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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

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My first impressions on the subject of religion must have been received at a very early age, as I can remember scarcely anything anterior to them. When I was six years of age I was deeply impressed with a sense of my sins in the sight of God, and my unfitness for death, by an address made to a Sunday School where I occasionally attended -- as the Presbyterian church, of which my widowed mother was a member, and where I usually went to Sunday School, was at considerable distance from our residence. I was frequently very much troubled, and, at times, deeply affected in reading the Holy Scriptures, especially the story of the cross. This would often melt me to tears. When I was about ten years of age, I was led, one Saturday morning, in school, under a deeper sense of my guilt than I had ever felt before; to utter the prayer of the publican: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." I felt that God heard and answered my petition. Peace and joy such as I had never known before filled my soul. But I had no one to guide and teach me. I was but a child, and quite small for my age; and there was much skepticism in the church I attended about the conversion of children. I took great delight in the means of grace, and especially the prayer-meetings, which I regularly attended. My peace and joy wore away, and I did not think this was conversion until years afterward, when God taught me more fully by his word and Spirit.

When I was about closing my twelfth year I left my native city, Philadelphia, and came to reside in New York, among strangers. I was almost without restraint, except that which my Heavenly Father imposed by his special providence and grace. I was scrupulously moral, but in a legal spirit, and therefore always more or less under condemnation. When about sixteen I learned to dance, and then the ballroom and the theater were frequent places of resort, until, at length, I secured an engagement to perform with a celebrated pantomime company, in one of the fashionable gardens in New York city. During all this time, however, God kept me from the vices so almost universally prevalent among this class. From intemperance, gambling, and licentiousness, I was almost miraculously preserved. I still attended church regularly on the Lord's day, and flattered myself that I was as good as the majority of professed Christians -- many of whom I used to see at the garden through the week, and at the church on Sunday.

When I was nearly twenty years of age I began to think very seriously of devoting myself to the service of God; it seemed to me very reasonable and proper that I should do so. Circumstances led me to attend the ministrations of Rev. George Benedict, pastor of the Norfolk Street Baptist church, and I began to read the Bible. I soon found that "I must be born again." The holiness of God, the justice and extent of the law, my own unworthiness and helplessness and ruin were now set before me in such a way that I began to despair of salvation. I read of Christ, and, thought of Christ as a Saviour. "But surely," I thought, "he cannot, he will not save a wretch so vile as I am." I had no kind friend to whom I could go and tell my troubles.

At length, I got a friend to make an appointment for me with Pastor Benedict. The conversation was much blest to my soul. I saw that the Holy Spirit was showing me my own guilt and depravity that I might be compelled to abandon my self-righteousness, and trust only in Jesus for justification before God. I left my pastor and went to my room, and there cast myself unreservedly upon the mercy of God in Christ, and received the witness of the Spirit that my sins were all forgiven, and that I was adopted into the family of God. Oh, the joy that filled my soul! I was in an ecstasy of delight. I could only say, "Praise the Lord!" "Oh, my Father!" -- repeating these words, while my whole frame quivered with the sweet rapture that thrilled my soul. I soon after made a public profession of religion, by baptism, and united with the Norfolk Street Baptist church.

When about twenty-one years of age I yielded to convictions which had long been pressing upon me, and began a course of preparation for the gospel ministry, in Madison University. The loss of what little I had saved soon made it necessary for me to return to New York, and I catered a classical school there. I was now nearly twenty-two years old. My experience, hitherto, had been of that vacillating character so generally prevalent among Christians; but, about this time, I was sweetly led by the Holy Spirit to rely on Jesus every moment. He was an ever-present reality to me; my constant companion, in every place and at every moment. He saved me -- fully saved me. I had no one to teach me that it was my privilege to continue in this blessed experience by the exercise of simple faith in Jesus; but supposed, from what I heard of the experience of others, and from the preaching to which I listened, that I was enjoying a special season of mercy which I must not expect to continue. This sweet state I enjoyed for about two months, as nearly as I now can remember; exactly how I lost it I cannot tell; but I know that I again began to experience doubts and fears, and to be overcome by temptation, and mourn the absence of my Saviour, and have an experience like the rest of my brethren in these respects. But I could not now be satisfied with this. I felt a conviction that there must be something better for the Christian.

Very powerful temptations were now assailing me, and I heard a great deal of self-examination, and of being faithful, and of watching and praying, but very little about believing. I used to pray a great deal, and watch, and make vows, and struggle against my inbred corruptions and outward temptations; but, oh! how often, almost constantly, I was living under bondage to sin. I found my own strength to be perfect weakness. I went on sinning and repenting, "resolving and re-resolving," and yet with the gloomy prospect of "dying the same." During all this time, however, I cherished a lively faith in Christ as my justification before God, and constantly repaired to the throne of grace, and rested on the prevalence of his intercession as my Advocate with the Father. But, oh! how I looked, and sometimes longed for death, to set me free from my sins. And yet, the thought would often press itself upon my attention: "Will death make you holy? Death will not

affect the soul. It will, indeed, remove you from the temptations from without which assail you here; but how can it remove your inbred sin? "And then, in my struggles, I would sometimes be reminded of some of the precious promises of God's Word, and it seemed that there must be deliverance and rest and triumph in this life. I read (1 Cor. 10:13), "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Also (Phil. 4:13), "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me;" which was the first text I ever preached from. I also read (Eph. 3:20), that God was "able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think," and (John 14:13, 14) "Whatsoever ye ask in my (Christ's) name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it;" From the day on which I experienced pardon, I had been led to pray that I might be "holy, humble, and useful;" and when, overcome by temptation, I fell into sin, oh! how earnest were my prayers to be kept from again falling. I could "ask" to be saved from sin -- I could "think" of being a holy, humble servant of Christ, in a sense beyond that which I then it experienced; and the Word told me that God was able to do "exceeding abundantly above" that, and that Christ would do for me whatsoever I asked in his name.

Here, then, was God's own declaration that he was able and willing to do all I needed to have done. Let it be borne in mind that, during all these exercises, my experience of justification was clear, and though, at times, the adversary would suggest to me that I was not converted, and that I would be cast off and left to perish, I always met him with the reply: "I trust in Christ to save me (when I come to die, was the idea of being saved then), and I will not doubt his ability or willingness to do it, though I am the chief of sinners." It was not salvation from the wrath of God I longed for, but salvation from sin.*[See Endnote] Not from its guilt, but from its pollution; not from its punishment, but from its dominion and power. And yet I was in bondage.

This experience continued until the year 1856. Meanwhile I had entered the ministry. My labors were multiplied. I determined to do all that it was possible to do in the service of Christ, and shrank not from any burden; and, though illy qualified to preach (speaking after the manner of men), yet I was always ready to "stand up for Jesus;" but often with great nervousness and doubt and fear; I was "in labors more abundant." If salvation from sin had been by working, I certainly think I should have obtained it.

On the first of January, 1856, I assumed the pastoral charge of the North Baptist church, New York city. A young member of the church, whom I baptized on the first Sunday of that year, one day came to me with a glowing description of a meeting which he had been providentially led to attend. From what he said of it, I told him that I guessed he had been to a Methodist perfection meeting. He assured me that he heard nothing but Jesus exalted, and the brethren and sisters confessing that they were only sinners saved by grace. I at length determined that I would go and see for myself what kind of a meeting it was. I went more from curiosity than anything else. I expected to detect a great deal of arrogance and self-exaltation in the remarks of the speakers. On entering the room, it was the front parlor in a private residence -- I was very solemnly impressed. However it may sound to others, it seemed to me that the very atmosphere in that room was different from any I had ever breathed. Over the mantel piece this motto was suspended in a plain, gilt frame: "Holiness unto the Lord." I was filled with awe, and at once silently breathed an earnest prayer that God would bless the meeting to me and to all.

Before the opening services were concluded, all my curiosity was gone. I was there as a learner. I found a good Baptist brother there with whom I was acquainted, and who was acquainted with most of those present. The company numbered about twenty. As one after another rose to speak, my friend whispered to me: "That's a Presbyterian; that's a Congregationalist; that's a Methodist; that's an Episcopalian; that's a Quaker; that's a Baptist." I was surprised and delighted. There were persons connected with six or seven of the different denominations, all speaking one language, and all bound together in the most fervent Christian love. Christ, a full and complete Saviour, a present Saviour from all sin, was the theme. Here was the experience for which I had longed. I was irresistibly carried back to the time when I enjoyed this blessing, but did not know it by the name of "sanctification," or indeed by any name. But the reality of it I could not doubt. I arose and told of my former experience, and of my present struggles. I attended this meeting only about four times, with intervals between my visits to it, and then circumstances transpired which prevented my further attendance upon it, or at least I thought so. I was led, however, to see that the way to retain the experience which I once possessed, was to live by the moment -- or, in other words, to look every moment to Christ. This was of great service to me. I was led also to make a very full consecration of myself and all I had to the service of God, as follows:

MY HEAVENLY FATHER: Recognizing the reasonableness of thy commands, and the benevolence of thy designs in making provision so abundant for the holiness of thy people, and earnestly desiring the entire sanctification of all my powers to thy service and glory, humbly relying on the merits of thy Dear Son, my blessed Saviour, for acceptance in this act, I do now solemnly and for ever consecrate to thee all that I am and all that I have.

I give to thee, to be made holy to thyself, my frail, weak body, with all its members and all their capacities.

I consecrate to thee my soul, with all its faculties -- my affections, understanding, judgment, will, conscience, memory -- my ability to think, speak, and act as a rational creature. I devote my spirit, with all its perceptions. I consecrate body, soul, and spirit, O Lord, to thee. I lay upon thine altar all my attainments and all my possessions. Whatever thou hast made me steward of; I consecrate to thee; praying that thou wilt sanctify me wholly, and give me grace ever hereafter to live for thy glory alone, and that, for Christ's sake, thou will accept me. Amen.

New York, July 30, 1856

I lived in this consecrated state about two years, during which time I was abundant in pastoral labors, and the blessing of the Lord in an unusual degree rested upon the church. Still I was not delivered from the power and dominion of sin. I sought grace to perform my part of the covenant, but did not believe that God performed his part. I gave all to God to be sanctified to his service; but I failed to believe that for Christ's sake he did so sanctify all to himself. I was therefore at times still overcome by sin -- though in the main satisfied with the blessings which God was conferring upon me, and with what I considered my own progress. I was settling down into the conclusion that sanctification was not a distinct work or experience in the soul.

But how strangely God works! In the summer of 1858 I was attacked with dysentery, and did not know but that I was about to be called home. I thought it would be a pleasant thing to fall asleep in Jesus, if my work was done. But it pleased my heavenly Father to restore me to health again. And now comes a period of my history which I would fain blot out. Instead of devoting myself renewedly to God and presenting my prolonged life as a sacrifice upon God's altar, I became neglectful of my spiritual interests, yielded to temptation, and fell into sin. During this time, I did not dare to read my act of consecration, but whenever I found it among my papers, I would hastily put it aside or cover it up.

This state of things lasted about five months, during which time the work of grace in the church began to decline; awakenings were less frequent; young converts became worldly, and no power attended the word. This alarmed me. I felt that I was the cause of it all. My sin of backsliding appeared most aggravated, and bitterly before God did I repent. He graciously heard my cries, and gave me pardon. Again his blessing rested upon my labors; and thus I entered the year 1859.

But I was not now satisfied with my experience. I felt that I needed not only pardon, but cleansing; not only justification, but sanctification. I now had such views of my natural depravity as I never had before; I saw myself such a sinner that I loathed and abhorred myself. But I did not now look for death to set me free. Nay, I could not desire death, as I had done, while in this state. I began to look to Jesus, not to death, as my entire and complete sanctification, as my full Saviour from sin. But, oh! what struggles now ensued! I was endeavoring to overcome sin, to sanctify myself; before I came to Jesus.

I began now to preach a higher Christian experience. My preaching of Christian morality had always been up to the New Testament standard, so that many thought me unnecessarily strict in my views on this point; but I now saw that the failure on my own part to exemplify that standard, and my failure to lead my people to live up to it, was owing to the want of a corresponding experience in my own heart, and, consequently, the lack of clear teaching of such an experience to them.

As the result of this preaching, a young lady, a member of the church, became convicted of her need of a better experience, and came to tell the exercises of her soul to me, and ask for direction. I could not direct her. She was as far advanced as I was. We were both under conviction. Her visit made a deep impression upon my mind. Here was I, a pastor, unable to lead one of my own flock forward in the divine life. I began to feel more and more deeply my need -- my nothingness. Language cannot describe the emotions of my soul. Oh, how ignorant I felt myself; how empty -- how vile and worthless I thought that my sinfulness kept me from receiving strength and full salvation. I began to agonize in prayer, spending hours together upon my knees. I fasted and prayed and wept; but oh, how strange, I did not believe -- I could not.

During this time the Lord was again blessing my labors in the conversion of souls. Anxious inquirers frequently came to see me. In conversing with them I used to urge them to believe in Jesus. I used to say, after hearing their confessions of sin and helplessness: "Well, you see that you are lost, and you cannot save yourself; and you know that none but Jesus can save you; now why do you not believe his word? Cast yourself upon him and believe." And it would seem as though the

Holy Spirit would echo back to my soul: "And why do not you believe? you know you are vile and helpless, and Jesus only can cleanse and sanctify you: why do you not cast yourself on him and believe?" I could only breathe out the prayer, "Lord, help us to believe." On the fourth day of March, 1859, I appended the following to the act of consecration above quoted:

"Having carefully read the above, I do again renew this consecration, in the presence of the Great Searcher of hearts."

Following this, there were deep searchings of the heart. It seemed to me that everything I held dear was separately presented to me, and the question propounded: "Can you part with this for Jesus?"

Then would come the suggestion: "If you do give these things to the Lord, he will take them from you, in order to test the sincerity of the consecration." In this way, my wife, my only child, my property, the church of which I was pastor, my reputation as a preacher, a Christian and a man, my influence, my official station as a minister, and everything to which the heart naturally clings, were presented to me with the question: "Can you part with this for Jesus? Are you willing that God should take this from you, if it is for his glory?" God, by the power of his Spirit, whose help I sought, enabled me to say, "Yea, Lord, strip me of all, if thou wilt but cleanse me from sin and use me only for thy glory." And there, in my study, I passed through the mental struggle of a separation from all that I once called mine -- now no longer mine, but God's -- laid upon the altar, a whole burnt offering to the Lord. I now knew what it was to be "crucified unto the world," "crucified with Christ." I felt now that my consecration was no sham -- it was a reality; and I praised God that he had enabled me thus to give him his own. But, oh I how insignificant, how worthless my offering appeared. There was nothing in it meritorious; I was but an unprofitable servant. Yet I hoped for acceptance through Jesus Christ.

But could I believe that so unworthy an offering was accepted? Not yet. About this time I began again to attend the meetings for the promotion of holiness; and I here learned that after all was given to Christ, it was the privilege of faith to have all in Christ; but yet I dared not believe. I was also looking for some sensible evidence that my sacrifice was accepted. I expected an emotional experience like that which thrilled my soul, and body too, when I received Christ as my justification. And so, when I was praying and trying to believe, the adversary was constantly directing my attention to myself, and asking; "Do you feel different?" Thus I was kept for some weeks in bondage to unbelief.

On the morning of March 22, while spending several hours on my knees, the following promises were presented in succession at intervals to my mind:-- "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive." "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." "There standeth one among you who baptizeth with the Holy Spirit." "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar." "Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think" -- in connection with, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive." These promises came into my mind at intervals during two or three hours of earnest prayer. But I arose from my knees, still in unbelief, and consequently unblest.

Two days after (the 24th), as I was about to retire, I looked up to God, and asked him to direct me to a portion of his word which would enlighten me. I opened the Bible to this text: "Abraham believed God" (there seemed to be a peculiar emphasis on the word "believed"), "and it was counted to him for righteousness." I then began to trust, without any feeling or emotion. I resigned myself to sleep and awoke the next morning, wholly trusting in the Lord:

It was on that day, the 25th of March, that I cast myself wholly upon Jesus as my sanctification, and realized by faith that his blood cleansed me from all sin. I was in prayer in my study. The text of the preceding evening, "Abraham believed God," etc., came powerfully into my mind.

I seemed to be led thus: "I have given all to God for the express purpose that all may be sanctified to himself; I have given myself to him that I may be cleansed from all sin. I will ask and believe." I felt that the power to believe was given me by the Holy Spirit. I no longer looked to myself -- to my emotions, or feelings, but to the promise -- and I dared to say, "I believe that the blood of Jesus Christ does now cleanse me from all sin." All within was calm as a summer's eve. No ecstasy or rapture disturbed the deep peace which filled my soul, as I experienced the consciousness that it was even so.

That day was a day of peace, such as I had never enjoyed before. Oh, it seemed so easy to trust all in the hands of Jesus. I was nothing -- Jesus was all, and I was content that it should be so. But, oh what a Saviour I felt Jesus to be now. Through him I was more than a conqueror. Sin had no dominion over me. I had no anxiety, no fear; Jesus fully saved me, and saved me fully each moment. I entered into rest -- the rest of faith; and soon my soul was filled to overflowing with the love of Christ, and praise filled my heart and burst forth from my lips.

More than ten years have now rolled away, and oh, what a history they have! I have realized more of the goodness of God, and the power of Jesus to save during that time, than during all my previous history combined. Trials such as I never before endured have come upon me; tests of faith have been applied by my heavenly Father; but oh, his grace is sufficient, and Jesus has saved, and does save me. And amid the fiercest assaults of the tempter, and the severest trials, I have sung songs of praise to Jesus, and he has put to flight the armies of the aliens, and cheered me with his presence and smile. I give myself to him that he may glorify himself in me, and I just believe that he does it. I simply

"into nothing fall,
That Jesus may be all in all."

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Hallelujah. Amen.

*Here the John Quincy Adams of this testimony revealed his "Baptist" belief in a salvation for the justified that delivers from God's wrath, but not from sinning. It would appear that even though here he had not yet again entered into "the rest of faith," his heart salvation was better than his head belief: he was saved from sinning, but not saved from all of the human shortcomings that many Baptists declare to be sins, and not yet again saved from inbred sin. Indeed, while much of this entire testimony reflects its author's Baptist belief, the conclusion of his testimony seems to reveal quite clearly that he was finally led by the Holy Spirit into a genuine and settled experience of deliverance from all sin, from all sin in his life and from all sin in his heart.. -- DVM

Source: "Experiences of the Higher Christian Life in the Baptist Denomination" by John Q. Adams

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THE END