takes on is one more responsibility taken from either the family or the church. The lack of respect shown to family and church today correlates directly to the usurping of the roles of these two institutions by the government. It is bad enough that this happens. It is far worse that some Christians encourage it.

Words Are Not Repentance

God is not to be trifled with; mere words are not repentance. One can confess sin, one can express the intention to repent verbally, but acceptable repentance has not happened until action is taken. And the action taken must be of the proper kind. It must be a sincere attempt to reverse the wrong done. Pharaoh repeatedly promised to change his ways, but he did not ever



Get Down to Worship By Tim Alexander

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About the Author:

Tim Alexander is a life-long Christian with a love for languages. He reads his Bible with an eye for getting away from human-made traditions and discovering the pure will of God. He works for a non-profit Christian organization and has had the opportunity to travel and speak in churches around the world.

Tim and his wife live in Beamsville, Ontario, Canada.

truly repent of his arrogant pride (Exodus 8:8, 15, 28–29; 9:27–28, 34–35; 10:16).

Effective repentance must be a real reorientation of life toward God. That is a clear lesson of the plague account, and it is repeated in the New Testament. John warned those who claimed to be repenting that they must bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance (Lk 3:7–8). Jesus is effectively saying the same thing when he warns, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Charles Spurgeon once used seven texts in one sermon. The topic of the sermon was the tendency of some to make false professions of sorrow for their wrongs. On the one hand Spurgeon spoke of the insincere confession of Pharaoh (Exodus 9:27), the double-minded confession of Balaam (Numbers 22:34), the eleventh-hour confession of Achan (Joshua 7:20), the unstable confession of King Saul (1 Samuel 15:24), the despairing confession of Judas (Matthew 27:4). On the other hand he noted the humble confessions of Job (Job 42:6) and of the prodigal son (Luke 15:18).

Nature is not God. The government is not God. We are not God. We need to reorient our lives toward God and away from the things we have been pursuing.

The Lord may not send us these same ten plagues if we fail to do so, but we will not enjoy his fellowship as we could, unless we truly repent.

To be continued...

Matsapha, Eswatini, Africa

1 See Thomas Olbricht, *He Loves Forever*, page 12.

2 The Geneva Bible included footnotes that King James found extremely upsetting. Commenting on Exodus 1:19, the footnote stated “Their disobedience herein was lawful” A number of other footnotes referred to Pharaoh as a tyrant.

3 See also F.F. Bruce, *The English Bible: a History of Translations*, pp 96–97; Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: the story of the King James Bible...*, pp 149–171; and Jack Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV* pp 9–68.

DIVIDED WATERS

Written on: July 1, 2022

Article by: Tim Johnson

Without a doubt, the parting of the Red Sea is one of the greatest miracles God worked in the Old Testament. For centuries, its memory motivated Israel, caused them to repent from waywardness, and reminded them that faith can do mighty things. It is mentioned repeatedly in Psalms and rehearsed by several of the prophets. Two similar events with parting waters – both at the Jordan River – served to establish a new leader and a new prophet (Joshua in Joshua 3–4; Elisha in 2 Kings 2). And New Testament writers drew lessons from it to strengthen us today.

Before we look at the actual event, we would do well to see what was brewing just before. After the final plague, a beaten-up Pharaoh agreed to release Israel from slavery. Moses later wrote, “and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt” (Ex.13:18), and “the sons of Israel were going out boldly” (14:8). It seems they left proudly, marching by their own strength instead of God’s. If that is the case, God would soon teach them better.

Instead of the assumed route up the Mediterranean coast, God brought them to Pi-hahiroth, essentially circling back from where they came, and right up against the Red Sea. This seems to have snapped Pharaoh out of his sorrows and into a full-fledged effort to chase Israel down. With the Red Sea cutting off a way of escape, Israel was suddenly trapped, frightened, and blaming Moses for everything. God was about to take this impossible situation and save Israel, destroying the Egyptian army in the process. But before we proceed, think about this: How many times have you been trapped by tough circumstances in life, and you felt powerless to proceed? The Red Sea reminds us that when man can’t save himself, but faith in God can.

It all seemed to happen at night. Israel huddled in the darkness as the Egyptian army approached. God sent His angel in the form of a glowing cloud to stand between the two camps (14:19-20). Then in the early morning hours Moses spoke his memorable words, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent” (14:13-14). Moses literally said, “Take your stand and see” (Footnote, NASV). Faith allows us to take a stand and see what God will do to help us.

Scholars and skeptics have debated how God parted the sea, some even suggest it was a natural phenomenon that took place fortuitously at the right time. But the scriptures clearly state it was an act of God accomplished by “a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided” (Ex.14:21-22). Moses further wrote that “the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left” (verse 29). What is even more startling is that these things took place at the very moment

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea (verse 21). Joshua, David and Ezra, all confirm it was a miraculous event, and that it should be remembered down through the centuries.

The victory is magnified even more by the destruction of Pharaoh's army when they chased Israel down into the path through the sea. The dry ground became wet, their chariots malfunctioned, and confusion reigned. When Moses stretched out his hand a second time, the Red Sea filled in and drowned the entire Egyptian army, perhaps Pharaoh as well.

As remarkable as these events are, it is also notable that Israel began to grumble in the very next chapter (15) as they began their travels into the wilderness. It appeared they had no drinkable water, and in chapter 16 they became angry with Moses a second time when they ran out of food. While God quickly provided both, the weakness of their faith was on full display. How could all these people forget the power of their God so quickly? It is a human flaw that arises so easily. What one of us today has not forgotten the great things God has done in our lives as we succumb to discouragements and frustrations? We would do well to remember the many ways He has cared for us in the past and find the courage to keep on going despite current obstacles.

A great celebration took place on the shore of the Red Sea when Israel was safe, and the Egyptians had been eliminated in their watery grave. Exodus 15 records the song of Moses which was sung by a grateful people. Moses' sister, Miriam, led a group of women in a second song of praise that answered the first. It was a song of victory, a "new song" because it expressed the new circumstances from that point on, and a new relationship with a victorious God.

What can we learn from the victory God won for Israel when He parted the Red Sea centuries ago?

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1. First, we gain a warning. The apostle Paul spoke of this in 1 Cor.10:1–13. He pointed out that Israel's experience through the waters is much like ours at Christian baptism. When they passed through the sea with watery walls on both sides plus God's cloud above, it was like being immersed into Moses just as we are into Christ. But they later craved evil, became idolaters, acted immorally, tried the Lord, and grumbled against their leaders. Their pride wouldn't let them see that they were vulnerable to sin, and they fell. Paul pointed out that "these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (v11). We can fall, just like Israel did through unfaithfulness and worldliness. We must be watchful.
2. Second, God can save us from great dangers and big discouragements. Nothing looked as hopeless to Israel than being trapped beside the sea with no escape available. We often feel that way in life when we face insurmountable odds and hopeless threats. Yet look at what God did for Israel! God can find a way for us too. Paul pointed out there is always a way of escape from temptation, just as God provided Israel with a way of escape through the sea (1 Corinthians 10:13). Even the threat of human death with all its unknowns can be faced with confidence, for God will walk with us to the other side. Remember David's words, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Ps.23:4).
3. Third, courageous leaders can inspire God's people in trying times. Moses didn't fully know how God was about to save them, but he stood up and said, "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent" (Ex.14:14). He had courage and faith, and God soon

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revealed how they were to proceed. Church leaders must lead with faith, confidence, and the wisdom that God can give. People will be comforted, challenged, and willing to follow.

4. We have plenty of reassurance from God. In Revelation 15:1–4 we find victorious Christians standing on a sea of glass, “And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb.” This is like Israel passing through the sea on dry ground. We are being reassured that no matter what future trials we may have to pass through, God will walk with us to the other side. There, we can sing of our great God and all He has done for us.

The great miracle at the Red Sea echoes throughout the pages of the Bible right down to the Book of Revelation. Like Moses standing on the shore, safe and victorious, we too sing the song of Moses today when God helps us pass through life’s trials, challenges, and uncertainties. “Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou king of the nations” (Revelation 15:3).

Barrie, ON

Exodus 26: The Tabernacle

Written on: July 1, 2022

Article by: Samuel Mulligan

Exodus 25–31 records the instructions God gave Moses for the construction and design of the Tabernacle. These chapters often get skipped or skimmed in yearly reading plans—I know, I’ve been there too. Parts of it can feel repetitive or difficult to follow, and it’s not always clear how it applies to our lives today. This year, for my Genesis–Exodus class at Great Lakes Bible College, I had the opportunity to write a paper on Exodus 26, which gives the design for the tent proper. The more I’ve studied this passage, the more I’ve come to understand why it is part of God’s Word, and that it is just as applicable today.

We’ll walk through the passage here in broad detail, but I would highly encourage you to read it yourself. In Exodus 26:15–30, we read about the tall wooden boards that made up the solid, skeletal structure of the Tabernacle. Each board was fashioned of rich acacia wood and was overlaid with gold. Each board was held in place by two bases of pure silver, and joined together by gold-covered acacia poles inserted through rings of pure gold. These boards formed the walls of the Tabernacle, and supported everything else above it.

Over top of this skeletal structure, a series of coverings were laid, described in verses 1–14. The first covering was made of blue, purple and scarlet yarns and linens—very precious and rare colours. Skillfully woven into the fabric were depictions of cherubim, and the fabrics

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were all held together by golden clasps. This first covering was placed directly over the wooden frames, and was the most ornate and lavish because it was closest to the presence of God. Over top of that first layer were more functional coverings made of goat skins and ram skins, which were needed to protect the tent from outside weather conditions.

In verses 31–37, the Israelites were commanded to make a curtain for the outside of the tent, which functioned as the front door of the Tabernacle. It was to be made of the same blue, purple, and scarlet yarns, and was held up by five pillars of acacia overlaid with gold on bases of bronze. Finally, there was the veil, which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and where God's presence dwelt. This veil was designed in the same fashion as the innermost covering, because it too was closest to the presence of God. It had cherubim woven into the blue, purple, and scarlet fabric, and was hung on four gold-covered pillars on bases of silver. This veil blocked off the Holy of Holies, which would have been in complete darkness, shielded from the outside world.

Even in such broad strokes, the point of the passage remains clear: the Tabernacle was very rich and lavish, using expensive and rare materials and intricate designs; great care and detail was put into its construction, with everything, from large to small, being specified by God. What makes the Tabernacle so important, though? Why was there so much detail put into its design? Most importantly, why is it included here in God's Word?

The purpose of the Tabernacle was God's presence. It was how God was to dwell among His people. God had chosen Israel to be His special possession, and as part of their covenant, Israel would have God's perfect, holy presence living in their midst—a prospect that is both amazing and terrifying. God wasn't watching from afar; He was physically among them. His dwelling place was visible to their very eyes.

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How can a holy and perfect God live among people? He needs to have a holy dwelling place built for Him. If God was to dwell among His people, they needed to build a house worthy of His name, and follow all the instructions He gave them for building it. In this way, the construction and design of the Tabernacle reveals God's holy character. As strange as it is to say, this passage isn't about a tent. It's about the God whose holy presence dwelt in that tent. The beauty, detail, design and richness of the Tabernacle revealed to the Israelites who God was. It reminded them of the reverence that was due Him, and the seriousness of having God dwelling among them. Its holiness and beauty was a symbol of the holiness and beauty of God.

But just as the Tabernacle showed that God was dwelling among His people, it also showed He was separate. This is seen most clearly in the veils. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place, and no one could enter the Holy of Holies, except the high priest, and only once a year. No one else would ever see beyond the first curtain, and only one person would see the Ark of the Covenant and the place where God dwelt. It drove home the point. God was holy, so although He was dwelling among His people, He had to remain separate. People couldn't freely enter His presence whenever they liked—in fact, they couldn't enter His presence at all. They were sinners and unclean, and they could not stand before a holy God and live.

All this has changed under the new covenant. Today, God no longer dwells in a Tabernacle or a temple. Instead, He dwells in us. Through baptism and faith in Jesus Christ, God gives us His Holy Spirit, and He lives in our hearts. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul writes, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" Today, we are the Tabernacle. We are the temple where God lives.

But how can the holy God, who had to be separated from His people by the veil, dwell in us? The people of Israel were sinners, and so are we. If they couldn't stand in God's presence and live, how can God's holy presence live in us, who are unholy? The answer is that He is making us holy. Through the blood of Jesus, we are no longer sinful and unclean. He is making us clean and pure, and is transforming us into His image. Through the blood of Jesus, the veil has been torn open, the separation between God and man has been removed forever, and the presence of God has been unleashed on the world.

In Exodus, God had the Israelites build Him a holy dwelling place. Now, He is building His dwelling place. He is shaping us, moulding us, and transforming us to be His holy temple. The Tabernacle was ornate and beautiful. Its designs were intricate, its materials costly and expensive. If that is how much beauty and detail God put into the Tabernacle, which was just a physical tent, how much more beauty and detail will he put into us, whom He has chosen as His sons and daughters? How much more beautiful will our souls be when we have been conformed to the image of Christ?

It would have been a privilege to live in ancient Israel, and to see the Tabernacle, a physical witness of God's presence among His people. But brothers and sisters, ours is an even greater privilege, to have God's presence dwelling in our hearts, to be able to enter into the Holy of Holies, passing through the veil that has been torn and to stand before our God with full confidence.

Milton, ON



C.G.McPhee: Student

II. Charles Gordon McPhee, Nova Scotia

Article by: Geoffrey Ellis

The McPhee Files:

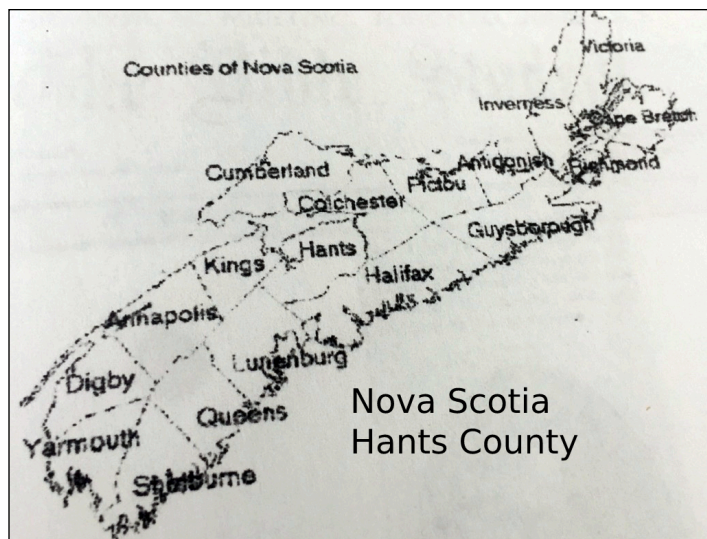
“The C. G. McPhee files in the collection of the Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society.”

Pictured is a bankers box that contains the

records of the life and ministry of Charles Gordon McPhee. Of the thirty-five files that are included, are those that Gordon developed during his day-to-day ministry. Also included are files added subsequently about his life and ministry, gathered from a variety of sources. His personal files were preserved by his family, and presented in 1981 by his daughter, Ruth Wilson, to the library of Great Lakes Christian College, in Beamsville. They were later transferred to the archives of the Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society. As noted above, these archives were held first in Meaford, Ontario, and then moved to McPhee Hall in Beamsville. Appreciation is extended to the CCCHS for making these files available for this study.



Charles Gordon MacPhee was born July 25, 1892, at Nine Mile River, Hants County, Nova Scotia. His parents were Charles, a farmer, and Emily MacPhee. Emily, of Scottish descent, came from Halifax and settled in Nine Mile River. C. G. was the youngest of four children: a sister, Annie, and two brothers, Henry and Cyril Stanley. The family was reported to be staunch Presbyterians. (Years later, C. G. McPhee remembered: “Being raised among Presbyterians, by a Presbyterian mother, and all my ancestors being the same...”) His family spelled their name, “MacPhee,” the spelling that Gordon adhered to until his move to Nashville in 1915, when he shortened it to “McPhee.” (I have been assured that there is no national or religious significance to either mode of spelling.) Family lore remembers a preacher, John Wright, passing by when C. G. was just two or three days old. His father invited him in to see “the little baby preacher.” Sadly, Gordon’s father passed away shortly after he was born. The family moved first to



Cape Breton Island for a year, and then back to Nova Scotia where Gordon was boarded out in two homes. Gordon was three when his mother remarried, the family moving to Upper Rawdon. He was twelve when his mother passed away. He then went to live with the Joshua Wallace family in Centre Gore, Hants County, attending church meetings at the West Gore Church of Christ. In May, 1907, at age fifteen, Gordon was baptized into Christ, one of ten, at a meeting conducted by A. J. McCloud, at the Nine Mile River Church of Christ.

He was 18 years old when he preached his first sermon, at Nine Mile River. It is said, "He had to walk twelve miles through snow up to his knees to get there!"

**"Nine Mile River Church building."
Nine Mile River Church of Christ**

The events that occurred during the next eight years, 1908-1915, in the normally placid central Nova Scotia, were remarkable, unique, and powerful in shaping Gordon's life. In 1909, at age 18, Gordon determined to become a preacher. He had found strong influences at the West Gore Church of Christ, particularly among the McDougalls, McDonalds, and Wallace families.



(1) 1908-09. Ora Hubert ("O. H.")

Tallman, from Ontario, came to serve as "evangelist" for Hants County, supported by the West Gore Church of Christ. The Tallman brothers, including O. H.'s younger brother, Ozro Ellis ("O. E.") Tallman, growing up on a farm near Smithville, Ontario, had experienced the spreading

Bible school influence centered in Nashville, Tennessee. Students from the Nashville Bible School, (cofounded in 1891 by David Lipscomb and James A. Harding), had planted two similar schools in Canada: Carman Bible School (1899-1902) in Carman, Manitoba, by Abraham Foster; and Beamsville Bible School (1902-1916) in Ontario, by Sim Malious Jones. The Tallman brothers studied for two years at Carman, and O. H.

studied for two years at the Beamsville school. Then the brothers headed to Bowling Green, KY, where James Harding (having left his work as president of Nashville Bible School) had opened, in 1901, the Potter Bible College. Here, the brothers earned their B.A and B.S. degrees by 1907. Both continued at Potter for the next year, serving as teachers of science and language. During the summers, the brothers held productive Gospel meetings in Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1908, O. H. went to serve as evangelist in Nova Scotia; O. E. went with Harding and several Potter teachers to open a new school, Western Bible and Literary College, at Odessa, MO.

(2) 1909-10. This was the founding year of Maritime Bible and Literary College at West Gore, Hants County, Nova Scotia. Charles Gordon MacPhee, age 17, was a charter student. MBLC opened October 25, 1909. Twelve students enrolled that first year. The largest student body to gather subsequently was thirty.

Donald McDougall, a leader in the West Gore Church of Christ, wrote in the April, 1909 issue of *The Bible Student*, "An educational institute where the Bible itself ... is made the chief study and predominating influence would be perhaps the most effective force that could be employed in this great work." It was McDougall's suggestion that the school be named, "Maritime Bible and Literary College." McDougall also claimed to have recruited O. E. Tallman to come and be number two in the college's operation.



Maritime Bible and Literary College building

Two acres of land in West Gore were donated for the college campus by Mabel (Wallace) Covey, widow of John E. Covey, parents of Harold Covey. She who would later marry O. E. Tallman.

"One Saturday morning in May, 1909, a notable collection of workmen, including farmers with teams of horses, men and boys with picks and shovels, and bars, etc. were observed..." (quite

probably Gordon MacPhee was included!), gathered to build the college building.

(3) 1910-1915. The school was designed to include three years of high school and four years of college. Gordon's six years of studies included activity in preaching, and "made his living by working in lumber woods, cutting wood and working on a farm." In 1913, it was announced in the *Bible Student* that C. G. MacPhee would serve as evangelist for the reactivated River John, Nova Scotia, congregation (the first to be established in that province, 1815). In fact, it was C. G. MacPhee, with the help of a fellow student, Fred McMadden, that the congregation was reactivated.

During two summers, 1912 and 1913, MacPhee went to Carman, Manitoba to preach.

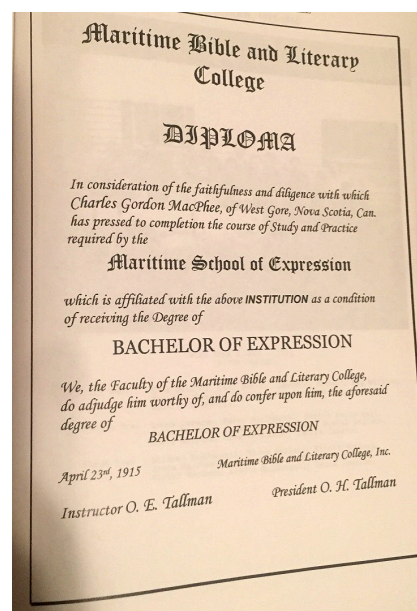


The Maritime Bible and Literary College student body, 1913-14

Sadly, after its sixth year of operation, 1914-15, due to the dislocations of World War I and trouble in the West Gore Church of Christ, the Maritime Bible and Literary College closed its doors. C. G. MacPhee may well have been the last to receive a degree from the college. In early summer, Gordon travelled with

the O. E. Tallman family, including O. E.'s wife, Mabel, stepson Harold Covey, and young Oliver, and baby Lena, to O. E.'s childhood home, the farm, *Evergreen Hill*, near Smithville, Ontario. Then in late summer, Gordon journeyed by train to Nashville, Tennessee, where he enrolled in Nashville Bible School, as a Junior student, where H. Leo Boles served as president. (Harold Covey, 1900-1920, died of the Spanish Flu, and is buried in the Jacob Snure Cemetery, Jordan, Ont. O. E. and Mabel Talman had two more children, Ora Hiram ("O. H."), and Erma.)

The Bachelor of Expression Degree, awarded to Charles Gordon MacPhee; with accreditation provided by The Maritime School of Expression



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Leadership in Congregations without Elders

Written on: July 1, 2022

Article by: Dave Knutson

Last month's editorial highlighted certain aspects of spiritual leadership in the church which God has designed for us to put into place. The scriptures assume that men will aspire to fill these roles and do so by achieving the spiritual milestones pertaining to each. The possibility that congregations might function for years without this kind of leadership is not directly addressed within scripture.

When a congregation has no elders nor qualified candidates, how is it to govern itself? How for example might it honour what the New Testament says about spiritual leadership and still attend in a responsible way to decisions which while they do not pertain to 'spiritual' things, nevertheless affect the whole congregation? This question is hard to answer since it is hard to find leaderless churches in the New Testament nor is explicit provision made for such.

At the end of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in all of the churches that they had recently planted in Asia Minor. This appears to have been an urgent matter and attended to at the earliest possible opportunity. Later in Paul's ministry, he sent Timothy and Titus to work in Asia Minor and in Crete, to "appoint elders in every city". (Tit 1:5). Biblical church organization and governance was a matter of first importance. Thus we have standards and guidelines establishing the rule – but nothing beyond that for exceptions to the rule. It is certainly not God's will that congregations remain without Biblically appointed leaders and therefore a reasonable conclusion that it is incumbent upon the men in each congregation to mature in Christ.

But what about that time-period in between?

A survey done by the Gospel Herald publication in 2011 of churches of Christ in Canada found that only a small percentage of congregations in Canada had elders. So the question that we are raising is not hypothetical. The 'exception' has become the 'norm' and when met with complacency, is accepted as the new-normal. In the Bible this was considered temporary and associated with new church-plants. But the church was not to remain without Biblically appointed leaders.

It is noteworthy that the ministry of Timothy and Titus in many cases preceded the appointment of elders, thus they themselves acted as leaders in the interim. As you will observe in our editorial, many of the teaching, rebuking and correcting functions of elders were being done by these evangelists. So a short answer to the question of 'spiritual leadership' might be, that these responsibilities fall to evangelists who also

seek to identify and develop those who one day may become elders. This has been our history in Canada and especially when new congregations have been planted.

Last month's editorial pointed to the continuity between male headship and spiritual leadership in the home and what happens when the church gathers for worship. As a collection of families, it is the men who lead in prayer and worship, who teach and proclaim God's word in the assembly. And it seems to me that when decisions are to be made that are spiritual in nature, that men ought also to lead. And of course, any and all decisions with respect to doctrine and practice must be drawn from a proper handling of God's word. No congregation is at liberty to decide such matters apart from Biblical authority.

The question that this article is trying to address is – in the absence of Biblically appointed elders and deacons, how might a congregation wishing to honour God's design for the church, go about conducting its 'other business'? Does male '*spiritual leadership*' imply that all decisions made on behalf of a congregation ought to be made by the men? If not, what decisions fall into the non-spiritual category?

We might also observe that as managers and stewards, elders may of necessity spend time – perhaps too much – on non-spiritual things which may in turn take time away from teaching and shepherding. Even when elders are present, their leadership 'style' with respect to oversight might certainly include and benefit from a fair degree of delegation as the apostles did in Acts 6.

The New Testament does not seem to anticipate and certainly makes no explicit provision for congregations to remain in a semi-permanent 'holding pattern' of functioning without elders and deacons. Yet this is our reality in Canada. In the absence of Biblically appointed leaders, it has

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become our practice to shift decision-making to the majority view of a 'men's business meeting'. In congregations without elders, this practice appears to be an attempt to honour the Biblical principle of male *spiritual* leadership by creating a 'stop-gap' measure which as we observed earlier has become somewhat permanent.

On matters such as this one, and when there is no explicit command, example or necessary inferences, we are left to rely upon Biblical principles. Even when we are totally committed to following the New Testament's pattern with respect to doctrinal teaching, instructions for worship, congregational organization and personal moral conduct, we can find no pattern in the New Testament directly supporting the formation of a 'men's business meeting' to take up certain oversight functions in the absence of elders.

Were we to argue that this (men's business meetings) is the **only** way that congregational decisions can be arrived at, then we will have created an 'innovation within the church. The most that we might say is that it is one way of doing so, but not the only one. A men's business meeting and those who take leadership of it may in fact function as a pseudo-eldership which, in time, might even resist the appointment of Biblically qualified leaders. In the meantime, the voices of those least mature may be heeded while more mature and carefully considered views are set aside. If the only criteria for the decision-makers of the church is gender then we open the door for sometimes dominant and unspiritual men to 'rule' in the church

This of course is not the original intent. But it is not an uncommon outcome when those who do not qualify to lead as elders or serve as deacons assume leadership through the creation of a decision-making body within the church that is not found in scripture.

What we do have precedent for in scripture are decisions made by entire congregations and made on the behalf of all. The apostles set out the criteria for the seven men who would lead in benevolence in Acts 6 and the whole church selected them. The question of who would serve was resolved within the parameters set out by the apostles, but the discretionary portion of that decision was made by the whole church. So we have an example of a discretionary decision made by a congregation within the boundaries of God's will.

So while 'men's business meetings' are one way of coming to 'congregational decisions', there are others that are worthy of consideration. And of course, *any* stop-gap measure falls short of what God has in mind for the church and runs the risk of replacing God-approved leadership by establishing it's own tradition.

As most of us know, group decisions are hard to arrive at. Our democratic model involving public discourse and 'rule by the majority' often results in a dissenting minority. 'Money talks' and those who have it tend to get their way. Outspoken and assertive personalities tend to dominate and silence those less inclined and intimidated by group discussion. And all of this is further complicated by our comfort with democratic principles in a church that is organized by our Lord as a kingdom and not a democracy. All of these factors cause us to favour some form of leadership able to streamline decisions and minimize dissent.

But, how to choose?

What principle or principles might guide us as a congregation seeking to do God's will while operating for a time without Biblically appointed leaders? We are asking this question relative to making decisions about 'non-spiritual' aspects of congregational life...the 'business' part of 'men's business meetings'.

A guiding principle that we do find in the New Testament is that churches acted 'with one accord'. As Jack Lewis points out in his work **'Leadership Questions Confronting the Church'**, "when congregations had a problem, they solved it by arrived at 'one accord'" (p76). When major decisions needed to be made, the whole congregation was present while they were decided, albeit led by the apostles (Acts 1:14, 2:1-47, 4:24, 32, 5:12). This enabled an outcome with which the whole congregation agreed and could act upon with unity (Acts 15:25)

The New Testament repeatedly urges congregations to be united in *mind* (Phil 1:27, 2:2, 1 Pet 3:8) in order to act with *one accord*. Just exactly how they were to arrive at that



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point was left to the leaders who the scriptures assume to be present and functioning. After all, leaders cannot lead if the congregation refuses to follow. Thus the elders are instructed to set an example and to refrain from domineering over the flock (1 Pet 5:2). These two goals then applied first and foremost to congregations who had a Biblically appointed leadership.

Congregations without Biblically appointed leaders are nevertheless commanded to act with 'one mind' or with 'one accord' while remaining obedient to N.T. doctrines and practices. How that is accomplished is a matter of judgment. A congregation might for example agree to follow the leadership of men who in most respects qualify to serve as elders but for personal reasons are prevented from doing so. They might also gather to make group decisions and do so under the guidance of the kind of a man that the apostle Paul envisions 'settling disputes' between brethren in 1 Cor 6:5. Arriving at decisions and 'getting things done' may become a slower process so that the church can arrive at 'one mind' and act with 'one accord'. But this is not a reason for failing to work toward unity. In my judgment it is consistent for a man or the men who provide spiritual leadership in a congregation – to moderate or to bring order to congregational meetings. But this is quite different than setting up a 'men's business meeting' where the will of the majority of men serves as a substitute for Biblically appointed leadership.

Acting with one accord requires each individual Christian to obey the apostles' command against being 'contentious' (Rom 2:8, 1 Cor 11:16, Tit. 3:10), or quarrelsome (2 Tim 2:24). When each member regards others as 'better than themselves' (Phil. 2:3) and is reasonable and peaceable (James 3:17), unity is facilitated and the work of the church is enabled.

Apart then from spiritual leadership and regarding matters of discretion, the principles of being *united in mind* and acting with *one accord* ought to carry the greatest possible weight. The further principle of not insisting upon one's rights but acting for the benefit of a 'weaker brother' (1 Cor 8:1ff) would keep a group from imposing a majority view upon the minority. Decisions arrived at in a unified way may take longer. But they also benefit from sober second thought, a deeper study of scripture and congregational prayer. Patience and mutual deference combined with dialogue and persuasion make for unity so that God's people might work together

No *temporary* arrangement for congregational decision-making ought to be regarded as permanent. The danger that follows from establishing extra-Biblical governance arrangements is that they might be considered 'good-enough', suggesting that men need not mature and aspire to lead as God has appointed. But in the interim – while we are not there *yet* – perhaps a more unifying and inclusive process of group decision making in matters of discretion, would unify and engage members while increasing ownership of the decisions taken and responsibility to see them carried out.

Barrie ON