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HOW THEY ENTERED CANAAN
(A Collection of Holiness Experience Accounts)
Compiled by Duane V. Maxey

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY

On a Sabbath evening in early October, 1821, when Finney was past twenty-nine years old, he deliberately made up his mind that he would settle the question of his soul's salvation at once, and, if it were possible, would make his peace with God. On Monday and Tuesday he was not much occupied, and read his Bible, and engaged in prayer most of the time. But when he began to seek God in real earnest, it developed that he was very proud without knowing it. He became ashamed to let any one know of his seriousness. He stopped up the keyholes of his room and office, and only whispered his prayer, ashamed to have it said of him, as of Saul, "Behold, he prayeth!" Before that time his Bible had laid openly on the table in his office among his law books; now, from wicked shame, he hid it from the sight of others. Like other convicted sinners, he resorted to the familiar device of hiding away from his pastor and all others who might have the slightest concern in his salvation. The wicked cowardice of a guilty sinner! Tuesday night the conviction was so great that he thought he should die; and he knew, if he did, that he would sink down to hell. Wednesday morning an inward voice seemed to say to him: "What are you waiting for? Did you not promise to give your heart to God? And what are you trying to do? Are you endeavoring to work out a righteousness of your own?"

He had started for his office, and was in the street, when the voice spoke to him. "Just at this point," he says, "the whole plan of salvation opened to my mind in a most wonderful manner. I saw the atonement of Christ was a finished work as clearly as I ever saw it in my life. Gospel salvation seemed to me to be the offer of something to be accepted, and that it was full and complete, and that all that was necessary on my part was to get my own consent to give up my sins and accept Christ." "I had stopped in the street, where the inward voice seemed to arrest me. How long I remained in that position, I can not say; but, after this distinct revelation had stood for some time before my mind, the question was put, 'Will you accept it now, today?' I replied, 'I will accept it today, or I will die in the attempt.'" He started for the woods to pray; but again his pride appeared, and he found himself skulking along under the fence, for fear some one might see him. As he entered the woods, he said, "I will give my heart to God, or I will never come down from there."

A quarter of a mile in the woods he crept into a covert where great trees had fallen across each other, making a closet for him. He thought that he could be alone where he might pray freely and not be overheard! But lo! when he came to try, he was dumb; he had nothing to say to God! He found himself fast verging to despair, and he cried, "My heart is dead to God, and will not pray!"

He thought several times he heard a noise, and he stopped to listen and see if any one was overhearing him. Then and there the senseless, wicked pride of his heart was revealed to him. "An overwhelming sense of the wickedness of being ashamed to have a human being see me on my knees before God took powerful possession of me. The sin appeared awful, infinite! 'What!' I said, 'such a degraded sinner as I am, on my knees, confessing my sins to a great and holy God, and ashamed to have any human being, and a sinner like myself, find me on my knees, endeavoring to make my peace with an offended God!' It broke me down before the Lord. I cried at the top of my voice that I would not leave that place if all the men on earth and all the devils in hell surrounded me." Then his heart was melted, and his tongue was loosed, and he could pray.

The Spirit brought a promise to his mind: "Then shall ye go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. Then shall ye seek Me and find Me when ye shall search for me with all your heart." He seized upon the heavenly promise with the grasp of a drowning man, and cried, "Lord, I take Thee at Thy word!"

He continued thus to pray and appropriate promises for a long time, until he found himself tripping through the bushes on the way to the road, and saying, "If ever I am converted, I will preach the gospel." In his ignorance he did not realize that peace with God had come, and he was already converted.

He reached the village, and found that it was noon. He had spent the whole forenoon with God. Such a wonderful quiet and peace had come to his soul; all sense of sin and all consciousness of guilt had so completely departed, and his repose of mind was so unspeakably great that he thought he must have grieved the Holy Spirit entirely away. But no burden came back. And when, after dinner, he took down his bass-viol and began to sing a sacred hymn, his whole heart melted before God, and he began to weep.

And now began the spiritual wonders of this wonderful life. Night came on. Squire Wright bade him good-night, and went home. He built a fire in the front room of his office, and went to the back room to pray. He says:

"There was neither light nor fire in the room; nevertheless it suddenly appeared perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seems as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me at the time, nor for some time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state. I have always since regarded this as a most remarkable state of mind; for it seemed to me a reality that He stood before me, and I fell down at His feet, and poured out my soul to Him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed His feet with my tears. I must have continued in that state a good while, absorbed with the interview. I returned to the front office, and found that the fire that I had made of large wood was nearly burned out. But as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism with the Holy Ghost. Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my

mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave of electricity going through and through me. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love. It seemed like the very breath of God.

"No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me and over me and over me, until I cried out: 'I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me. Lord, I can not bear any more!'"

The next morning these marvelous experiences were repeated, till he was overwhelmed with the baptism, with the Spirit, and with the resulting emotions. He wept aloud, and poured out his soul to God.

I question if there is a parallel to this in all the literature of the saints -- a man receiving such a baptism with the Spirit so soon after conversion, without asking for it or expecting it, and when he was too utterly ignorant of the whole subject to even think about it. In this instance God seems to have stepped beyond the bounds of His ordinary method of conferring the great gift. Finney was the instrument God wanted, and He used His sovereign right to deal with him spiritually after an unusual manner, and equip him at once for a matchless service.

Source: "Life of Charles G. Finney" by A. M. Hills

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THE END