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

Vol. II -- Unnamed Accounts

ACCOUNT #036

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I propose to give a brief detail of personal experience. I enjoyed many religious privileges in my youth, was the subject of many serious impressions; do not recollect that a day passed during that period, without feeling more or less anxiety in respect to my soul's welfare. I believe that with a little of the right instruction, I might have been brought to submit to the Savior. Like the boasting Jews of old, I always inwardly approved the "things that were excellent." I early became acquainted with, and embraced the various reforms of the age; was fond of reading religious matter in the form of books, tracts and periodicals. For several years before my conversion, I had an impression, that I should one day preach the gospel. For various selfish reasons I desired to do so. All these things conspired to prepare me for self-deception and a false profession of religion. About the age of twenty-one, I was persuaded that by performing religious duties, such as became a public profession of religion, I should get the internal evidence of being a Christian. Hence I resolved to do so. I commenced immediately. Satan and my own imagination soon furnished me with the requisite evidence, and I quietly rested in my blindness and carnal security. Now the last obstacle was removed, and I commenced studying preparatory to the work of preaching the gospel. But a change of circumstances ere long occurred. I fell in with those who could speak a language in relation to Christian experience all mysterious to me. I wondered and queried with myself as to the cause of this difference between their experience and mine. It was suggested to me by a friend, that perhaps I was mistaken, and had never really been converted. I thought this a very uncharitable insinuation. Nevertheless, the evidence that this was the fact accumulated before me, till it became irresistible. I came fully and deliberately to the conclusion that I was not a Christian, and publicly acknowledged it. What then? Why, I must become one without delay. Here many temptations assailed me. "Wait a little longer," whispered a deceitful voice! "you can more easily become a Christian after you have obtained more light and knowledge, say a year or two hence." I pronounced it a falsehood, and cast the suggestion from me. "Your sins are so strong you cannot overcome them now; indulge them and let them spend their strength, and then give your heart to God," whispered the same arch deceiver. Ans. "I can overcome my sins now if ever, and I must overcome now, or be lost for ever." "O, you are a Christian, only not quite so far advanced as

some; why disquiet yourself in vain?" the flatterer oft accosted me. Ans. "I know I am not: and if there is nothing more in religion than what I have found, it is not worth having." "Well, there is nothing in it -- there is no God, no heaven, no hell; I have no soul -- all this ado about these matters is mere illusion and enthusiasm." This was the last, blackest, and most horrid form of temptation. I immediately repelled it. I said, "I know it is not so, I know there is a God, and all these other things are true, and I will act as a rational being in view of these truths." I sought the Lord with prayer and self-examination. I inquired, "What is it to be a true Christian?" Ans. "To obey God, and put Sin in' all its forms." My attention was now turned to my sins. My conflict was with them. At length the way of faith was revealed; and what I could not do in overcoming my sins, by myself, I trusted in the Lord to do for me. Here was rest. My sins were subdued. The conflict was ended. And, O a rest! What unspeakable joy! What surprise! What a miracle of grace! To be thus snatched from the dark abyss of self-delusion, and the very verge of hell: from the deepest bondage to selfishness, and all the deceitful and insidious forms of sin; those forms of sin which may exist in' the heart full of all unrighteousness, and yet the exterior pass undetected in its counterfeit profession of holiness: to be thus snatched, I say, was to me a most marvellous and unaccountable interposition of sovereign mercy, which I could by no means find language adequate to express. I was lost in wonder, love and praise. Yes, I could truly say,

"Lord, I adore thy matchless grace,
That warned me of that dark abyss,
That drew me from those treacherous seas,
And bade me seek superior bliss"

In this state of mind I continued for eight months. Not a cloud -- scarce a ruffle on the surface of the deep ocean of peace that pervaded my whole soul. I retired to rest each night lifting my heart in prayer to God, and awoke each morning chanting the praises of God from a heart all enraptured with his beatific presence. Being awaked one night by one of those, since then, oft repeated visits of eternal love, in which the heavens seem bowed, and its very atmosphere seems to enrich and ravish the soul, so that sleep is no longer possible, and departs as an unwelcome guest the circumstance suggested the following lines as describing in some measure that visitation of sovereign love, which I then called

A HEAVENLY BREEZE

It comes! it comes! I know not why!
The wings of love divine surround me,
And God is stooping from on high
To shed the air of heaven around me.

It brings a calm, a Christ-like peace,
Mid inward music sweetly flowing;
It whispers, "Free, and sovereign grace
This heavenly breeze is now bestowing."

I feel it, ay, most mild and sweet,

In charming movements gliding o'er me;
It circles round my heart's retreat,
And fans away the mists before me.

It is not fancy that deludes,
Tis no impulsive flight of feeling,
Tis no illusion that intrudes,
But 'tis the Holy Spirit's sealing.

Come Holy Spirit, waft along
A constant gale that shall surround me,
And roll, while seraphs tune their song,
The atmosphere of heaven around me!

Still let me have this lamb-like frame,
And bask amid thy beams bright shining,
And feel thy love's encircling flame,
My heart with thine in union twining.

So shall I dwell in heaven below,
And drink thy full salvation pouring:
On blissful wings to God I'll go,
And fall before his throne adoring.

In such a frame of mind, I say, I passed the first eight months of my Christian experience, struggling to comprehend the depths of sovereign love that had stooped so low as to notice me? and seeking to humble myself infinitely low before the holy majesty of the King of heaven. Whenever a temptation to sin came before me, I referred it at once to God, and said, "see thou to that," and the temptation fled, and I remained in quiet, undisturbed repose. But at the close of this period I found myself placed in different circumstances, and began to query whether the Lord could keep me in those circumstances, as he had done before. Here unbelief crept in, and as a consequence I stumbled, and did not regain that stability of heart for two years thereafter, that I had previously enjoyed. Yet not a day passed that I recollect, during that two years, in which I did not have a witness of my love to God and of his favor to me; and in some respects I have since seen that the work of the Lord was deepening in my heart... But here I come to an era in my experience which I wish more fully to relate.

I said that for two years I was not so stable as I had previously been, but was sometimes overcome with temptation: nevertheless do not recollect of passing a day without an inward consciousness of peace with God. When I found I had sinned, I would go immediately to the Savior, abhorring and confessing my guilt, and firmly resolving never to yield again. And I believe that during the second of these two years especially, the Lord was deepening his work in my heart, for sin grew more and more odious to me, and I was less and less frequently overcome with temptation; and when I was overcome, it came to be like the opening of the gates of hell to my soul; and I could truly say, "the pains of hell gat hold upon me," until the Lord beamed upon me his forgiving smile again. Except these occasional stumblings, I could still triumph in the joy of the

Lord, and count myself a pilgrim and stranger here, with my home and treasure above; and O, how did I long and pray with strong crying and tears, all this period, to be established in righteousness, so as to stumble no more, but be an abiding pillar in the temple of God -- a constant, unwavering witness of his saving grace and power! And I may here say, that, during this period, (as before and since,) I continued to proclaim the everlasting gospel of a full salvation by Jesus Christ, as opportunity offered: and I can testify that I never stood up thus to speak in behalf of that gospel, without feeling the word of the Lord like "fire shut up in my bones," and the power of the Lord's Spirit energizing within me; and also so attending the word as not to permit me to labor in vain for the good of others. Yet oftentimes, while thus holding forth a full and permanent salvation to others, did the thought rush home to my own soul -- "thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" And I acknowledged its pertinence and force. But how to get established I found not! Yet "to will was ever present with me." At the close of this period, the thought struck me all at once with startling power, that I had in a measure backslidden and lost my first love, and that this was the reason why I was not now established as during the first period of my Christian experience. This thought greatly surprised and alarmed me. I had previously attributed all my instability to circumstances. Here was my self-justification. But now the spell was broken the veil lifted! And O! what self-reproaches! what dismay! what desperation seized me! Is it possible to recover the lost ground? in bitterness I inquired. If so, it must be done forthwith. It is barely possible, was hope's faint whisper. Then come what will, come life or death, I shall pursue that one object until it is attained, or while life endures. There was no faltering. My heart was fixed. I was desperately in earnest. I coolly, deliberately, determined to conquer or die. I pressed forward. But O, what conviction of sin! The conviction that I experienced before my conversion would bear but a faint comparison with the present. Selfishness, lust, pride, unbelief -- how did their guilt stare upon me and wring my soul with inconceivable anguish! I spent my time and strength in pouring out my soul to God in "groanings that could not be uttered."

O how vain were words to express the intense meaning of my heart at such an hour. The portals of eternity on either hand were thrown wide open before me. The glories of heaven and the woes of hell were brought into vivid view in solemn and awful contrast! I could not doubt their reality any more than I could doubt my own existence, for I saw them as clearly as my own existence. Heaven invited on the one hand, and hell threatened fearfully on the other. At times I would seem to be on the brink of perdition, and then near the portals of heaven. And how did my mind labor and sink as I sought to count or measure the ceaseless cycles of eternity. But, ah! which ever way I look, no end! is the appalling prospect! And my conscience too, all this time, performed its office faithfully. It thundered guilt, and rolled up blackness and darkness and terror before me, and left no ray of hope, unless I should at once escape from all my sins. My mind was so tossed and driven that I could not attend to the ordinary duties of my occupation, for I was then teaching a school, as well as attempting to hold forth the word of life on the Sabbath and on other occasions. I dismissed my school; ceased appointing meetings; withdrew one appointment previously made; and determined to be free from all distracting cares as far as possible, and to give myself to seeking the Lord, if peradventure I might regain his abiding presence, and obtain his sustaining grace. Although, as I said, I had seen my labors previously blessed, yet I found I could not bear prosperity, nor prevail in prayer as I believed I ought, and I concluded it was of no use to labor for others until I was "saved" myself. I now spent much of my time away in solitude, on my face before God, pleading with Him for deliverance. And this I asked not merely for myself, but also

for the sake of kindred, friends, and a world in sin -- for the sake of a professed Church that knew not Jesus Christ, having only a name to live while dead. I felt that here was my great strong hold -- that God would hear my plea "for their sakes," although, as to myself, I were too unworthy to receive.

During this struggle, which lasted full three months, in which my life and condition were continually passing in solemn and earnest review before me -- my mind continually on the stretch, and every nerve in tension, looking every hour for a complete deliverance, which came not, except by degrees, I was preserved from absolute despair by the fact that the Lord did strengthen me more and more, day by day, from my first commencing to seek the Lord afresh, with the determination to rest not till permanently established in him, and also from the fact that I found many Scripture promises which represented the Lord as "leading the blind in a way that they know not," and, as needful for them to be "in heaviness for a season," for the trying of their faith, but that if they held on "hoping in God," they should be "exalted in due time," and yet be permitted to "praise God for the help of his countenance." True, my convictions kept growing deeper and deeper for a season, and I appeared to myself to wax worse and worse, but this only encouraged me, for I knew that this revelation of my satanic character was all needful, and I besought the Lord, as he loved my soul, to spare me not, but to let me see the worst of my case, at least as much as I could bear and live: and he did so, and thereby "slew me," as it respected all self-righteousness and self-trust, and brought me to trust alone in him. At first I was where no sympathizing human ear could listen to my complaints -- no human voice attempt to soothe the anguish of my heart, for I was a stranger in a strange land, and I thanked God that it was so, for the three following reasons:

1. I know that man could not help me. I was shut up to God as my only hope, and I wanted to present my cause and my plea before him alone -- I knew my duty, and I only wanted the strength of grace to do it.

2. I was afraid, lest, making known the mere fact of God's dealing with in such a manner might be an occasion for temptation to pride, which form of temptation I dreaded almost as I dreaded death itself.

3. I was afraid of wrong instruction. I knew that God could teach me, but as for man, I knew that I never had never received any human instruction that answered in my present condition; for all would cry, "only believe, and cease all this struggle." I knew that I did believe and hope only in God, yet was not "filled with God;" and hence I knew that such instruction did not answer my purpose; nor did it correspond with the teachings of God's word; so I resolved to throw myself on the mercy of God, to be guided by his word and Spirit, not doubting but that if I held on, I should be led aright, and in due season, (after he had sufficiently tried and sifted me,) come forth into the "glorious liberty of the children of God."

I ought to have stated, that while my mind was so laboring to measure eternity, while all its fearful realities were so vividly portrayed before me, I could not but look upon all the thoughtless multitude as absolutely mad; and I wondered how a professor of religion, in view of such awful destinies as awaited the human race, could laugh and jest and make merry; while it seemed to me a totally opposite course was infinitely more appropriate. O, what were life! what all earthly good in such an overwhelming contrast! Life! an inch a point! a shadow! nay, dwindled to very nothing!

What are people thinking of? Eternity right in view! Ah, they're blind! reckless -- insane! My extreme tension of mind, and anguish of spirit, in view of my sins and the necessities of my case, as revealed to me by the Spirit of the Lord, which also seemed to be so justly chiding me for my vile ingratitude to God, wore severely on my physical system; so that I was oft reminded of those words of the Psalmist, "When thou (Lord) with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth." And various other passages in the same author seemed peculiarly applicable to my case. See Ps. 38:42 & 77. My acquaintances when they saw me wondered what was the matter with me. I told them I had been wicked, and that that was the matter. But God led me forward step by step. Yea, he led the blind by a way all unknown before. And I saw the wisdom of this, for I was thereby shut up to simple and constant faith in his naked promises. Every day and many times a day did I find some sweet promise just suited to my case. These I ate, just as a starving man would devour his longed-for food just as a condemned and dying criminal would seize the free and life-giving pardon. For O, I was a criminal most justly damned! I looked at myself as a very devil, waging a most unprovoked and cruel war against the Almighty, the God of all love! For many long weeks did I groan in view of my diabolical wickedness to God, in sinning against his forgiving grace; and though I earnestly sought his forgiveness, yet I solemnly vowed that I never would forgive myself. I tried to get my rocky, flinty heart all broken at the Savior's feet, but it would not break. I besought the Lord to break it, and it seemed as if his Spirit had placed a lever underneath, and was trying to pry up the rock from the foundation and break it, but it would not break. At length, by means of a deeper and still deeper view of the love of Christ, and God's infinite goodness, the rock which would not break began to melt! Yes, glory to God! how did my soul all gush out, with contrition, while scalding tears and heaving sobs could now take the place of those groans which before would scarce admit a tear! How did my throbbing, yet melting heart find relief in pouring out tears like water... I prostrated myself so often before my much injured Savior. But ah, that Savior knew how to heal the wounds himself had made! He knew how to bruise and how to make whole again, blessed be his name! I thanked him then for bruising, and because I knew it was he that did it, I dared to hope he would make me whole again; and how did I pour forth my thanksgivings as I discovered he was thus restoring me. The pangs of remorse by degrees subsided. The load of guilt passed away. The strength of temptation was gone. "The prince of this world came and found nothing in me." I began to have a witness that my heart was cleansed. I now began to query whether this was not the blessing the Lord had been so long leading me forward to possess. Yet I was not fully satisfied. I did not know beforehand how things would appear, but I knew that when God was satisfied with me, he would also make me satisfied, and would absolutely let me know that I was just where he wanted I should be. I said, "God is his own interpreter, and he can make it plain." And he did so. In place of the pangs of remorse, I began to feel an indwelling fullness of the Spirit of God, like a sweet holy unction, or like the fountain of the water of life, constantly rising, boiling up, as it were, within me. Both during the period that I was in such grief and bitterness of soul, and now also, there seemed to be a sensible manifestation of God by his direct power affecting my heart and sensibility, and this often made me tremble; to find myself thus noticed and thus in the awful presence of the Holy One.

I said I began to query whether this witness of the indwelling of God were not the blessing which God wished to put me in possession of: especially as I had been so long pressing after the unknown, yet to see well known evidence of being in an acceptable state before God. I had all along assumed these three things, and had proposed these as conditions of being satisfied, ere I

would cease to struggle and plead for a greater deliverance. I said, when I get where God is well pleased with me, I shall 1st, be right, (i. e. at heart.) 2d, I shall do right, i.e. in all my outward conduct: or, in other words, I shall keep all God's commandments, both in spirit and in action. And 3d, I shall feel right, i.e. all my feelings shall be in perfect harmony, and no discord, no jarring nor tossing within. But as yet, there was a feeling that God had something more for me to receive ere I should rest satisfied. But my physical energies were so exhausted by the long continued struggle, (for I had now been about three months in this conflict,) I began to see that I must rest down on the promises of God, and give myself more rest of body, and let the mercy of God do for me whatever else God desired to do in my case. Right here, and all at once, a light began to arise around the horizon of my mind. That, said I, is the thing the Lord wishes me to receive: he wishes to merge my soul into the noonday brightness of the Sun of Righteousness. This is but the dawning twilight. Now, O my soul, press on and receive its meridian blaze. The New Jerusalem, the city of God, seemed to stand off in the distance, resplendent, and basking in the glorious light of God. My soul, I said, Thou must pass into that, and there abide, for there God makes his tabernacle with men. At this crisis how earnest did my soul become, and how fearful lest I should sin and grieve the Spirit, and not be permitted to see, and walk in the fullness of this glorious light, lest I should not enter into this city of God! I prayed, watched all my ways with more jealous care, and pressed ardently forward. God heard me! The Sun of Righteousness kept rising, and more and more swiftly I drew nearer to the city, yea, close to its limits! In two or three days from the first dawning of this light, and all at once, the darkness was all past, the heavens were all resplendent with the light of God, (almost dazzling to my natural eyes, it seemed,) and I found myself translated into that holy city, "brought out of the kingdom of darkness into God's marvelous light." Here were wonders! This was like a God! But why attempt to describe it with words? they are weak; and I felt it thus! Did not say much to any one about myself: dared not, could not! Those who have seen, know, and they alone can know! I have had many glorious seasons with the Lord since that time! The light has been constantly increasing: God has established my goings! He has quelled many fears! For a year after this I often feared exceedingly lest I should sin, and lose this light; but God kept me, and kept shining upon me. The brightness of his glory has oftentimes been so great as almost to extinguish the lamp of this mortal life. The heavens seem bowed, and my soul almost drawn away from its frail tenement. At such times I ask permission to live, because my work on earth is not yet done. Sometimes I have severe conflicts with Satan, and other severe trials! But the Lord delivers me out of them all. My nervous system and bodily health in other respects, has suffered from so much tension of mind; partly from the fact that at first I knew not how much effort my physical system could endure, and partly from the fact that an all-absorbing desire for a world's recovery from its lost estate, consumes me, is constantly urging me now to over-action, in seeking to accomplish it. I know that this is the great object for which I wish to live! I know that God has taken away my sins, and has permitted me to love him with all the heart. I have the daily witness of this, and can most heartily adopt those words of the poet, altering them a little, as I may, and say,

O! matchless bliss of perfect love,
It lifts me up to things above;
It hears on eagle's wings:
It gives my ravished soul a feast,
And makes me here a constant guest,
With Jesus, priests and kings.

Source: "The Blessing of Perfect Love"
by D. S. King

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THE END