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Gospel Lighthouse Pentecostal Church, 1316 Highway 25, P.O. Box 207, Tishomingo, Mississippi 38873; Tel.: (662) 438-6585 or (662) 438-7169; Pastor: William H. Burcham

Early Years

Born and raised in Prentiss County, Mississippi, Rev. William Hayward (W. H.) Burcham felt the call of God to begin a church in the City of Tishomingo. On a Wednesday morning in August 1970, without a penny in his pocket, Rev. Burcham began looking for a rental building to begin a home missions' church. He soon located an empty building that belonged to James Glasgow. Although Mr. Glasgow, who lived in Paden, formerly rented the store front building in Tishomingo for \$50 a month, he generously rented it to Rev. Burcham for \$45 a month to be used as a church. Rev. Burcham agreed to rent the building, but since he was broke, he told Mr. Glasgow that he would return on Saturday to pay him.

The following day, Rev. Burcham met Garvin Lambert, who mentioned that he heard that a church was going to be built in Tishomingo. Mr. Lambert wanted to pay the first month's rent on the building. At that point in time for Rev. Burcham, the gift of \$45 to pay the church rent was a miracle.

The following Monday, Rev. Burcham, his wife, Freda Barnes Burcham, and Gerald Barnes began cleaning the building. It had formerly been used as a pool hall, and previous occupants had spit tobacco juice on the walls and floor. Working together, the three cleaned and painted the facility to make it look as presentable as possible. After the building was cleaned, pews were needed to seat the congregation. After much praying, Rev. Burcham felt impressed one morning to get in his car and drive around. Leaving home, he traveled Highway 30 West to Hills Chapel, and then he turned left towards the south. After three or four miles, Rev. Burcham noticed a beautiful, new church building on the right. In the yard of this church, Candler's Chapel, there were several used pews that had been taken out of the old building. Rev. Burcham immediately stopped and asked neighbors who he could contact about purchasing the pews, and he was advised to contact Clyde Shook, a deacon of the church. Rev. Burcham hurriedly went to Clyde Shook's home, feeling that God had directed him that day. How disappointed he felt when he was told that a group of individuals had already made a deal to buy the pews! However, as he

was leaving, Mr. Shook said, "Now, if they don't show up by Saturday, I will just go ahead and sell them to you." To Rev. Burcham, this would be one of the first miracles he would see in the new work at Tishomingo. Returning Saturday morning, the pews were still in the yard, and Mr. Shook sold the pews to Rev. Burcham for \$350. Borrowing the money from the Iuka Guaranty Bank, the pews and other necessities were purchased and lovingly arranged in the church's first home. The heat in the facility was erratically supplied by a big pot-bellied coal heater, and although the building was not a high-class facility, it was respectable. Rev. and Sis. Burcham were very happy that a new work for the Lord was beginning in the town of Tishomingo.

The first service held in the store front building in downtown Tishomingo was on Sunday morning, August 23, 1970. Sis. Burcham played the accordion, and Rev. Burcham played the bass guitar to supply music for the service. Linda Lambert Mock loaned her piano to the church. At a later date, the Bates Piano Company in Belmont, Mississippi, donated the church a piano. Rev. Burcham's 11 a.m. message was taken from Matthew 11:14, and it was entitled "Selling Out to God." For the next few years, the church's pastor, his family, and its members had to "sell out to God" to make the sacrifices needed to establish the church. From miracle to miracle, God always provided and supplied the needs of the church.

A little more than a year later, land where the church is now located was purchased from John Poole. The place where the church now sits was previously a very high hill. A lot of dirt was moved and graded, but soon the task was completed. Cleston Barnes donated oak timber to build the rafters of the new building. All the church men gathered to cut trees. Addis Deaton handled the logging along with the help of Connie Mock and Kirk Riddle. Garvin Lambert sawed the logs in his mill at no charge. Will Henry McNeal hauled the lumber to the church, and after the wood dried, he picked it up and took it to Walden's planer in Booneville, Mississippi. Mr. McNeal only charged the church for the price of gasoline it took to haul the lumber back and forth between the planer and the church.

In the summer of 1971, construction began on the new building. Workers were hired to lay the blocks, and after that task was completed, Dugger Feltman and Rev. Burcham, along with a couple of hired workers, gathered one morning to build the rafters. Finally, the day arrived to raise the rafters. After arriving at the work site, Randle Jourdan was seen walking around the top of the block wall, ready to offer his assistance. When the men got ready to put up the rafters, they were extremely heavy. Dugger Feltman said, "Rev. Burcham, we might as well burn these things and go buy us some pine and build some more. It'll be lighter, 'cause we'll never get these things up." They were excruciatingly heavy, but after a little laughter and some planning, arrangements were made and the rafters were put into place. The first service in the new building was held January 16, 1972. It might not have seemed like much to a lot of people, but the Gospel Lighthouse congregation was proud of it!

The church continued to grow and Sunday School rooms were needed after a year or two. Once again, the church didn't have the necessary money. The possibility of building Sunday School rooms was discussed, but it was decided that the church couldn't afford the project. Within two weeks' time, however, an event occurred that Rev. Burcham considered as another miracle from God.

While visiting another church in Ripley, Mississippi, on a Wednesday night, there was an elderly man in attendance. This new convert was a recovering alcoholic, and it was obvious that he didn't have much in life. His clothes didn't look too good, but he got up that evening and played a musical rendition on his French harp. Rev. Burcham was working at a factory during this time,

and he only had \$5 in his pocket to last until his payday on Friday. However, while that man was playing the French harp, Rev. Burcham felt moved by God to give the last \$5 he had to the elderly man. As Rev. Burcham sat in the service, he felt impressed that if he gave his last \$5 to the elderly man, then God would supply the funds needed to build Sunday School rooms for the Tishomingo church. Rev. Burcham sat through the service, wrestling with his thoughts, knowing that it was only Wednesday night, and he needed money for gasoline, etc. After the service was dismissed, Rev. Burcham ambled toward the rear of the church, still arguing with himself about the money. Before exiting the building, however, he looked back and saw the elderly man standing in front of the podium, looking directly at him. Immediately, Rev. Burcham turned, approached the gentleman, and taking the \$5 he had in his pocket, stuck the money in the elderly man's pocket. Tears immediately popped into the man's eyes, and he began to cry. That was certainly payment enough for Rev. Burcham! The man looked at him and said, "Nobody's ever given me anything before!" Returning home, Rev. Burcham felt that seeing the joy on the man's face was reward enough for him.

Early the following Sunday morning, while in the old trailer the Burcham family lived in alongside the church, a man pulled up out front and blew his horn. Rev. Burcham went out to the car, not knowing who he was or what he wanted. As he approached the car, the stranger said, "I heard you were going to build some new Sunday School rooms." "Well," Rev. Burcham answered, "we had thought about it, but we've decided that we can't afford it at this time." The man said, "Well, I wanted to come over to help you out a little." He began to write a check, and after pressing it into Rev. Burcham's startled hands, he made his departure. Looking at the check after the stranger left, Rev. Burcham saw that he had written the church an \$800 check to put toward the expense of the Sunday School rooms. To Rev. Burcham, this was a great miracle! That Sunday morning, the church rejoiced in unison. They could now begin construction on the Sunday School rooms.

Then the strangest thing happened that afternoon. Rev. Burcham heard a car horn blowing, and looking out the trailer window, he noticed the same man sitting in his car. His faith became weak, and he told his wife, "Oh, no, he's back out there, and he's probably come back after that check. He's decided he doesn't want to give us that money." However, to his surprise, when Rev. Burcham approached the car, he noticed that the stranger was weeping. The man handed Rev. Burcham another check, saying, "I didn't give you enough money this morning." The second check was made out for \$700. God had turned Rev. Burcham's \$5 into \$1,500. This miracle certainly proved one thing to Rev. Burcham—he could never out give God. Needless to say, it wasn't long before the church had a Sunday School Department constructed with rooms to teach the word of God.

Present Time

Over a period of years, the church added a fellowship hall. The sanctuary was remodeled, and a gymnasium was built. The gymnasium also housed a larger fellowship hall and classrooms to begin a church school. Eventually, the gymnasium was remodeled to house the church sanctuary, and the kitchen and fellowship hall were moved back into the older church building. A beautifully decorated foyer and plenty of Sunday School rooms completed the structure. The church moved into its new facility in the fall of 2004, in time for its 34th anniversary service.

Rev. Burcham was honored as the 2004 Outstanding Citizen of the Year by the Tishomingo Chamber of Commerce. In conjunction with that distinction, Rev. Burcham served as the Grand Marshal of the Tishomingo Christmas Parade on Saturday, December 4, 2004.



The Tishomingo Chamber of Commerce presented the award to Rev. Burcham at the annual Thanksgiving Service in Tishomingo. Rev. Burcham has always been active in this city-wide service which welcomes all denominations and races. As the congregation present at the Thanksgiving service rose to their feet in tribute, Rev. Burcham—in his typically modest way—indicated that any success was God’s work, not his. The Outstanding Citizen of the Year award, in its sixth year, recognizes the people who have worked to make the community a better place to live.

Rev. Burcham founded the Gospel Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Tishomingo, Mississippi, and has remained its pastor for 35 years. Anyone in the community in need due to sickness, personal loss, or tragedy will find Rev. Burcham there to assist in any way possible. He is a living example of the Good Samaritan. In addition to his work with individuals in the community, Rev. Burcham has always worked to make the community a better place to live. He always supports and participates in the activities of the community. More importantly, Rev. Burcham is a strong and steadfast man of God. His church family has the utmost respect for his honesty and integrity. He exhibits Christian principles on a daily basis.

Rev. Burcham and his wife, Freda, have been married for 43 years. Their son and daughter-in-law, Duane and Shelley, have given them three precious grandchildren: Tyler, Dylan, and Hanah Grace.

The above information was compiled by RaNae S. Vaughn. It was obtained both from Rev. William H. Burcham and, in part, from a November 2004 issue of the *Belmont & Tishomingo Journal* (Belmont, Miss.).