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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

JOHN R. CHURCH

Dr. John R. Church is a member of the Western North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church. For the past twelve years he has served as an approved evangelist of the church. Dr. Church has traveled extensively; he has preached in many of the nation's largest churches and in many colleges. He is an author, and over one hundred thousand copies of his books have been sold.

I consider it an honor to be asked to give my testimony in this book. While I have nothing yet of which to boast, I am glad to be a humble witness for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ called Paul to preach, he told him that he had been called to be a minister and a witness to the Gentiles. The Lord wants us not only to preach, but also to witness to the truths we proclaim. This is in accordance with New Testament practice.

I would not have anyone think that I have anything of which to boast. I would, however, like to give Christ the glory for all he has done in my life. Naturally, in giving one's own testimony one has to use the personal pronoun I many times, but in doing it I want it understood that it was Christ who did the work. Paul said: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Here Paul uses the pronoun I and me a number of times, but no one would dare accuse him of boasting. I want to manifest the same spirit of humility in giving my testimony for Christ.

I had the good fortune of being born and brought up in a very devout Christian home. My mother was one of the godliest women that I have ever known. I cannot remember the first time I ever heard my mother pray. As far back in my recollection as I can go, I can remember kneeling at Mother's knee and lisping that little prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep." Some of the fondest recollections of my childhood are those seasons at night when Mother had finished washing the dishes, sat down, and gathered us children around her knees to read to us from the Bible, or Aunt Charlotte's Bible Stories, and talk to us about God. I am so thankful that God did not give me a card-playing, cigarette-smoking mother. My mother did not hunt a deck of cards or a pack of

cigarettes. She was more interested in our spiritual welfare than she was in the things of the world. I owe a great deal to Mother and her Christian influence on my life.

My parents were poor people. My grandfather was killed in the Civil War; my father was bound out as a boy to work for his board and clothes. He never was privileged to go to school a single day in his life. My father worked all his life as a day laborer, and I can remember when he worked for a dollar a day. There were eight of us children; things were not always plentiful at our house, but we did have a Christian home. My father was a good man, who loved his family and always took an interest in our spiritual welfare. He helped Mother in her effort to give us the right kind of teaching and training. They took us to Sunday school, and kept us for the preaching service. They instilled into our hearts and minds some great truths and conceptions that have held us steady all down the pathway of life. I owe a great deal to my parents, and the training they gave will never be forgotten. I thank God for such a home, for such training and teaching.

I was definitely converted in an old-fashioned Methodist revival when I was about nine years of age. My conversion was very clear and unmistakable. I have never had any doubt about my conversion. Some people say that children do not know what they are doing at that age, but I want to testify that I knew what I was doing, and I feel certain that my sins were forgiven and that I became a child of God at that time.

I lived a very happy Christian life until I was about fifteen years of age. Then I began to feel the call to preach, which at that time I did not want to do. I wished to make money, to win a place for myself in the business world. I began to fight the call to preach, but the Lord was patient with me. Finally I told God that I would not preach, and I backslid. I lived in this condition until after I was married, when I was a little over eighteen years of age. I had the good fortune of marrying a fine Christian girl. Through her godly influence, and in answer to her prayers, I was reclaimed. It happened in a revival meeting that was being conducted by Rev. C. C. Totherow, one of the godliest men that I have ever known.

At the time, I was in the market business in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. When I went to the altar, I told God that I would give up my business and prepare for the ministry. I sold out my business and began to make plans to attend Rutherford College in order to prepare for the ministry.

Rutherford College was a Methodist school in North Carolina, the kind of school that a poor boy could attend without being humiliated about his clothing and lack of money. I did not have any money or anyone to help me in a financial way. At the time I went there, we had one child. We had a hard time financially, but we learned many things that have been of help to us in the years since that time.

The outstanding thing that happened to me while in college was the fact that I sought and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When I went to school, I knew nothing about this. I was in the same condition as the people at Ephesus, whom Paul found and asked, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" They said they had never heard of such a thing. I, too, had never heard of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

When some of the men at Rutherford College began to talk to me about this baptism, it was so new and strange to me that I did not know what to think of it. I knew I was a Christian, that I was called to preach, but I had heard nothing of this experience. At first I was a little shy of such teaching. I felt, however, that I wanted all God had for me. I made up my mind that I would find out what the Bible really taught on this subject. I read my New Testament through eleven times in one month. I carried a red pencil with me; when I would find a passage of Scripture that I thought taught this truth, I would mark it with red. I soon became convinced in my own heart and mind that the Bible taught the baptism of the Spirit.

I also began to read the testimony of other men, and I saw that many of the greatest saints of the past had testified to this same experience. I was convinced in my mind. Then, too, I felt in my heart that I needed something more than I had.

I prayed and sought for the baptism of the Holy Spirit for about five months; then one morning in an all-night prayer meeting we were having at the college I received the baptism. It came to me about 1:30 A.M., March 19, 1920. I was in the Platonic Literary Society hall at the time it came to me. I cannot describe the physical sensation that came over me, but the most notable thing about this experience was the fact that I had such a clean, pure feeling after the physical sensation subsided. I had never felt so clean and pure in my life. I felt that all sin was gone, that now I was actually fit to stand in the presence of God and man. I shall never forget that experience. It is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me. I feel very unworthy of what God did for me at that time, but I do thank him for doing it. I never could have gone on in this work and accomplished the things God had for me to do if it had not been for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I wish I could get all of God's people to see that this same promise is unto them. (See Acts 2:39.)

I feel that I am a very unworthy servant of Christ, but I am glad that I can testify that there is adequate grace to take care of all sin in the human heart. The minimum of atonement more than covers the maximum of the Fall. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3-4).

To Him be all the glory, now and forever. Amen.

Source: "Contemporary Conversions" by Bernie Smith

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THE END