

# GOD'S GENERALS

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## GOD'S GENERALS

Why They  
Succeeded  
and Why  
Some Failed



*Roberts Liardon*

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ROBERTS

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EVAN  
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## Introduction

When I was almost twelve years old, the Lord appeared to me in a vision. In this vision, He told me to study the lives of the great preachers—to learn of their successes and their failures. From that day on, I gave a large portion of my life to the study of church history.

When prominent people in the secular world die, people begin to look at their natural accomplishments. But when leaders in the body of Christ die, I believe Jesus would have us look at not only what was accomplished in the natural world through their lives, but at what they also accomplished within the body of Christ. The purpose of their remembrance is not to praise or criticize the leaders, but to see him or her as an example for our own lives.

The “Generals” that are written of in this book were human. Their stories represent a collaboration of the way life is. I have not made anyone out to be superhuman or bionic. I have told of their tears, their laughter, their successes, and their failures. They were all persecuted, lied to, betrayed, slandered, as well as honored, adored, and supported.

But most importantly, I have attempted to reveal the secrets of the power in their individual calls to the ministry—how they operated, what they believed, and what motivated them to change each of their generations for God.

The failures that took place in the lives of these great men

and women will attempt to take place again. But their successes also challenge us and are waiting to be grasped again. There is nothing new under the sun. If there is something new to you, it is because you are new under the sun.

It takes more than a desire to fulfill the will of God. It takes spiritual strength. As you read these chapters, allow the Spirit of God to take you on a journey that points out the areas in your life which need to be focused or subdued. Then, determine that your life and ministry will be a spiritual success in this generation that will bless the nations of the earth to the glory of God.

—Roberts Liardon

## **Evan Roberts**

“Welsh Revivalist”

In my opinion, the story of Evan Roberts, the young revivalist from Wales, is the saddest study I have conducted on the Generals. This young boy-preacher from the coal mines of southern Wales had an unmistakable dispensation of worldwide revival allotted to him. But because of inexperience, limited revelation, and demonic control, his incredible ministry was cut short long before its time. Before we explore his life, let it be clearly understood that the truths presented here are not intended as criticism. The lessons I will bring to light are constructively inserted so that our generation can learn to guard their hearts, carry the anointing, and prevail successfully in the heat of revival fire.

## **COAL-COVERED TRUTH**

Evan John Roberts was born June 8, 1878, into the staunch Calvinist-Methodist home of Henry and Hannah Roberts. I believe a “revivalist spirit” was built immediately within him. Evan’s parents had a strong influence in cultivating that spirit and nature within him. His nature was one of excellence and sensitivity. The family was known for their love of God’s Word and hard work. Each family member, no matter how young, had

his own well-worn Bible.

I want to make a point here: Parents, allow your children to be involved with the move of God. I can't stress how vitally important it is to teach and train your children in the things of God. They need to know how to pray, how to study the Word of God, and how to sit under the anointing. Teach them to worship God with you, and show them how to do it. Revival fires die because parents stick their children in the nursery instead of setting them in the move of God. The nursery is a blessing for taking care of infants and toddlers. But there comes a time when they are able to understand proper behavior and can be included in the revival service.

How can revival continue without passing it on? Many past revivals and some revivalists didn't take their next generation into account. As a result, God had to search for another generation to rekindle the fire that should have never gone out. Revivals don't have to end. Revivals are meant to continue. The fire of God must be passed on with each new generation. Children are pliable and sensitive, wanting to learn. They are like little sponges eager to draw in everything you share with them. So, be their teachers. If you have children, that godly responsibility of passing the fire of God onto them rests in your hands. And it is evident the family of Evan Roberts took that responsibility seriously.

Evan's strong character was the result of his family's training. While Evan was still very young, his father was injured in a mining accident. His father took Evan out of school

to help him in the coal mines. Evan never complained.

Soon, Evan had developed the family's habit of memorizing Scripture. He was never seen without his Bible. It has been said that he would even hide his Bible in the clefts of the mine while he worked. One day, a huge fire burned through everything in its path—except young Evan's Bible. Only the pages were scorched, so he continued to carry it every day and memorize Scriptures from it. Each morning, Evan stood at the opening of the mine to give a particular Scripture to each of the passing workers for their workday meditation. Then, when young Evan saw them in the evening, he would ask, "What truth did you find in that text?" As these hardworking men passed by the coal-covered boy, they had no idea how God would use him to change their nation.

### "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?"

Evan was dramatically different from the rest of the boys his age. He never took part in sports, amusements, or coarse joking. He worked in the mines every day, then came home and walked a mile to his church, Moriah Chapel. At thirteen years of age, Evan experienced his first encounter with God. It was then that Evan vowed to commit himself even further to the work of the Lord. One simple yet profound phrase spoken from the pulpit of Moriah Chapel changed Evan's life. The phrase "What would Jesus do?" became his obsession. He repeatedly asked himself, "What have I done for Jesus?" as he further dedicated himself to the work of the Lord.

Evan was so intense in giving his life to God that he read everything he could pertaining to Him. He used his earnings to purchase instruments that he later learned to play. In fact, he was able to succeed at most everything he put his hand to because he put his whole heart into it. He excelled in any business apprenticeship offered to him, and he excelled in personal character. He was also a prolific writer, having several of his poems and essays published in local newspapers.

While others of his age group became interested in dating, Evan was more likely to be inside the church discussing Scripture with other men. Soon, the elders of the church gave him the responsibility of starting a weekly debate group for young men like himself. But these happy times ended abruptly when the mine Evan worked in suffered an explosion. The single men were the first to be relieved of their duties. So, in 1898, Evan began work in Mountain Ash, a town north of where he lived. He left home not realizing the spiritual preparation he had gained.

### “I AM BURNING AND WAITING FOR A SIGN”

At that time, few people understood the power of prayer. Most attended church as a moral commitment instead of a spiritual one. But not Evan. Because of his unique desire for the Lord, Evan gave himself to fervent prayer and intercession, so much so that, by the time he was twenty years old, he was known by some as a “mystical lunatic.” Stories about him circulated widely. There were whispers about seeing him standing “trancelike” beside the road while uttering deep sighs

as his lips moved without the sound of words.<sup>1</sup> It was also said that he meditated in the Word so long that he often missed the evening meal. Sometimes he would stay up half the night discussing and praying with a friend about revival.

Several concerned ministers approached Evan regarding his unusual behavior. He simply answered them, “But the Spirit moved me.” During this time, friends also introduced him to an American specialist, Dr. Hughes. The doctor told Evan’s friends he was suffering from “religious mania.” One Christian man said of Evan:

“We usually had a reading and prayer together before we put out the lamp. Then I could hear Evan calling and groaning in the Spirit. I couldn’t understand what was his message to God again, and some holy fear kept me from asking.”<sup>2</sup>

Though people didn’t understand Evan’s methods, the spiritual power he portrayed was unmistakable. On one occasion, he traveled to Bulith Wells for a prayer meeting, at which he was called on to pray. The people’s hearts were melted within them at the power exhibited in Evan’s prayer. After the service, the minister approached Evan and advised him to consider full-time ministry.

Evan considered it and answered the call. Through his church, he was required to preach twice at all twelve affiliate churches, and his sermons were met with great approval. He confided to a friend that his heavenly secret was, “Ask, and it

shall be given unto you. Practice entire, definite faith in God's promise of the Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

During this period, Evan wrote to a friend and said, “I have prayed that the Lord will baptize you and me with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> Soon afterward, he got so caught up in the Lord that his bed shook. After that, he was awakened every night at 1:00 a.m. to be “taken up into divine fellowship.” He would pray for four hours, fall back to sleep at 5:00 a.m. for another four hours, then pray from 9:00 a.m. until 12 noon.

In December 1903, Evan knew in his heart that God had planned a great revival for the Welsh community. While preaching at Moriah he said, “I have reached out my hand and touched the flame. I am burning and waiting for a sign.”<sup>5</sup>

Let me make a point here. Revival must be in your heart before it comes into the earth. Each revival has nothing to do with the last one, but it has everything to do with the individual who brings it.

During this time, every denomination in Wales was praying for revival. Moriah Chapel had a strong Calvinistic doctrine, so Evan was well-trained in the doctrine of “man, sin, and salvation.” The young ministry students were required to listen to great men of their denomination and pattern their preaching styles after theirs. But Evan was an exception. Though he had been accepted into the Bible college, he couldn't complete his studies because of his burning desire to preach and pray.

“BEND US! BEND US!”

For Evan Roberts, 1904 was a year of great struggle. He was torn between doing what everyone expected of him and following what he felt the Spirit of God wanted him to do.

His closest friend, Sidney Evans, attended a prayer meeting and came back very excited. He told Evan of how he had fully surrendered his life to the work of the Lord. But Evan reacted strangely. Fearing he wouldn't be able to receive the fullness of the Spirit of God, he went into a deep depression—a pattern he became known for throughout his ministry. He was so consumed with this thought that no one could soothe him.

Then, in September, Evan's friends persuaded him to go with them to hear the rugged evangelist, Seth Joshua. Unknown to Evan, Rev. Joshua had prayed for years that God would raise up another "Elisha" from an ordinary person and "mantle him with power."<sup>6</sup> And Joshua got exactly what he prayed for. When mighty revival came through the leadership of Evan Roberts, the great, dignified preachers of England and Wales were forced to sit at the feet of crude, hardworking miners to see the wonderful works of God.

Evan remained silent throughout Joshua's service. But when the minister began to pray, "Bend us! Bend us!" Evan's soul stirred within him. After the meeting, the group went to Joshua's house for breakfast, but Evan refused to eat. He was extremely tense and solemn. He was afraid the Holy Spirit would come to him and that he wouldn't accept Him. So, once again, Evan put himself in a state of depression.

In my opinion, this showed young Evan's misunderstanding of the ways of the Holy Spirit. This intense, unnatural pressure he put upon himself only led to error later down the road. The Holy Spirit will never force Himself upon anyone. He will never offer you something you can't receive or ask you to perform anything you can't do. The Holy Spirit isn't out to torture your soul, drive you, or pressure you into isolation. He has come to empower you for His service. He came to impart boldness, sensitivity, and strength. All we have to say is, "Come, Holy Spirit." If our lives need adjustment, He will reveal those areas along with His plan to mature them. The kingdom of heaven is righteousness, peace, and joy. Anything else will throw you off balance.

Evan left the company of his friends and went back to the chapel where Rev. Joshua held his meeting. While there, he began to respond to Joshua's earlier prayer by crying out to the Lord, "Bend me! Bend me!" In this prayer of total submission, he received a revelation of the love of God. Evan surrendered to the will of God that day and allowed His compassion to fill him. One of Evan's friends described him during this period as a "particle of radium whose fire in their midst was consuming."<sup>7</sup>

Though many times it seemed Evan Roberts was unnaturally driven toward the things of God, it can also be said that he carried a great love for the Holy Spirit and His move in the earth.

AN ARM OUTSTRETCHED FROM THE MOON

Evan wasn't one normally given to visions. He had his first vision in October of 1904.

While strolling in a garden with Sidney Evans, Evan noticed that Sidney was in a daze, staring at the moon. Evan looked into the sky and inquired, "What are you looking at? What do you see?" Then, suddenly, Evan saw it, too. He saw an arm seemed to be outstretched from the moon, reaching down into Wales.

Evan had been fervently praying for one hundred thousand souls to be added to the kingdom of God, and he received this rare vision as a direct answer to his prayers.

He later told Sidney Evans: "I have wonderful news for you. I had a vision of all Wales being lifted up to heaven. We are going to see the mightiest revival that Wales has ever known—and the Holy Spirit is coming just now. We must get ready."<sup>8</sup> Now he was even more determined to launch his ministry. He was ready to give all his time and money to the work before him. His statement "We can do nothing without the Holy Spirit"<sup>9</sup> set the precedent for the rest of his ministry. Sometimes, it was effective, while at other times, it was extreme.

Fervent for the Holy Spirit, Evan seemed to take up a personal defense for Him at times. Once, while sitting in a service, he jumped to his feet, disrupted the sermon, and accused those in the congregation of not being sincere and earnest. His friends were concerned, while others labeled him as a lunatic. As quickly as Evan turned extreme, he would often

become levelheaded and instruct those around him how to obtain peace with God.

## **THE LOST KEYS**

Evan finally obtained approval to begin a small series of meetings. What began on October 31 as a small church meeting quickly grew into a major revival and lasted for two weeks!

The group began with a few consecrated believers who listened intently to Evan's message. Instead of standing behind the pulpit, the young revivalist walked up and down the aisles, preaching and asking questions of those sitting in the pews. This was unheard of in his day. The goal of those first meetings was to dedicate and train intercessors for the coming revival. Evan succeeded in his goal. He believed that revival would come through knowledge of the Holy Spirit and that one must "co-work" with the Spirit in order to operate in power. Even the children were trained to pray morning and night for God to "send the Spirit to Moriah for Jesus Christ's sake!"

Soon, the services grew to a fervor, and Evan sent word to the Bible college to request more workers. Strong moves of intercession flooded the room during each service, and many times the services would go past midnight. Once, Evan prayed all night with a congregation and didn't return home until the next morning. This small group of intercessors led by the young evangelist transformed the entire community. Some meetings lasted until 4:00 a.m., with crowds gathering outside

for 6:00 a.m. prayer. In two years, all of Wales would know the name of Evan Roberts.

During this whirlwind of revival, Evan refused to be recognized as its leader. He denounced anyone who sought him as such and even refused to be photographed. It is said that he once even hid behind the pulpit when a newspaper photographer came into a meeting with a camera. As a result, the only photographs we have of Evan are family possessions.

One eyewitness of the revival said that what drew people to Evan “perhaps more than any other thing, was the unfeigned humility in all his actions.”<sup>10</sup> His services were marked with laughing, crying, dancing, joy, and brokenness. Soon, the newspapers began covering them, and the revival became a national story.

Political meetings were cancelled. Soccer matches had neither players on the field nor fans in the stands. Theatres closed down due to low attendance. Gambling and alcohol business lost their trade. And doctrinal barriers came tumbling down as Christians from all denominations worshipped together in the Spirit’s move.<sup>11</sup> Some of the reporters themselves were converted at the meetings. As the revival spread with great fervor throughout Wales. Soon bars and movie houses closed. Former prostitutes started holding Bible studies. People began to pay their longstanding debts. And those who once selfishly wasted their money on alcohol suddenly became a great joy and support to their families.

The Wales revival meetings had no choirs or special ceremonies. There were no offerings, no hymnbooks, no committees, no song leaders, and no paid advertising. Leaders from denominations who were hungry for God attended the meetings. It is said that in one city, all the ministers exchanged pulpits for a day in an effort to break down denominational walls and establish unity. Even the women were welcome to participate. Up until that time, the women of Wales had been banned from any public role in church life, but now they could be seen praying and praising openly. Eventually Evan even encouraged national and racial barriers to be broken.

The Wales revival was founded on these four points: (1) Confess all known sin. (2) Search out all secret and doubtful things. (3) Confess the Lord Jesus openly. (4) Pledge your word that you will fully obey the Spirit.

Evan Roberts had discovered the keys to revival. And if those keys were important then, they are certainly important now. I believe “repentance” is a word that is somewhat tarnished today. It has lost much of its meaning due to social issues and wrong attitudes. Some people are so carried away with God’s law of grace and mercy that they overlook the rest of His laws. Grace and mercy don’t give us license to live however we want to. We don’t live under cheap grace and mercy. The righteousness we enjoy as believers was purchased by the blood of Jesus—a price too great for words. If we don’t obey, we won’t receive. Repentance brought us into the kingdom of God, and repentance will keep us moving with His cloud.

Also, we must love God more than we love anything else. When I was a young boy, I felt impressed to quit playing basketball. There's nothing wrong with basketball. But at the time, I knew what God had called me to do, and it seemed I loved basketball more than I loved to pray. So I quit playing basketball. God had set the plan for my life. I agreed to it, and prayer became my life-giving force. It's fine to enjoy life. Just make sure you don't love life more than God.

### “GOD HAS MADE ME STRONG AND MANLY”

Roberts' revival meetings were unlike any Wales had ever seen. One such service began with two girls standing in the pulpit. One pleaded and prayed for the people to surrender to the Holy Spirit. Then the other gave her testimony in song before bursting into tears. They called this “warming the atmosphere.” If the congregation wondered why Evan Roberts didn't take the platform after the two girls finished, they only needed to look at him. He was on his knees, weeping and pleading with God. Many said it was not the eloquence of Evan Roberts that broke men—it was his tears. In his book *Azusa Street*, Frank Bartleman quotes an eyewitness as saying, “Evan Roberts, in the intensity of his agony, would fall in the pulpit, while many in the crowd often fainted.”<sup>12</sup>

It was common in Evan's meetings for members in the congregation to suddenly fall on their knees and pray aloud. Waves of joy and sorrow would flood the congregation. Women fell to their knees, and men lay in the aisles weeping, laughing, and praying. All the while, there was no Bible reading

or instrument playing. A few were inspired to stand and sing hymns. It was even said the congregation was so caught up in God that they would forget to go home for Sunday dinner. This was unheard of in southern Wales in those days. As the day progressed, the evening service would become a continual prayer meeting. Evan could be seen walking up and down the aisles swinging his arms, clapping his hands, and jumping up and down.

Though his success had become the talk of the nation, many still didn't know what to think of Evan Roberts. They were used to the fiery eyes of the old-time preachers, and Evan never raised his voice. Sometimes he was called the "silent preacher." If Evan didn't sense the unction to preach, he remained quiet. On one occasion, Evan sat on the front row for three or four hours, then rose up to preach for only fifteen minutes.

Also in that day, most people were accustomed to the preachers with stern, dignified faces. But Evan was the opposite. His face constantly beamed. Once when a minister read from a list of thirty-three converts, Evan threw his arms around him and exclaimed, "Is this not glorious?"

As a result of the revival, local stores couldn't keep Bibles in stock. The Welsh coal-mining industry also took on a new look. Their workhorses had previously been trained to respond to instructions that included profanity. But with the coal-mining crew having been born again, they found that their horses had to be retrained because the animals didn't know

how to follow a command without a curse word in it.

Of course, there was the usual concern. People were murmuring because there seemed to be no order in the services. And Evan was operating around the clock without rest. When asked about it once, he replied:

“Tired? Not once. God has made me strong and manly. I can face thousands. My body is full of electricity day and night and I have no sleep before I am back in meetings again.”<sup>13</sup>

It is a documented fact that Evan Roberts slept and ate very little during the first two months of this great revival. In fact, he slept only two or three hours a night.

#### HEAR THIS: REST

In order to continually walk in the Spirit, we must obey the universal laws instituted by God. One of those laws is to take care of your physical body. While it is true that the Spirit is greater than the flesh, if we don't take care of that flesh while on earth, the body will break down, or even die. If the body dies, the spirit must depart. God established a universal law that says our bodies need proper rest and nourishment. God Himself rested on the seventh day after the work of creation, establishing the principle for us.

When I am in the anointing, it affects every part of me. My body feels energized, and my mind is submitted to the will of God. Why? Because the anointing brings life. However, the

physical demands of my body continue, whether or not the anointing is present. My blood still needs oxygen and nutrients, and my mind still needs rest. We are not in our glorified bodies yet. Thus, mature revivalists must learn to care for their physical bodies. You can live out of your spirit, operate in the anointing, and get the rest you need. If you don't, disaster is pending. The Holy Spirit will never drive you—He leads you. You can't follow God and hear Him accurately if your body is exhausted and driven. Pressure and need abound when revival hits because mankind is made aware of his spiritual condition. A revivalist must know how to lead and rest in order to remain a vital instrument of God. I believe one of the main reasons Evan Roberts' ministry was cut short was because he didn't learn this principle.

Evan was soon showing many signs of emotional strain. But despite the overload, he continued to go from town to town and pleaded with residents to think of the lost. Whenever friends would encourage him to rest, he reacted strongly against them. Though his body was rapidly wearing down, the power of God continued to feed the hunger of the people. One newspaper reported that while some were shouting with conviction, others were literally shaking.

## **DEMONSTRATING THE DIVINE**

It was a supernatural experience to be in an Evan Roberts meeting. He carried the ability to usher in the presence of the

Holy Spirit as almost a tangible force. He made the common churchgoer aware of the spirit world, especially in the area of purity and holiness toward God. Since he rarely preached, Evan allowed three female singers, Annie Davies, Maggie Davies, and S. A. Jones, to travel with him. Many times, they sang an inspired message from God to the congregation. Evan would rebuke anyone who tried to hush the singing. He believed the Holy Spirit should be given the primary role and that no one had the right to interrupt Him. He felt that so doing invited the wrong kind of authority and control.

To Evan, the Holy Spirit wasn't some unseen force but a divine Person who must be praised and adored in His own right and totally obeyed. It even came to the point that when one or two people in the congregation wouldn't participate, Evan would stand up and say, "The Spirit can't be with us now."<sup>14</sup> Then, many times, he would leave the service.

Residents from local towns and surrounding communities would often pour into the buildings for Evan's meetings. In a town with a population of three thousand people, over one thousand would attend the meetings. If they didn't arrive early enough to get a seat, the people remained outside just to catch a glimpse. Amazed, newspaper reporters noted that communities had never seen so many visitors as when Evan Roberts came to town.

Soon, word of this revival spread to other nations. The people of South Africa, Russia, India, Ireland, Norway, Canada, and Holland rushed to Wales. One group of Americans came

just to be able to say they were there when the miracles happened. Many came to carry a portion of this revival back to their own nations. It is said that during this time, the Californian evangelist and journalist Frank Bartleman wrote to Evan and asked how to bring revival to America. Evan corresponded several times with Bartleman, each time listing principles for revival while encouraging him to pursue it, and assuring him of the prayers from Wales. Bartleman would later become instrumental in recording the events of the Azusa Street Revival, which originated in Southern California in 1906. There is no doubt that the revival in Wales started a worldwide hunger for God.

## **CONFUSION AND COLLAPSE**

In 1905, Evan Roberts' mind became confused. A Congregational minister's published criticisms of the young revivalist unsettled him greatly, but he pushed on.<sup>15</sup> He often said that he wanted to enter into the "sufferings of the Master." Sometimes, he would start a service in gentleness and joy, then suddenly jump up, wave his arms, and sharply rebuke those who weren't pure in heart. Then he would threaten to leave the service. He commented to his friend Sidney Evans that he was afraid of speaking words that weren't of God. He heard many voices, and sometimes he wasn't sure which was God's and which was his. He was also constantly examining himself for any unconfessed sin. His number one fear was that people would exalt him instead of God.

Revival attendees in the town of Neath were confused and disappointed by Evan's sudden decision to remain in seclusion for seven days in the home of his host. He received no visitors and spoke to no one during that time.<sup>16</sup>

As the revival continued and specific needs became apparent, Evan began to operate in the gifts of the Spirit. Out of ignorance, the people labeled Evan telepathic, since they didn't understand how he could be so spiritually accurate. But instead of stopping to teach the people concerning the gifts of the Spirit, Evan simply continued to operate in them.

At times, Evan would be preaching, then suddenly would stop. He would look up into the balcony and exclaim that someone there needed salvation. Within seconds, a person would fall to his knees and cry out in repentance to God. This happened often in his services.

Sometimes Evan would name a specific sin that was present and call for immediate repentance. Other times, he would know of a person outside the building agonizing before God. Evan would abruptly leave the building, head out into the street, and find that person on his knees crying to God.

The voices Evan was hearing began to trouble him greatly. But instead of receiving counsel from mature leaders, he chose to continue following the signs and to ignore the uneasiness within. It was at this time that Evan Roberts suffered his first emotional collapse. He was forced to remain in the home of a friend and cancel his meetings.

## “OBSTACLES ARRIVING..AND DEPARTING”

When the people heard of his cancellation, they were outraged and offended. Though still severely fatigued, Evan was swayed by their pressure and rescheduled the meeting.

But as to be expected, at the meeting he was hazy in mind and rebuked the crowd sharply. He even began to point out “obstacles arriving” and “obstacles departing.” The people became more concerned with the conflict he was pointing out than with their hunger for God. After this, complaints and criticism abounded against Evan from every corner of Wales. They labeled him a “hypnotist,” “exhibitionist,” and “occultist.” In retaliation, Evan began to condemn entire congregations for the cold hearts of one or two who would show up at his meetings. He once even condemned a man’s “soul” forbidding anyone to pray for him.

Accusation and criticism spread like wildfire. Every day produced new, bitter charges in the newspapers and letters. And each new meeting was filled with challenging agnostics who called him a “bearer of false fire” or “profaner.” Friends tried to justify his actions, saying he was a young, inexperienced minister and subject to making “a young man’s mistake.”

Soon, Evan Roberts suffered another physical and emotional breakdown. Much to his critics’ delight, Evan canceled all his meetings. He was branded as unbalanced, and revival converts began to wonder if they had been deceived by

Satan. In response to the outburst, a psychologist who examined Evan published this remark: “Our organisms can’t support such pitiless tensions and violent repeated shocks, shaking the nerves and exhausting the brain and body.”<sup>17</sup> With this, Evan went into silence for a season.

### GREAT GLORY, GREAT STRAIN

Not to be outdone by critics, the supporting public flooded Evan’s secretary with requests for him to minister. After a short season of rest, he agreed to accept the invitations, and he published an itinerary of the meetings in the newspapers.

On the day of his first meeting, the streets were packed. Hundreds arrived early to get a seat. As it was about to begin, his secretary took the platform and read a note from Evan: “Tell the people I shall not come to the service. The Spirit prevents my coming and I can’t speak.”<sup>18</sup> There were great cries of disappointment and anger. Even Evan’s friends couldn’t support this “leading of the Spirit.” The best they could say of him was that he was under great strain.

Evan locked himself away to spend time in the Word and prayer. Then, after another short season of rest, he returned to public ministry. This time, the results looked like the days of the early revival. Evan saw himself as “the Lord’s special messenger who would arouse the churches for their task of saving the nation.”

Again, sharp criticism arose. Evan, no longer known for his gentleness, openly rebuked public leaders and announced of

one particular church he was ministering in that it was not “founded upon the Rock.” One devastating blow came at a men’s meeting in this same church when Evan filled in for the absent pastor, facing hundreds of disturbed men. When he arrived, he wouldn’t step up to the platform, choosing instead to sit silent in his chair for two hours. As criticism was openly voiced by the ministers there, Evan got up and left the chapel. When the pastor returned, he vowed the meetings would continue in peace and begged the ministers to conduct themselves peacefully. When Evan took the platform that night, he smiled and exhorted them to study the true Shepherd in Ezekiel 34.

Because of his failing condition, Evan’s emotional wounds became more difficult to heal. He became greatly disturbed at small things. He took it personally when he heard of converts “barking after the devil,” or “following healers and prophetesses.” As a result, he remained depressed most of the time.

The critical point of Evan Roberts’ downfall came when he returned to northern Wales in the summer of 1906. He was asked to participate in a Keswick-type Easter convention for ministers and church leaders. It was there that Evan spoke on what he called his “new burden,” which was the identification with Christ through suffering. Soon afterwards, he became tremendously overstrained and broke down again.

## **ENTER JEZEBEL**

At the Keswick meeting, Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis introduced herself to Evan. Mrs. Penn-Lewis was a socially influential and wealthy woman from England.

She was also a minister, but her ministry had been scorned by the Welsh due to serious doctrinal conflicts. They rejected her “suffering” teachings and abolished her ministry in their nation.

When Mrs. Penn-Lewis heard Evan’s message on the cross, she aligned herself with him to gain his acceptance. And she confided to friends that she felt Evan “had too been shattered and would need some type of getaway.” Then she convinced Evan of her position while pointing out his excellent teaching and the abuses he was suffering because of it. In his weakened condition, Evan succumbed to her influence. Less than a month after being constantly paired with Penn-Lewis, Evan suffered his fourth and most serious nervous breakdown.

Newly discovered letters show that Penn-Lewis had ulterior motives with Evan Roberts. She used his name repeatedly while exonerating her own methods and beliefs. She also told the ministers of Wales that she was so hurt by their opinion of her and her doctrine that she wouldn’t return to their nation. And she added that it was best for Evan to stay away from Wales because he, like her, was “too shattered to do anything.”

After this announcement by Penn-Lewis, Roberts was transported quickly and quietly by train from his beloved homeland and place of his call. Penn-Lewis and her husband

retired Evan to their estate in England, Woodlands. Then they built their new home around Evan Roberts' needs. They built him a bedroom, a prayer room, and his own private stairway. It was here that the great evangelist was confined to bed.

### FIRST KINGS 21?

While at Woodlands, Penn-Lewis visited Evan daily. Evan listened respectfully as she told him of the mistakes and wrong judgments she felt he made while in the ministry. But Evan wasn't able to discern that everything the woman said was based entirely on her opinions.

When one local minister was forbidden a personal interview with Roberts while gathering information for a book, he was angered by Penn-Lewis' complete control over the revivalist's affairs. Convinced Penn-Lewis had destroyed Evans' effectiveness, he wrote that she and those working with her had done "much towards marring his usefulness."<sup>19</sup> This minister's letters were intercepted by Penn-Lewis and never seen by Evan. Other correspondence went completely unanswered, and rumors circulated wildly concerning Roberts' disappearance from the field.<sup>20</sup>

As Penn-Lewis counseled Evan in his seclusion, she questioned him about the supernatural gifts that operated through him. She determined that Evan's depression was caused from this spiritual operation. Denouncing these gifts given to Evan, Penn-Lewis lectured that unless he was totally crucified to self, he was deceived. Filled with condemnation,

Evan finally agreed that all the supernatural operations he had experienced couldn't have been of God. Besides confounding the multitudes, Evan concluded that he, too, had been deceived by the supernatural operations.

From this point on, Evan determined from Mrs. Penn-Lewis' counsel that he would no longer trust any moving of the supernatural. And he concluded that in order for the Holy Spirit to move through any believer, he or she would have to have a far greater wisdom and experience than that which he possessed. The depressed revivalist's condition was extremely frail and was further frustrated by the repeated prodding and drilling of Penn-Lewis.

I wonder if Evan ever considered the thousands that turned to God and became born again because of those gifts. Could he remember the multitudes that came from other nations to receive from his ministry and carry it to their countries? No doubt he heard of their glowing reports in their own nations.

I wonder if he thought of the multitudes, hungry for a touch, who stood in the streets because he had been so transparent for the Holy Spirit to use. Did he ever once consider that his lack of rest—not a lack of consecration caused his confusion? Did he think the mistakes he made from exhaustion summed the total fruit of his ministry?

If Evan Roberts ever did consider these things, the thought never turned to action. Thus, the spiritual equipment that came as a result of his call was severely damaged for any future

manifestation.

### PULPIT MINISTRY? NEVER AGAIN

Faced with much criticism for her actions with Evan, Mrs. Penn-Lewis wrote to a respected revivalist. In the letter, she stated how Evan Roberts needed to be “safeguarded” and that he was maturing at a “great rate, seeing how he had been misled.” She later wrote the same minister, this time stating how Evan had grown spiritually and that she could see how the two of them were being “specially trained for a special work.”

In my opinion, it seems that Mrs. Penn-Lewis was using the strength and call of Evan Roberts to promote herself. From past record, she didn't have the strength, character, or call to make it on her own. Therefore, I believe she needed something that would prove her spiritual validity. And that “something” was Evan Roberts. If she could gain his partnership, then she could share his platform.

Though Evan remained isolated at the home of Penn-Lewis, a minister and a friend were allowed to visit him. As they counseled and prayed with him, they greatly influenced his recovery. Their love helped to encourage Evan spiritually, but it was still another year before the emotionally shattered revivalist was able to physically stand or walk.

After a year, medical advisors told Evan to never undertake pulpit ministry again. He would be able to do informal counseling, but he was advised to never preach again. Obviously, for more reasons than health, Penn-Lewis agreed.

Unaware of his physical condition, the Welsh revival converts were very hurt. They felt deserted by their leader. A year or so after Evan's move to Woodlands, concerned friends made accusations that Penn-Lewis was guilty of misleading Evan and that she had been far too secretive concerning their relationship. Evan answered their criticism by saying that he remained at her estate of his own free will. He also said Penn-Lewis was "one sent by God" and that her work could only be understood by "the faithful ones of God whose eyes are opened of God."<sup>21</sup> But sadly, with eyes wide open, it was Evan who refused to see.

## **SEVERING THE BLOOD TIE**

Shortly thereafter, Evan began to refuse visits from his closest relatives. When his mother became seriously ill, the news wasn't passed on to him because of his nervous condition. It seems the decision was made by Penn-Lewis. But once when Evan's father came to see him, it was not Penn-Lewis, but Evan himself, who refused to speak with him. The reason given for not seeing his father was that "he had been set apart for a highly spiritual task and had thus been obliged to forget ties of blood."<sup>22</sup>

There is an important point I want to make here. Don't ever cut your family off. Whether or not you see "eye to eye" with them is irrelevant. Many of you are where you are today because of the prayers of your family. The old saying that

“blood is thicker than water” is true. When all of hell turns against you, you can usually count on your family to love and care for you, especially if you were raised in a Christian home. By cutting off your blood ties, you cut off part of your own heritage. For some reason, it seems revivalists can be misled in this area, especially if they feel their family isn’t spiritual enough for them. John Alexander Dowie went through the same thing. He even forsook his last name for a season. You can never become so spiritual that you forsake the Word of God that commands: “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2–3).

According to the Word, if you dishonor your family, you will not be at peace, and your life could be shortened. If you feel too spiritual for your family, then love them to your level. Never forsake them.

## **WAR ON THE RANKS**

During these isolated years, Penn-Lewis relied on the anointing of Evan Roberts and wrote a number of books. The first one, *War on the Saints*, was published in 1913. Mrs. Penn-Lewis stated the book was birthed from six years of prayer and testing of the truth. It is believed the two authored the book together, but she received the credit. And rightfully so. Intended to be a complete answer manual to spiritual problems,

it was instead a compiled work of spiritual confusion.

Within a year after the book was published, Roberts denounced it. He told friends it had been a “failed weapon which had confused and divided the Lord’s people.”

Though his opinion eventually changed, during the years of writing *War on the Saints*, Evan seemed mesmerized by Penn-Lewis, saying, “I know of none equal to her in understanding of spiritual things, she is a veteran in heavenly things.”<sup>23</sup> At this stage of Evan’s recovery, Penn-Lewis convinced him that his sufferings were a divine plan of God to equip him to do battle against satanic powers and to train others for battle. As a result, she persuaded him to translate into Welsh her revelations on warfare and to compose booklets of it into English.

It is amazing to see how a national revivalist, once so strong and invincible from the power of the Holy Spirit, could now become so harnessed, subdued, and deceived. The biblical stories of Elijah and Jezebel, or of Samson and Delilah, continue to repeat themselves throughout history.

## **SERMONS IN THE SHADOWS**

The newly formed team of Roberts and Penn-Lewis also published a magazine entitled *The Overcomer*. This was a Penn-Lewis idea in which Evan wrote an essay, and she wrote the remainder of the issue. From my personal view, the

magazine was just another tool of Penn-Lewis' continued need to bring validity and popularity to her work. It attacked early Pentecostal groups and listed their practices as satanic. But with a mailing list of approximately five thousand people, the magazine circulated throughout Britain, Europe, North America, South Africa, Korea, and China.

Penn-Lewis fell ill in late 1913. In her absence, Evan wrote most of the magazine. Then, several months after her health returned, she announced she was closing the magazine. She decided to hold what she called "Christian Workers' Conferences" where she would preach. During these conferences, Evan was to stay in the prayer room, and, at times, he would be allowed to counsel groups of people. This was justified by the fact that his medical advisors had told him to never again stand behind the pulpit. So Evan submitted and used his gifts in counseling. One person who sat under his group counsel said, "What strikes me most is Evan Roberts' accuracy of insight, for he is rarely at fault in his diagnosis and his spiritual discernment."

How could one, who once seemed so invincible from the might of the Holy Spirit, and who balked at anyone who suggested otherwise, now be contained to only counseling sessions?

Penn-Lewis' conferences eventually became less popular over the years. When they did subside, Evan found his outlet through The School of Prayer. The school came out of "The Prayer Watch," which was instituted during the Swansea

Convention of 1908. In The School of Prayer, Evan taught how to intercede for families, ministers, and churches. And he wrote essays on various aspects and degrees of prayer. Several ministers commented that everything they knew about prayer came from Evan's teachings.

Evan came alive when he spoke of prayer. The school sparked a new flame inside him. Eventually he detached himself from The Prayer Watch and turned privately toward his own prayer life.

For a while, several met with him in his prayer room within the Penn-Lewis home. Then he pulled himself away from the group and chose to intercede privately before the Lord. Evan once commented to a friend, "I would like to reach a state of prayer where my life would be naught but one prayer from morn to night."

Evan seemed thrilled to be called to a life of intercession. His prayer ministry focused on Christian leaders and believers around the world. When a group of French Salvation Army officers asked him about aggressive warfare, he answered:

"In Luke it does not say, 'Preach and faint not,' but 'Pray and faint not.' It is not difficult to preach. But while you pray, you are alone in some solitary place, fighting in a prayer-battle against the powers of darkness. And you will know the secret of victory."<sup>24</sup>

I believe this statement supported Evan's choice to leave public ministry. In fact, he became so detached from humanity

that he could no longer relate to people. Penn-Lewis wrote this of his behavior: “Those who are around him can’t get into conversation with him—even if present in the same house.”<sup>25</sup>

Evan Roberts remained inside the walls of the Penn-Lewis home for eight years.

The life of Evan Roberts was complex. I find it interesting that even though Penn-Lewis used Evan’s ministry influence for her own ulterior motives, Evan obviously allowed it. In the beginning, he probably had little choice because of his invalid condition. However, the young revivalist remained in her household for eight years. And this leaves me with a multitude of questions. Was the Penn-Lewis home a comfort zone for him? Did he lose all confidence in his public image? Why didn’t he go home? Did his emotional breakdowns cause him to feel secure with someone else in control? The only thing we can conclude for sure is that Evan Roberts made a choice to leave the public forefront. And the Penn-Lewis home is where he wanted to be.

#### “SHALL WE HAVE REVIVAL AGAIN?”

It is not exactly clear how or why Penn-Lewis and Evan Roberts separated. First, it was noticed in 1920 that he was no longer contributing to any of her writings. When asked about his absence, she responded, “It is remarkable that Mr. Roberts has never been able to take part in the work again, but his work has been carried on by others.”<sup>26</sup>

Then, sometime between 1919 and 1921, Evan moved to

Brighton, in Sussex. He had purchased a typewriter and began to write several booklets. But they were unorganized and much of the Scripture was out of context. The booklets were never a success.

Evan had written to several friends in his homeland to tell them how he had never forgotten their love and support. England and Wales were bitterly divided at this time. Returning to his homeland wouldn't be easy without the support and the permission from the citizens of Wales. Besides the fact that Evan had left, the converts of the Welsh Revival were shocked and outraged at what they had read in *War on the Saints*. It seemed to them their leader was now contradicting everything he once stood for. The Welsh didn't know what to think of the young revivalist now. They thought they had known his heart, but they couldn't explain his actions.

Evan wrote to his denomination and congratulated a minister who received a new position in it. The minister was elated to receive the letter and asked if he could publish it to break Evan's ten-year silence. Evan consented, and was invited to return to Wales at his convenience. Evan did just that.

In 1926, Evan's father fell ill. When Evan returned home for a visit, the family was receptive. All the members were happy to see him and assured him that all was forgiven. And while he was there, some members of a particular chapel asked him to hold a service. Obviously forgetting the medical advisor's warning, Evan took the pulpit. While the congregation was surprised at his middle-aged appearance, they recognized the

power of the Holy Spirit that still rung through Evan's voice. The people became so excited that it was murmured throughout northern Wales, "Shall we have revival again?"

Mrs. Penn-Lewis died of lung disease in 1927. Evan had been longing for his homeland of Wales for some time. After her death in 1927, Evan returned home permanently. It is interesting to note that though he began to visit Wales, he never moved there from England until Penn-Lewis died.

#### "THE ROOM FLOODED WITH LIGHT"

Evan's father died in 1928, and at the funeral service, Evan did something unusual. As his father was being somberly eulogized, he suddenly interrupted and said, "This is not a death but a resurrection. Let us bear witness to this truth." Of that day, one person remarked, "Something like electricity went through us. One felt that if he had gone on there would have been another revival then and there."

Indeed, there was a short revival. The deacons of Moriah asked Evan to take part in a special service. When he decided to speak, the exciting news traveled throughout Wales. Visitors poured into northern Wales, and locals rushed to the chapel after work. Two hours before the service began, the chapel was full. Outside in the streets, another large crowd had assembled. Young people were eager to hear the man their parents spoke of. Evan calmly addressed the crowd. Then he went outside to address the overflow of people.

During this brief period, he visited various chapels and

warned against the choking materialism that had crept into the church. Once, two parents brought their child to Evan in his prayer room. As he prayed for the child, “the room was flooded with light and with a sense of the Spirit of God.” The parents began to praise and worship God at the top of their voice. Soon, nearby workers heard them and left their jobs to join the group. Shoppers in the same district also heard the celebration and ran to take part. In a matter of time, there was such a large crowd gathered that wagons couldn’t get through the streets. According to an eyewitness, Evan prayed for healings and deliverances and operated in the gift of prophecy. But he is said to have openly rebuked someone who tried to speak in tongues. Nevertheless, some thought Evan Roberts had become Pentecostal. Healings, conversions, and answered prayers were the most talked about results of this small revival. A year later, Evan Roberts totally disappeared from public life.

## **A SHADOW OF SUCCESS**

By 1931, Evan was almost a forgotten man. He stayed in a room provided by Mrs. Oswald Williams. She wanted nothing from Evan but to ensure his peace of mind. He spent the last years of his life writing poetry and letters to ministers. He kept a daily journal and enjoyed watching sports and theater. In May 1949, Evan had to stay in bed all day for the first time. One word was written in the September 1950 portion of his journal. It was the word “ill.”

Evan Roberts was buried on January 29, 1951, at the age of seventy-two. He was buried in the family plot behind Moriah Chapel in northern Wales. Some years later, a memorial column was raised in front of Moriah commemorating his efforts to stir revival.

The funeral service itself turned into a memorial. Hundreds who loved Evan Roberts but had lost sight of him through the years attended and sang his favorite hymns.

Of the many tributes to him, the memorial in The Western Mail eulogized him best. It read, "He was a man who had experienced strange things. In his youth, he had seemed to hold the nation in the palms of his hands. He endured strains and underwent great changes of opinion and outlook but his religious convictions remained firm to the end."

Indeed, Evan Roberts was a great revivalist who held the keys of spiritual awakening. He pioneered a religious move of the Spirit of God in Wales. However, forty years later, not a trace of this revival could be found in his homeland. It would remain as only a memory in the hearts of those who experienced it.

But, why just "a memory"?

Because one man can't carry the weight of revival alone. He can lead a move of God, but the people also have their part to play. If a move of God fades away, it is partly because the people never continued in what they received. So we are in error if we solely blame the leader.

There are a multitude of unanswered questions circling Evan Roberts' life. Some believe Evan was ordained by God for a two-year public ministry, then was called to spend the rest of his life in worldwide prayer and intercession. If this were totally true, I believe he would have died a happy man. But dark and depressing poetry was found written in his journals. In his sixties, he wondered if there was any purpose left in his life. His reaction was a mixture of "personal loss, loneliness, and failure." It seemed he continually searched for the part he was to play.

I believe Evan Roberts carried the spiritual truths that would shake the world, but those truths were only in his heart. It seemed he could never find the keys to emotional strength. Evan wanted his personality to fade into the shadows and he said repeatedly, "I do not want to be seen." Yet, in my opinion, the weakness of his emotional disposition caused him to be seen more than if he had taken his place in the authoritative leadership that comes in the move of God.

To carry the weight that comes with leading a revival, especially for a nation, all three parts of the human being—spirit, soul, and body—must be made strong. As we can see from his life, there is more to revival than spiritual revelation. Spiritual hunger and revelation are always where it begins. But we are more than spiritual beings. The human body and emotions must be strong through the Word of God in order to maintain revival in the earth.

Your work for God doesn't have to fail or be cut short.

Strengthen your body, season your soul, and yield your spirit to the plan of God. You can have revival in your nation and run with it successfully!

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1 Brynmor Pierce Jones, *An Instrument of Revival: The Complete Life of Evan Roberts, 1878–1951* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1995), 10.

2 *Ibid.*, 10–12; 19.

3 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 14.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, 15.

6 Charles Clarke, *Pioneers of Revival* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1971), 26.

8 James Alexander Stewart, *Invasion of Wales by the Spirit through Evan Roberts* (Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 1963), 28.

9 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 26.

10 David Matthews, *I Saw the Welsh Revival* (Kimmel, IN: Pioneer Books), 75.

11 Stewart, *Invasion of Wales*, 64, 65.

- 12 Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 33.
- 13 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 41.
- 14 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 58–59.
- 15 Clarke, *Pioneers*, 29.
- 16 Matthews, *I Saw the Welsh Revival*, 76.
- 17 Matthews, *I Saw the Welsh Revival*, 92–98.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 19 Eifion Evans, *The Welsh Revival of 1904* (Bridgend, Mid Glam, Wales: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1969), 174.
- 20 Matthews, *I Saw the Welsh Revival*, 115–116.
- 21 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 168.
- 22 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 170.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 169–170.
- 24 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 192.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 198.
- 26 Jones, *Instrument of Revival*, 204.