

Nigerian Healer T.B. Joshua Still Attracts Followers From Abroad

But a former aide warns that Joshua is deceiving Christians with false miracles and Pentecostal jargon

Christians in Nigeria have labeled T.B. Joshua a false prophet and a charlatan. But the controversial healer—known by his followers as “the man in The Synagogue”—insists that time will prove his critics are wrong.

“It is a great offense to speak against a man of God. But the more you accuse a man of God, the stronger he will be,” Joshua said during an interview inside his newly constructed, 30,000-seat The Synagogue, Church of All Nations in Lagos.

Every day thousands of Nigerian and foreign pilgrims visit the unusual building, which was constructed by volunteers who consider Joshua their spiritual leader. Those who seek healing are asked to wear paper signs that describe their ailments. Others come wanting prayer for guidance, financial blessing or pregnancy.

Joshua’s critics, including prominent pastors in the country, won’t deny that he heals people. But they say he draws his power from indigenous African occultism—not from the Holy Spirit.

One person who has stayed silent about Joshua until now is Bayo Ajede, a 37-year-old man from Lagos who served as Joshua’s assistant for four years. In 1996 Ajede ran away from The Synagogue—fearing for his life—and eventually became a

Christian. He decided recently that he must warn others about the source of Joshua's power.

"People need to know that Satan can also perform miracles," Ajede said. "The Bible says that in the last days even the elect will be deceived."

Ajede claims Joshua never converted to Christianity and that he mixes Islam and African folk religion with Christian doctrines. Ajede also claims that when he worked at The Synagogue, Joshua used incense, candles, "magic writing" and demonic power to work miracles.

On an altar in Joshua's bedroom, Ajede said, the mysterious prophet kept a Bible, a Quran and an occultic book. Joshua also boasted that he could visit members of The Synagogue in their dreams.

"[Joshua] used to say he was the Jesus for the present age," Ajede said. "He would say that God had passed over the Jews and had raised up a black Christ."

When Charisma confronted Joshua with such claims, he denied knowing Ajede. When asked about magic writing, Joshua scribbled some marks on paper and said he possesses the gift of spiritual language. "This [writing] is purely divine. The human hand cannot write it," Joshua said.

Photographs obtained by Charisma prove that Ajede lived and worked at The Synagogue. Also, Ajede's current pastor, Ladi Thompson, of Living Waters Unlimited Church in Lagos, said he has indisputable evidence that Ajede worked for Joshua.

"It has been confirmed by people who saw [Ajede] regularly during those years," Thompson said. "T.B. Joshua is lying through his teeth."

Ajede said he lived in a cultlike environment while serving as one of Joshua's handpicked disciples. He slept in The Synagogue with 16 men in the same room, and they were told not to eat meat or fish, he said, "in order to have more spiritual power."

They were also forbidden to leave the compound. "We were told that something terrible would happen to us if we ever left," he said.

Another man from Lagos who served Joshua as a disciple from 1991 to 1995 told Charisma that he constantly had nightmares while living at The Synagogue. He also confirmed that Joshua used soap and palm leaves to heal people and sometimes swatted away demons with loincloths.

"He did many things that were not biblical, but I thought he was of God because he used the name of Jesus," said the man, who requested anonymity because he fears reprisals from Joshua.

"I was becoming a spiritual captive there," the man added. "I was becoming subservient to the spirits that ruled that place."

Both men also claimed that Joshua, who is married, engaged in illicit sex with women in his private quarters and sometimes conducted "spiritual examinations" of their genitals. But Joshua denied all claims of immoral behavior.

"One cannot continue in immorality and continue in the ministry," said Joshua, who apologized for the fact that he never finished primary school. "I hope God will show you that I am a prophet."

Many charismatic Christians side with Joshua. Since the mid-1990s they have flocked to The Synagogue from Europe, Asia, North America and Australia. They come in large tour groups and are offered housing on the expansive compound, which is equipped with a dining hall and bread factory.

When visitors arrive they are shown videotaped scenes of Joshua praying for the sick. The videos also include glowing endorsements of Joshua's ministry from international church leaders.

On one video, Christian newspaper editor Jerrell Miller of Mobile, Ala., tells the camera: "God has a man in Lagos, Nigeria, who has walked through the door of divine healing. I believe this church holds the key for worldwide revival."

However, some residents of Lagos fear that Joshua's ministry has become a dangerous cult. One man who requested anonymity said he fears for the life of one of his relatives, who has been a member of The Synagogue for eight years. His relative, who was prayed for by Joshua in 1995 so she could become pregnant, has carried what looks like a pregnancy ever since.

"It must be demonic," the man said. "No one is pregnant for eight years. I want her to get medical help and talk to some people outside. [The Synagogue] is a cult."

When Charisma visited The Synagogue in August, several young women and one man, all in their 20s, were serving as Joshua's personal aides. They lived communally inside the compound and referred to Joshua as "the prophet" or "the man of God" when discussing their loyalty to him.

"There is no place on Earth where there are greater miracles than here at The Synagogue," said one young woman, who said she came to Lagos after viewing a video of Joshua's healing services at her Assemblies of God congregation in Galt, Calif. "After I came here I knew I had to stay."

Thompson, along with dozens of other Nigerian pastors, said all these international visitors are being deceived by African spiritism—which is covered with a Christian veneer.

"I had hoped that T.B. Joshua's original doctrines were simply because of his ignorance in his early days," Thompson said. "But now I know that he is a false prophet."

J. Lee Grady in Lagos, Nigeria