

Margaret Peoples Shirer

Explorer, Translator, and Proclaimer

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Margaret Peoples Shirer¹ (1897–1983) earns a place in herstory as an influencer of multiple nations through her faith, adaptability, and tenacity. She was an amateur anthropologist, an enthusiastic and unashamed advocate for Christianity, and a promoter of whole-being wellness, including the spiritual, physical, mental, and social health of those she served. She also created a writing system for a previously illiterate people group and translated scriptures into several African languages.

In the early twentieth century, Protestant women, as well as men, proclaimed the Gospel with an urgency driven by their expectation of Christ's imminent return and the lostness of humanity. In letters, speeches, and articles, female missionaries wrote that they considered their work necessary because of their call to missions. Their missionary service was inescapable and undisputable because they considered their call a righteous cause. Difficulties in crossing cultures, leadership constraints, and other challenges they faced are buried in numerous reports of mission results, fundraising, and recruitment of new missionaries. Margaret's letters and updates are no exception. She was a prolific writer; there are over 600 pieces of her writing in the Assemblies of God (AG) missionary archives and the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center (FPHC) in Springfield, Missouri.²

Historically, Pentecostalism has been a movement that relies on personal experience and hearing from God and scriptural texts. Thus, Pentecostal men and women could equally feel called to become missionaries. If they had experienced Spirit baptism as described in the biblical account in Acts 2, they could go abroad into Christian missions. From the early stages of the twentieth-century Pentecostal revival (approximately 1905–25), the movement’s leaders began to define men’s and women’s roles with some distinctions of where and how that call should be carried out. Margaret Peoples Shirer began her international career before the rules governing her denomination (the Assemblies of God) were established. She carved out a life of service on her terms.

Margaret Peoples began her cross-cultural service with a four-year term in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) as a single woman. During her second term, she married Lloyd Shirer. She was ordained in 1925 and worked in West Africa until 1947. Years later, she and Lloyd spent time in Haiti as well, teaching and training residents in childcare and family health and well-being. Margaret was known as a big personality and an outstanding speaker at many conferences at a time when women were not often given the opportunity. She remained a missions recruiter into her eighties.

Her Story and Expectations

Early Life and Conversion

Margaret Peoples Shirer was born in Ireland in 1897. Margaret’s father, a farmer, refused to let her continue her education beyond grammar school, reckoning that further learning would be wasted on a girl. She trained as a domestic servant in Ireland and later in Philadelphia. For two years during her teens, she set a lifelong pattern for self-learning, rising at four in the morning to study scripture until six. Margaret memorized and assimilated the Bible, hiding the reading light under the bed covers to keep from disturbing her family, according to her application to AG missions (“Application for Endorsement as a Missionary: Foreign Missions Committee of the General Council of the Assemblies of God,” November 11, 1919, AGWM Archives).

Margaret was influenced in her faith by strong female leaders such as Irish female evangelist Miss Bell Malseed from Donegal, Margaret’s home county. Malseed’s general influence was demonstrated by her signature on the Ulster Covenant Women’s Declaration of September 28, 1912, opposing the home rule of Ireland (Malseed n.d.; PRONI). Following Malseed’s example, Margaret felt called

to be an African missionary when she was fifteen years old and called to preach the following year. She stayed in touch with Malseed after she immigrated to the United States, listing the evangelist on her missionary application as one of her personal references.

Call and Application to Foreign Missions

By 1917, when she immigrated to Philadelphia to live near her sister, Margaret thoroughly knew the Bible, though she continued to study it on her own. In Philadelphia, Peoples found Christian friends and sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit. She was home alone when she received her Spirit baptism, but it was confirmed in public with a message in tongues during a church service. Her church promised to support her as a faith missionary. She remembered:

It was an independent Pentecostal church that sent me to Africa. The Spirit had just fallen and it was a brand new church. I told the pastor and others that I had a call to Africa; I didn't know where. They said, 'Go, make your preparations and come back and tell us when you are ready. We will stand behind you with our support.' So I studied the Bible at night and made my preparations. (Margaret Peoples Shirer, interview with Adele Flower Dalton, "Interview with Margaret Peoples Shirer: Upper Volta," 2, FPHC)

According to her missionary application, she considered herself optimistic and able to work with others (Peoples, "Application," AGWM Archives). She worked two jobs, demonstrating the vigor with which she would tackle missionary obligations in later years. She received an enthusiastic written endorsement from the first AG general superintendent, Eudorus (E. N.) Bell (1866–1923), on her application—even though she indicated a "grammar school" education and that she had previously won few people to Christ.

Single Woman Missionary in Africa

Peoples began missions in Upper Volta, also known as Burkina Faso, as a twenty-two-year-old single woman in 1919. En route to Africa, she met three like-minded others on a stopover in Liverpool, England: Mrs. Jenny Farnsworth and Mr. and Mrs. Leeper. Together, the foursome traveled to Sierra Leone and onward to Burkina Faso. High fever struck her on her arrival in Africa, but she made the difficult boat journey upriver to Upper Volta with the rest. The missionaries set up their portable organ to sing and testify at every stop, from boat landings to railroad stations (Wright 1921, 19; M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC). In a recent history of Pentecostalism in Africa, Margaret is mentioned as one of "two single

women” who, along with Wilbur Taylor and Harry Wright and their wives, “arrived in Mossi Land on January 1, 1921. Because they did not know anything concerning this tribe, they had to question people on their journey. The emperor of the Moose [formerly called Mossi] sent them to one of his ministers so that he could take care of them” (Roamba 2016, 58).

She was an adventurer with a big personality, always up to learn something new or try something different. Margaret remarked:

Being young, for me everything was fun. In the daytime, I talked with the people on my side of the boat, watched the people play in the water. ... We were on these boats for 21 days, down the Niger. Then we changed boats and went from another town, 3 days, to a place called Mopti. ... Now, real travel began. (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC)

It took twenty-eight days of all-day travel to reach the outpost of Ouagadougou. Margaret reported that, after sundown, “we would set up camp, light fires, and do our cooking” (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 2, FPHC).

Upon arrival at her first mission station, Margaret was given her choice of transport: hammock, bicycle, or horseback. The intrepid Peoples chose horseback and was sent into town to buy a horse, though she had not ridden before. She reported with some glee that the spirited, unbroken animal threw her “off about three times, but I learned to ride him.” Locals affectionately nicknamed her “Madame Horse’s Tail” because her hair was so long. Margaret began to settle in by finding shelter for herself and her newly acquired horse. She hired a “horse boy” to tire out the horse each day before mounting the horse to travel to villages (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC).

Though Peoples remembered every experience as an adventure, she may have seemed high-spirited to older missionaries. She remarked, “Mrs. Farnsworth was a teacher, but she never learned the language. She was past her age and didn’t have the ability to learn. She was staid and set in her ways; I was young. We were good friends, but were never really close” (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 4, FPHC).

Acclimation and Culture

On the other hand, Margaret was a keen observer and quick learner. She began to document the life and interests of the Mossi people where she stayed. She had no formal language training but quickly picked up languages, observed customs, and adapted her preaching style to local culture. Margaret’s respect for Indigenous customs opened many doors (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, FPHC). Her adaptability and ease among Africans earned her a place of honor from village leaders. She observed:

It was my custom to honor the chief of the village even if he weren't a Christian. ... When I would go into a village, I would first go to the chief. He would say to his people, "Beat the drums and tell my children that the white woman is here and has something to tell them." While they went to beat the drum, I would sit and talk with the chief. So many of them said to me, "White woman, ... we are old now, but we want you to take our sons and teach them." (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 9, FPHC)

Early Pentecostals had mixed educational backgrounds. For example, Ruby Nicodem, a missionary to India, listed her average grade in Bible college as 95 percent, so she was an exceptional and gifted student. Less-educated women also became outstanding missionaries. Margaret Peoples' application seemed average, without special qualities that would make her a good missionary beyond a personal call of "God laid it [missionary service] on my heart" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 1, FPHC).

On missionary applications, it was not always apparent whether a woman would be successful. Margaret appeared to be the ordinary daughter of an Irish farmer, with only a grammar school education. Her application indicated that she loved to study and was a hard worker, holding two jobs daily as a domestic servant. She knew no language besides English, could not play a musical instrument, and her Bible training was informal, consisting of "a persistent study of the Bible since saved." She had wanted to be a missionary for three and a half years by the time she submitted her application, indicating that she felt God wanted her in Africa and that she had been part of the Africa Inland Mission and read their literature. She was not ordained and did not know of anyone she had won to Christ, listing her results of personal efforts to bring others to Christ: "Sorry to say not much as far as I know. I've always worked with others" (Peoples, "Application," AGWM). However, her call was strong and personal. She completed her first term as a single missionary and enthusiastic proponent of Pentecostal missions.

Like her peers, Margaret Peoples believed in divine healing as a continuation of the biblical account. She referred to scriptural precedents while praying for a young boy who was dying: "Oh God ... in the days when your apostles began to preach, you healed the people and now I want you to heal this boy." The boy recovered, to the amazement of his tribe (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 5, FPHC).

Female missionaries often mentioned their love for the people they served, becoming emotionally involved with their mission fields. They passionately and sentimentally described the beauty and worth of their field in reports filled with observations of daily life and surroundings. Margaret enjoyed Africa and the

African peoples. Her updates are full of colorful descriptions and, sometimes, pure joy and excitement.

The earliest Pentecostals expected glossolalia, the gift of speaking in other languages that accompanied their Spirit baptism, to be xenolalia, the ability to immediately speak and preach in Indigenous languages. To the surprise of many missionaries, glossolalia did not provide an easy ability to speak in foreign tongues.

The time needed to learn the local language allowed missionaries to study the culture and begin to incarnate the Gospel into the new setting: Harvey Cox notes:

It did not take long for tongues—construed as the ability to speak foreign languages and expected as the only infallible sign of Spirit baptism—to assume a less commanding place in Pentecostal belief. [It gave those] who did not have the strength or the fluency to pray with their own words direct access to God through the Spirit. (Cox 1995, 87)

When Margaret Peoples landed in West Africa, none of the missionaries knew the language of the Mossi tribe where they were headed, though the coastal tribal languages were familiar to one of the couples, the Wrights. Bernice Lee, serving similarly in India, wrote home to ask for prayer so that she and her companions would learn the language, indicating that missionaries like Peoples and the Wrights no longer expected or depended on xenolalia, as had the first Pentecostals (Bernice Lee, “The Indian Pentecostal Convention at Uska Bazar,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 31, 1925, 11).

Language, Travel, and Dependence on Men

Margaret became a gifted linguist, translator, and informal anthropologist, sharing observations of life abroad through her writing. She was the first Westerner to understand Moré, the Mossi language. It was a challenge because, like many African languages, Moré uses pitch (how high or low a tone is) to distinguish meanings. Shirer said:

I cried myself to sleep every night, praying, “Lord, what shall I do?” One morning at 2 o’clock God said to me, “Have I ever failed you?” ... In our village there was a place where each evening the women went to grind their grain between two stones. I got some stones and grain and went to grind with them. As I listened to their conversation, I began to understand what they were saying, and I wrote down everything I heard. When I had enough words I wrote little stories in Moré in order to teach the women to read. Then I translated.” (AG Department of Foreign Missions, *Upper Volta*, June 1981, 3–4, AGWM Archives)

She gradually learned the language as women commented on her hair, clothes, and mannerisms. From there, she formed an alphabet, wrote a simple dictionary, taught the Mossi tribe to read, and began to translate scripture. She was not only a learner but also a teacher; as Adele Dalton writes, “Margaret taught reading classes, and as the pages of the Bible were printed by mimeograph, the delighted Mossi read by lantern light until the oil ran out. Then they used cornstalk torches to keep reading. Today a strong national church exists in that area” (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC).

While she learned the language, Margaret began to preach in Mossi villages nearby. By the time she was in her mid-twenties, she translated the Gospel of Mark into local Moré “because it was the shortest book” and preached from it (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC).

Travel was no simple matter and took its toll on the health and strength of missionaries. They were regarded as curiosities by the Indigenous people and endured close examination by those they set out to serve. Peoples and coworker Jenny Farnsworth traveled away from their first mission station “twenty days ... a very profitable trip, both to the testifying of saving grace and acquainting themselves with the language” (John Perkins, “Three Days in a Heathen Town,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, August 1910, 21).

Though female missionaries appealed for young men to join the work, women continued to dominate the early Pentecostal missionary force (Peoples, “Many Young Men Needed,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 19, 1923, 13). Before she married, Margaret Peoples wrote of the worries among single female missionaries if the few men in the field got ill. Men did maintenance and handled heavier loads than women could manage alone. Margaret wrote:

It caused us no little anxiety [when Brother Taylor had Blackwater fever] ... for he is the only man here. He overworked hauling the baggage when he first came ... to get it here before the rains. Then he just lay down and for a week he was not able to take interest in anything. (Peoples, “Fruit from the Sudan,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 10, 1923, 13)

Her future husband, Lloyd Shirer, had a reputation and skills as a handyman. He was in demand by many missionaries, repairing cars, fixing homes, and building new things (M. P. Shirer to Sister Jones, Ellicott City, MD, February 13, 1978, FPHC; Lloyd Shirer, “A Prosperous Journey: French Sudan Party Nears Destination,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 28, 1925, 10). Before and after their marriage, Margaret greatly admired and supported him: “[Lloyd] was a man of many talents. He could do almost anything. He was the one who started printing in Ghana” (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 12, FPHC).

Meanwhile, Margaret's decisions continued to show inventiveness and spunk, just as had her initial choice of a horse when she'd never ridden before. Margaret used the transportation that would be most useful. She rode her bicycle through the jungle and remarked that, when she would ride her bicycle to the village, "I would see a lion by the roadside. As I came near he would just give a roar and go off into the forest. ... I went to villages, forests, without any idea of fear. The fact that I was doing the will of God, took care of my fear. I expected God to look after me" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 10, FPHC).

At a conference in the USA, she recounted an experience meant to illustrate the lostness of humanity and sinners' need for the light of the gospel. She had set off down a jungle path on her bicycle one evening to pray for a sick African child. Darkness fell, and a tropical downpour began while she was in the hut. She hung a lantern on her bike handles and set off for home but became lost. "That gives a very peculiar feeling to one in the heart of Africa, to realize you are lost in the darkness, with wild animals all around you and no natives passing that hour of the night. So I stood there in the midnight darkness and thought, 'What shall I do?'" (Margaret Peoples Shirer, "Shall We Give Them the Light: Stone Church Convention Speech," *Latter Rain Evangel*, August 1937, 20). She looked for a light, prayed for guidance, and followed a faint beam to a native hut where she asked for directions. "He told me to go a certain distance 'this way' and a certain distance the 'other way,' till I would come to the main road that led to the station. I thanked him and was off, pushing my bicycle till I came to the main road and finally I reached our home" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC).

Subsequently, she improved her transportation, purchasing a motorcycle. David Womack, who arrived years later as a missionary to Ghana, remarked on a concrete ramp going into the Ghanaian kitchen where she had lived. Upon his inquiry, "they told him it was for Margaret's motorcycle" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 2-4, FPHC). That kept the bike from being stolen. In 1939, when she and Lloyd went to support Indigenous workers in a Pentecostal revival in Nigeria, the Shirers traveled over nine hundred miles from the Gold Coast with their house-trailer (Lloyd Shirer, "Modern Miracles," *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 25, 1939, 9).

For early twentieth-century Pentecostal female missionaries, the life of faith missions meant suffering, ostracism, and hardship. They launched their ministries with the expectation of the imminent return of Christ (Bernice Lee, "Pentecost among the Presbyterians," *Latter Rain Evangel*, July 1924, 6).³ "This is the last of the last hour, but it is also the hour of great victory in the battle for the Lord Jesus before the coming of the anti-Christ," warned B. B. Anderson in 1913 ("The Last Hour," *Word and Witness*, May 20, 1913, 2). The urgency of Christ's return impacted Margaret Shirer's party. "We are trying our best to work with the thought that this is our last term or chance to snatch precious souls from the enemy before

Jesus comes. Surely he will not delay much longer” (H. M. Wright, “Missionary Party Arrives Safely,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 19, 1921, 19).

Ordination, Marriage, and Family Life

During her first furlough, about 1925, Margaret was ordained by E. S. Williams, her pastor in Philadelphia. She spent three months in the United States. On her way back for a second term, she spent nine months in France, learning French because the French were taking over Upper Volta.

Upon her return to Africa, she met and married fellow missionary Lloyd Shirer. She added his name to hers, which was very unusual at the time. She was already known because of frequent updates to supporters. She became known as Margaret Peoples Shirer to friends and supporters. Margaret and Lloyd were both feisty, dedicated, and innovative. She waited to get her wedding dress from her sister in Philadelphia and then married him in a ceremony using their four languages: Bamb, Moré, English, and French (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 2, FPHC).

As a married missionary, Margaret continued to evangelize and teach:

Even after my husband and I were together, I went into these villages by myself. We were both missionaries and he was very wise to know that I was more than a housewife. He knew that I was a missionary as well as he was and he wasn't going to stop me. Any time that we went preaching ... he would drive to the farthest town. He would let me off at the first town, and someone else at the next town, or vise [sic] versa, so that we were preaching in several places. (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC)

The Shirers had a son and daughter their first term. They opened missions stations as the first AG missionaries in Gold Coast (Ghana), starting at Yendi. From that base, around 1938-39, Lloyd and Margaret traveled to Nigeria to minister after the outpouring of the Spirit there (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 7, FPHC).

Harvey Cox attributes the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in great part to the work of women who considered themselves empowered by the Spirit, set free from American cultural and religious constraints for ministry and proclamation (Cox 1995, 121). The Shirers found that a couple in missions could multiply their effectiveness.

On the other hand, Lloyd Shirer stated bluntly, “Some wonderful missionaries’ lives have been wrecked by their wives.” One of the couples who accompanied Margaret on her first missionary term returned to the United States after they had their first child; apparently, the wife was unwilling to raise a child in Africa. “After this, they had to leave the field” (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, FPHC).

Childbearing and child-rearing in the tropics could be daunting and draining. Children fell ill, died, or were put in harm's way. A pregnant Shirer arrived on the mission field on July 24, 1927, and birthed her daughter in Ouagadougou on October 22. When she left on preaching tours, she arranged for local women to care for the children (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 10, FPHC).

Always interested in education, Margaret homeschooled her own children with Calvert, a standardized curriculum from the States. Margaret was a very strict teacher. When the school bell rang and she entered the room, the children stood as a sign of respect for their teacher (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC).

Around 1933, after their furlough, the children stayed behind in the United States while Lloyd and Margaret returned for a third term. The separation was difficult for the whole family. The children lived with their uncle for five years before a warm family reunion in 1942. Margaret said, "The next day our children took us through the streets of the little town where they have lived the past five years so that we could meet their boy and girl friends, and to show these friends that they really had a daddy and mamma" ("How We Flew Home from Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 5, 1942).

Physical Challenges

Missionary suffering included natural disasters and skirmishes with wildlife. Peoples sent an early, curious request to supporters regarding destructive African ants. "The white ants have destroyed my Bible and so I must have a new one. Will you please send me one?" ("Fruit from the Sudan," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 10, 1923, 13). Years later, a sixteen-foot python entered the front opening of the house at night while Margaret's husband had gone for supplies. She called in six villagers to kill it, was happy that her children slept through the event, and kept the snakeskin as a souvenir after the locals poked the snake outside and then beat it to death (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 10, FPHC).

Like many other missionary women, Margaret became involved in caring for the whole person. To care for physical needs, she acquired basic medical skills. She operated a clinic in most areas of service. She was respected as a healer by African men and women alike, teaching hygiene and health to locals (Lloyd Shirer, "Recent Progress in the Gold Coast," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 20, 1948, 11). This work continued in Haiti decades later.

However, missionary women also needed healing or physical intervention for themselves and their families. They became ill due to unsanitary surroundings, extreme temperatures, and unfamiliar foods (Anna Reiff, "From the Firing Line," *Latter Rain Evangel*, May 1917, 13). Margaret was thankful that both Shirer children were spared permanent disability by God's healing power. Margaret and nine-month-old Marguerite were struck by lightning, but the baby revived after a

half-hour of fervent prayers by natives and missionaries. The Shirers' six-year-old son was severely injured with multiple broken bones after falling from a tree. He required a month's hospitalization and was sent home with the expectation that he would be permanently disabled. Margaret prayed over him and, to the surprise of his doctors, he was completely healed with no after-effects (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 9, FPHC).

Sometimes local skeptics demanded that God prove his power. Subsequent miraculous healings brought about a willingness to listen to the missionary's message. Shirer wrote,

We had another public burning of fetish objects. Three more have been saved, several babies have been dedicated to the Lord, and many have been prayed for having all kinds of diseases. ... We pray that all that is found in the Scriptures may be manifested to these primitive people who depend on their fetishes for help until the light of Christ shines in upon their darkened souls. (W. L. Shirer, "Fetishes Burned Publically," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 3, 1934, 10)

What Pentecostal missionaries found especially difficult to understand was the indifference of people at home. The desperation of some missionaries comes through in their communications, seeing their countries ready for a spiritual harvest without enough coworkers and the unfinished task of evangelism (Lillian Garr, "Hearts Burdened for China," *Latter Rain Evangel*, April 1911, 8). At missions conferences and on furloughs, the Shirers and others pleaded for individuals to sacrifice home comforts and complacency to reach the lost. If those in the United States would not go, missionaries appealed for their generous support so representatives could work effectively in the field (L. Shirer, "Interesting News from the Gold Coast, W. Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 6, 1937, 11, 16).

Both Margaret and Lloyd boosted the efforts of locals. Margaret's first "horse boy" was converted and went to his village after working for her for three years. She went to preach in his village after he shared the Gospel and found thousands of Africans waiting to ask questions. The Shirers also admired the effective preaching, evangelization, and miraculous confirmations of the Gospel message through Indigenous missionaries like Prophet Harris and his heir apparent Oppom (Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, "Crying for Help," *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 21, 1931, 5).⁴

Margaret was also an excellent preacher. She and Lloyd alternated preaching in churches while on furloughs in the United States as well as in Africa. As one observer noted: "Both Mr. and Mrs. Shirer preached the Word with unction and power. The church was blessed and considerably revived, while quite a number of lost souls were saved to the glory of God" (William A. Coxe, "Profitable Services at Zion," *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 7, 1929, 16). She recounted that God would

give her words of knowledge through parables, African proverbs, and stories that highlighted scriptural truths (Lloyd Shirer, “Fetishes Burned Publically,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 3, 1934, 10).

Expansion into West Africa

Starting in 1931 as the first AG missionaries in Gold Coast (Ghana), Margaret and Lloyd opened mission stations in Yendi, Tamad, in Burkina Faso under their ministry (Roamba 2016, 63).

Margaret ran a Sunday school for children at the Yendi mission station and hosted incoming missionaries. Meanwhile, she continued to translate scripture, helped standardize the spelling of the Dagbani language, and wrote a grammar book and dictionary. Eventually, she translated the books of Matthew, Mark, Acts, Ephesians, and 1 Peter. She wrote of her feelings of urgency in translating: “We spent nearly the entire month on translation work as the boys who are saved are so anxious to get the Scriptures in their own language” (Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, “Yendi, Gold Coast,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 25, 1933, 7). From there, around 1938–39, the couple traveled to Nigeria to minister after an outpouring of the Spirit (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 11, FPHC).

The Shirers briefly pastored a church in Washington, DC, before resigning in 1947 to return to Africa for the last time. While in DC, Margaret Shirer experienced the trauma of an unfaithful spouse. Despite Lloyd’s moral failure, Margaret kept the family together and remained his partner in life and ministry (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 6–8, 11–12, FPHC). They lost their AG missionary appointment and subsequently worked for the governments of Ghana and the Congo (Onyinah 2016, 40).

Haiti and Beyond

Margaret’s missionary appointment file shows that she continued her interest in whole-person well-being. She taught healthcare and helped with literacy in Haiti from 1968–71 while she and Lloyd were based at a Bible college. R. C. Cunningham mentions Lloyd’s involvement with the Haitian government’s literacy program and the Bible society (“Mission to Haiti,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 28, 1969, 17). After Lloyd died in 1972, Margaret returned to full-time ministry, preaching and recruiting young missionaries in the United States well into her eighties. Margaret held meetings in several churches in Springfield, Missouri. In 1976, a church leader encouraged other ministers to make room for her. His note reads: “Margaret ... is

a terrific preacher. ... [She] stayed with him all through the years and kept her home together. ... She is a beautiful Christian lady who deserves any recognition we may give her” (Jim Bryant to unknown recipient, November 7, 1976, AGWM Archives).

Margaret continued to encourage young people to serve and give their life for missions. She died of a stroke on September 25, 1983 (“Ministerial Status Report” 1983).

Conclusion and Summary

Early twentieth-century Pentecostal women regarded their baptism of the Holy Spirit as a continuation of the New Testament outpouring—a personal revelation of God’s power, sufficiency, and permission to fulfill their call to global missions. Margaret Peoples Shirer acted on her belief that anyone empowered and called by the Spirit should serve. Expecting the imminent return of Christ, she opened herself to groundbreaking ministries. She gave up the comforts of home, risked her life, and suffered opposition, persecution, and natural disasters. She held steady through hardships and disappointment and shared her challenges with supporters.

Margaret, like other early Pentecostals, felt herself individually called to proclaim the Gospel. Most missionary women remembered exactly when and where they had sensed God’s calling to missions. Some had specific destinations in mind; others were open to serve any field that needed workers. Many married women considered their call to missions as personal and important as God’s call on their spouses, as did Margaret. Amid severe challenges, they competently opened fields and helped administer missionary projects with their husbands. They raised children, often ministering to orphans and abandoned children alongside their own. Their hospitality and care for the personal needs of others were vital to the survival of missionaries, as well as practical demonstrations of the Gospel to Indigenous Peoples.

The courageous legacies of early Pentecostal female missionaries continue to demonstrate the power of the Spirit working through women. Margaret’s life indicates that women made opportunities for God to work. She believed God had equipped her through the baptism of the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts. Her belief in prophecy, tongues, and miracles enabled her to minister beyond the boundaries and constrictions of nineteenth-century Protestantism. She and her husband proclaimed the Gospel “with signs following,” ministering to those in need of God’s touch and guidance. In other words, they practiced genuine New Testament ministry. God used her passion, obedience, and self-sacrifice to win Christian

converts and to help take the Pentecostal outpouring and the work of the AG church and mission into Africa.

In the end, for Margaret as for her peers, the call to Pentecostal missions, Christ's presence, and the hope of his imminent return were enough (Bernice Lee, "One Long Thanksgiving Day," *Latter Rain Evangel*, November 1937, 3). Carolyn Tennant remarks on the impact of the women missionaries who believed Jesus could return at any moment, "Though often misunderstood, many women indeed have been pioneers. They set out into unmarked territory, stretching beyond their comfort level to follow the call of God" (Tennant 2001, 50).

Margaret Peoples Shirer was a heroine to many who came to faith through her work. She was a role model for those she inspired to serve and an inspiration for her supporters. She engaged her surroundings with bold curiosity and respectful inclusion of customs and worldviews. As a lifelong learner and an enthusiastic teacher, she created language structures and translations that pioneered reading and writing for a large people group. Her life is a milestone in herstory because of it.

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Notes

1. Margaret Peoples Shirer will be referred to variously: as Margaret for general activity, as Peoples while single, and as Shirer after her marriage.
2. archives.ifphc.org. Please note that the historical language of the original correspondence is herein included. It accurately reflects early twentieth-century colonial culture but is not intended to offend today's readers.
3. John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) codified seven "dispensations" of the church, including a Church Age that would be ended by the rapture of the Church. Late nineteenth-century Evangelicals and early-twentieth century Pentecostals believed they were living in the final days of Darby's Church dispensation. Pentecostals considered that the outpouring of the Spirit in the Pentecostal revivals empowered the Church for evangelization before Christ's return. Cyrus Scofield (1843–1921) popularized Darby's views in his correspondence Bible studies, which were then incorporated into the commentary in his Scofield Reference Bible in 1909 (revised in 1917). Pentecostal periodicals advertised the Scofield Bible, thus promoting its theology to many Pentecostals.
4. Later missionaries were less keen, noting that Harris traveled with several wives and allowed polygamy.