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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

**JOHN WESLEY**  
**1703 -- 1791**  
**(Founder of Methodism)**

It would appear from an examination of the written statements by John Wesley that his interest in Christian perfection preceded his conversion by some 13 years. His "Heart-Warming" experience at Aldersgate occurred on May 24, 1738, but his interest in Christian perfection dates back to 1725. It is remarkable that long before John Wesley was actually born again, he apparently began to focus on, and to seek for, Christian perfection. Below, is a chronology of some of the events in the life of John Wesley, including the date of his conversion and possible dates of his entire sanctification:

1703  
(BIRTH)

John Wesley was born on June 17, 1703, at the rectory of Epworth, England. His life-span covered nearly 88 years to his death on March 2, 1791. He was the son of Samuel and Susannah Wesley. His grandfathers were among the ministers ejected from the Church of England in 1662, so there was a strong Puritan strain in him. His father, Samuel, was rector, poet, and scholar. He spent ten years in preparing his work on the Book of Job. Susannah Wesley diligently trained her children in the things of God -- a fact that no doubt profoundly influenced the ministries of both John and Charles Wesley.

1714  
(BECAME A PUPIL AT CHARTERHOUSE)

On January 28, 1714, John Wesley became a pupil at Charterhouse, London. Even though the treatment meted out to the school-boys was Spartan, he always felt a true love for his school. Wesley never forgot his boyhood, nor did age could wither his affection for Charterhouse.

1720

(ELECTED TO CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD)

On June 24, 1720, he was elected to Christ Church, Oxford. He remained there until he was ordained deacon by Bishop Potter in 1725.

1725

(FOCUSED HIS ATTENTION ON PURITY)

About this time Wesley became acquainted with Bishop Taylor's "Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying." He says:

"In reading several parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected with that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God: all my thoughts, and words, and actions."

1726

(RECEIVED STRONGER LIGHT)

In March, 1726, he was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. It is with this College, rather than Christ Church, that Wesley's name is so closely linked. In this year, he "met with Kempis' Christian's Pattern," and he says: "The nature and extent of inward religion, the religion of the heart, now appeared to me in a stronger light than ever it had done before. I saw that giving even all my life to God ... would profit me nothing, unless I gave my heart, yea, all my heart to Him. I saw that 'simplicity of intention, and purity of affection,' one desire in all that we speak or do, and one desire ruling our tempers, are indeed 'the wings of the soul,' without which she can never ascend to the mount of God."

1727 -- 1728

(SAW THAT ONE CANNOT NOT BE HALF A CHRISTIAN)

In August, 1727, Samuel Wesley being infirm, John Wesley went to his help, and remained in his parish for about two years. He then returned to Oxford. It was apparently of the time-frame, 1727 to 1728, that Wesley writes: "A year or two after, [after 1726] Mr. Law's Christian Pattern and Serious Call were put into my hands. These convinced me more than ever, of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined through his grace, (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible,) to be all devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance ..."

1729

(SAW THAT HOLINESS IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION)

"In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of true religion. Hence I saw in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having 'the mind which was in Christ,'... even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in him ..."

"What was the rise of Methodism, so called?

"In 1729, two young men, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others to do so ..."

1730

(GROANED AFTER PERFECT LOVE)

"I then saw, in a stronger light than ever before, the only one thing needful, even faith that worketh by the love of God and man, all inward and outward holiness; and I groaned to love God with all my heart, and to serve Him with all my strength."

1733

(PREACHED SERMON ON HEART-CIRCUMCISION)

Wesley preached at St. Mary's, Oxford, before the University, on January 1, 1733 on "The Circumcision of the Heart". In this message, we can see that, even prior to his new birth, John Wesley's concepts about the essence of Christian perfection were becoming quite clear:

"It is that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit'; and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; the being so 'renewed in the image of our mind,' as to be 'perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.' "

Commenting on this sermon later, Wesley said: "January 1, 1733, I preached the sermon of the 'Circumcision of the heart'; which contains all that I now teach concerning salvation from all sin ... This was then, as it is now, my idea of perfection ..."

1734

(THE HOLY CLUB MEMBERS WERE CALLED "METHODISTS")

In 1734, John Wesley's father pled with great insistence that he should take his work and rectory at Epworth. Wesley declined, feeling that he should remain at Oxford. Upon returning to Oxford, he discovered that his brother Charles had gathered a small group of men around him to read the New Testament. John Wesley joined this Holy Club, and soon became its leader. Noting their religious habits, others called them "Sacramentarians," "Bible Moths," and Methodists (a double reference -- both to a medical sect and to their "method" in all religious practices).

It would appear that Samuel Wesley may have tasted the fruits of a genuine new birth. Before his death, he spoke words to John that were no doubt good for him to hear: "The inward witness, son -- the inward witness, that is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity." To Charles he said: "Be steady. The Christian faith will surely revive in this Kingdom; you shall see it, though I shall not."

1735

(EMBARKED FOR GEORGIA)

In 1735 Wesley was invited to go on a mission to the colony of Georgia. His father was now dead, but he mentioned this offer to his mother. Susannah Wesley's reply to him is noteworthy. She said: "If I had twenty sons, I should rejoice if they were all so employed, though I should never see the any more." Thus, John and Charles Wesley embarked for the American colony from Gravesend on Oct. 14, 1735. John Wesley said concerning his reason for going to Georgia: "My chief motive is to save my own soul ... I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by preaching it to the heathen."

On the voyage, as at Oxford, he was meticulous and strict in apportioning his time. He studied German and his Greek Testament, and held services even amidst the storms. A party of Moravians on board greatly impressed him. Their conduct in the tempest demonstrated to him that they were not alarmed. They went right on singing, and Wesley asked one of them, "Were you not afraid?" He replied, "I thank God, no." "But were not your women and children?" "No, our women and children are not afraid to die."

1736

(REACHED GEORGIA)

Wesley reached Savannah on Feb. 6. 1736, where he soon met Spangenberg, the Moravian, who asked him, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" "I know He is the Saviour of the world." "True, but do you know that He has saved you?" "I hope He has died to save me." Spangenberg then asked, "Do you know yourself?" Wesley answered, "I do," but, in telling the story of this conversation, says, "I fear they were vain words."

Wesley had purposed to become a missionary to the Indians. This purpose was frustrated by the governor of Georgia, General Oglethorpe, who wanted him to minister in the European settlement. Being denied his chief end in coming, still, as a rigorous High Churchman, he methodically and diligently sought to pursue the work of the Lord -- teaching children, reproving sinners, preparing communicants, repelling those whom he thought unworthy, and gathering a few people together for mutual conversation. In a subsequent appraisal of his condition at that time, Wesley said that he "was a child of wrath, an heir of hell," but in later years when he reassessed his writings, he said: "I believe not... I had even then the faith of a servant, though not of a son." Grave misunderstandings arose between Oglethorpe and the Wesleys which were later reconciled. But, suspicions and misunderstandings flourished in the colony. John Wesley fell in love with Sophy Hopkey, the niece of the chief magistrate of Savannah, Mr. Causton. Her affection changed, and she swiftly married a Mr. Williamson. Soon after this, Wesley repelled her from Holy Communion. Beyond all assessment on his part that she was not in a fit state of heart to receive it, on the surface it appeared like the act of a disappointed man. Her uncle brought a charge against John Wesley. He refused to acknowledge the power of a civil court in ecclesiastical affairs.

1737

(EMBARKED FOR ENGLAND)

Wesley, realizing that no further good would come from his ministry there, left the colony, and sailed for England on Dec. 22, 1737. In spite of his careful devotion and diligence in the

performance of religious duties, Wesley felt that somehow, he himself still needed to be converted. He wrote: "I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh, who shall convert me ... I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near. But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled ... Oh, who will deliver me from this fear of death?"

1738

(THE MONTH OF MAY -- WESLEY'S CONVERSION)

Wesley was spiritually hungry, but he still needed to get rid of his false concepts about the means of salvation. After his return to England he met Peter Bohler, who told him, "My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away." "Preach faith till you have it, and then because you have it you will preach faith." Wesley did so, but still had difficulty concerning momentary saving faith versus a lifetime holy living as a medium of bringing one into salvation. He could not see how such a sudden crisis experience could take the place of a lifetime of devout worship in church in bringing a soul to God.

About one month before Wesley's new birth, Bohler brought four of the Brethren to Wesley, each of whom testified to him of their momentary salvation by faith and instant assurance that their sins were forgiven. When Wesley still had difficulty believing that this could be so, Bohler told him that he could bring eight more to him that would testify in like manner. That was enough! Wesley could only cry, "Lord, help Thou my unbelief!" He finally saw into the truth of genuine saving faith, and soon he would experience its happy results in his own heart. He gathered with the members of the little society in Fetter Lane. On May 24, 1738, Wesley came to the day of his true conversion -- it was a day never to be forgotten. He described it as follows:

"I think," he wrote, "it was about five this morning, that I opened my Testament on those words, 'There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.' He writes that just as he went out, he opened the New Testament again on those words, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' In the afternoon, he visited St. Paul's, and noted that the anthem was 'Out of the deep have I called unto Thee O Lord.' Then, he describes the momentous visit to the Aldersgate meeting. 'In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.'

1738

(AUGUST -- HEARD WITNESSES OF ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION)

In August of 1738 Wesley went to Herrnhut to speak with those who were "living witnesses of the full power of faith." Apparently not all of the Moravian Brethren either experienced or taught the second work of grace, but it was among them that Wesley first encountered those who testified of being "saved from inward as well as outward sins."

"In August following, I had a long conversation with Arvid Gradin, in Germany. After he had given me an account of his experience, I desired him to give me, in writing, a definition of 'the full assurance of faith,' which he did in the following words:-- 'Repose in the blood of Christ; a firm confidence in God, and persuasion of his favour; the highest tranquility, serenity, and peace of mind, with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation of all, even inward sins.' This was the first account I ever heard from any living man, of what I had before learned from the oracles of God, and had been praying for, (with the little company of my friends,) and expecting for several years."

Michael Linner and Christian David taught him the difference between justification and entire sanctification. In reference to Linner's preaching on the subject, Wesley noted how that three times Linner described the weak state of those "who are justified, but have not yet a new, clean heart; who have received forgiveness through the blood of Christ, but have not received the constant indwelling of the Holy Ghost." He also noted how that Linner had distinguished between the carnal bondage of a justified believer seen in Romans chapter 7 and "the full glorious liberty of the children of God" seen in Romans chapter 8.

1739

(SENTIMENTS ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION PUBLISHED)

"In 1739, my brother and I published a volume of 'Hymns and Sacred Poems.' In many of these we declared our sentiments strongly and explicitly ... The first tract I ever wrote expressly on this subject was published in the latter end of this year...In this I described a perfect Christian, placing in the front, 'Not as though I had already attained.' "

1740

(PUBLISHED SERMON ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION)

"I think it was in the latter end of the year 1740, that I had a conversation with Dr. Gibson, then bishop of London, at Whitehall. He asked me what I meant by perfection. I told him without any disguise or reserve. When I ceased speaking, he said, 'Mr. Wesley, if this be all you mean, publish it to all the world. If any one then can confute what you say, he may have free leave.' " Wesley answered that he would do so, "and accordingly wrote and published the sermon on Christian perfection."

1741

(SANCTIFIED WHOLLY THIS YEAR? OR EARLIER?)

Sometime, after coming into contact with these testimonies and teachings on the second work of grace among the Moravians, Wesley thus defined the second work of grace and stated it to be what he had personally received: "Repose in the blood of Christ. A firm confidence in God, and a persuasion of His favour; serene peace and steadfast tranquillity of mind, with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and from every outward and inward sin. In a word, my heart, which before was tossed like a troubled sea, was still and quiet, and in a sweet calm."

Note the words "my" and "before" in the last sentence of the above quotation. Wesley testified "my heart," his own heart which "before" had been like a troubled sea had been made "still and quiet, and in a sweet calm." This definitely sounds like he had entered into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

The precise date when John Wesley was sanctified wholly is not known. And, apparently there is no other account, either in his own writings or in those of others, that describes with certainty his entire sanctification experience. There are, however, indirect references made by Wesley that point to the fact that he must have received the experience at some point. One statement in his Journal seems to indicate that he may have been sanctified wholly as early as 1741 or perhaps even before. Wesley's Journal for November 1, 1762 records a letter wherein the following words are found:

"I like your doctrine of perfection, or pure love; love excluding sin. Your insisting that it is merely by faith, that consequently, it is instantaneous, though preceded and followed by a gradual work), and that it may be now, at this instant ... I dislike the saying, This was not known or taught among us till two or three years. I grant you did not know it. You have over and over denied instantaneous sanctification to me but I have known and taught it, (and so has my brother, as our writings show) above these twenty years."

If in 1762 Wesley had known the experience of entire sanctification more than 20 years, then subtracting those 20 plus years from 1762 could point back to 1741 or earlier as the time when he was sanctified wholly. But, perhaps this misconstrues his exact meaning. If the phrase "above these twenty years" should be taken as only in reference to the length of time that he and Charles had then "taught" Christian perfection, then we cannot ascertain any date from this Journal entry for his entire sanctification. Nonetheless, it seems quite apparent that we should conclude from Wesley's remarks here that in 1762 he had for many years experientially "known" what it means to be sanctified wholly.

1744

(SANCTIFIED WHOLLY AT SNOWFIELD?)

Perhaps most holiness students of Wesley's life point to his experience at Snowfield in December of 1744 as the most likely time that he received the "second blessing". The following is recorded in his Journal for December, 1744:

"In the evening, while I was reading prayers at Snowfield, I found such light and strength as I never remember to have had before. I saw every thought as well as action or word, just as it was rising in my heart, and whether it was right before God, or tainted with pride or selfishness. I waked the next morning, by the grace of God, in the same spirit; and about eight, being with two or three that believed in Jesus, I felt such an awe and tender sense of the presence of God, as greatly confirmed me therein; so that God was before me all day long. I sought and found Him in every place; and could truly say, when I lay down at night, 'now I have lived a day.' "

Still, it must be admitted that, while this marvelous experience at Snowfield might well have been Wesley's entrance into perfect love, there is not enough revealed by this entry in his journal to determine beyond question that this was his reception of the second work of grace.

1760

(ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION WITNESSES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY)

It seems regrettable that more is not known concerning the particulars of Wesley's entry into the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Be that as it may, it seems apparent that at some point the great founder of Methodism himself was Divinely persuaded that the work was done in his soul, and he repeatedly pointed to that fact.

In one place Wesley wrote: "... I expressed my desire in these words:--

O grant that nothing in my soul  
May dwell but thy pure love alone!  
O may thy love possess me whole,  
My joy, my treasure, and my crown!  
Strange flames far from my heart remove,  
My every act, word, thought be love!

"And I am still persuaded this is what the Lord Jesus hath bought me with His own blood ..."

Charles Wesley had prophesied that when John's Pentecost had fully come, then cases of persons sanctified under his ministry would be as numerous as those who were justified under his preaching. In 1760 witnesses to the experience of entire sanctification began to multiply in London, Bristol, throughout England, and in Ireland. In London alone Wesley counted 652 who were clearly in the experience. Perhaps all of this has no relationship to Charles' prophecy. But it would appear that at some time prior to this John Wesley's day of Pentecost had indeed fully come. Referring to this time, Wesley wrote in his "Concise Ecclesiastical History":

"Here began that glorious work of sanctification, which had been at a stand for twenty years. But from time to time it spread, first through various parts of Yorkshire, afterwards in London, then through most parts of England; next through Dublin, Limerick, and all the south and West of Ireland. And wherever the work of sanctification increased the whole work of God increased in all its branches. Many were convinced of sin, many justified, many backsliders healed."

Wesley's Journal entry for October 28, 1762 also alludes to the fact of his day of Pentecost had fully come, and he asserts that the evidence of that fact should be apparent to "any unprejudiced reader":

"Many years ago my brother frequently said, Your day of Pentecost is not fully come; but I doubt not it will; and you will then hear of persons sanctified, as frequently as you do now of persons justified; and any unprejudiced reader may observe that it was now fully come."



Thus, by the repeated statements in his own writings, it seems quite apparent that at some point John Wesley became convinced that he was sanctified wholly, and he felt that a fair examination of the fruits of his life should convince others also of this fact.

1766

(WESLEY KEPT ON PREACHING PERFECTION)

It is not surprising that the increased numbers of those receiving the second blessing from 1760 onward brought increased opposition to Wesley's teaching of Christian perfection. In the heat of spiritual warfare for Christ, it is not uncommon for God's appointed leaders to reach the point where the pressures are so great that they really do not know, humanly, what to do. In 1766 John related to his brother Charles: "I am at my wit's end with regard to two things -- the church and Christian perfection." Then, a month later, in a moment of anxiety, he asked Charles, "Shall we go on asserting perfection against all the world? Or shall we quietly let it drop?"

It is to John Wesley's eternal credit that he did not "let it drop," but bravely stayed his righteous course and went right on preaching Christian perfection, in spite of all opposition, until his personal warfare was finished. He went on to perfection in his search for truth, in his experience of salvation, and in his labors to spread scriptural holiness over the land. Because he did, the impact of his holy influence has spread around the globe, across the centuries, and will no doubt continue until Jesus comes.

Source: "Works of John Wesley" as quoted by various authors

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THE END