

Why Were So Many Christians Deceived by TB Joshua?

Twenty years ago, as I was preparing for my first ministry trip to Nigeria, a friend asked me if I had plans to visit a famous Nigerian minister named T.B. Joshua. I had never heard of the guy, so I did a bit of research before I flew to Lagos. I learned that thousands of Christians from Asia, Europe, Canada and the United States were flocking to the Synagogue Church of All Nations, the huge ministry of this so-called prophet.

I didn't jump on the Joshua bandwagon because I saw too many red flags. I only had to look at a few pages of his magazine to discern that there was a strange spirit of sorcery behind this man. I had a sick feeling in my stomach any time I looked at his materials or watched his videos.

The spiritual revulsion I felt was confirmed when Pentecostal friends from Nigeria told me that Joshua was an occult healer who had only recently started using Christian terminology to attract big audiences. They said he used deceit and African magic (or "juju") to build his following. He even claimed that his birth was miraculous and that his mother carried him in her womb for 15 months.

I eventually wrote four articles in Charisma over a span of 10 years to warn people not to follow this man. But for more than two decades, Christians traveled to Nigeria by the thousands to receive prayer, to see miracles and to tell people back home that Joshua was uniquely anointed and far superior to any other minister on earth.

I was shocked by how gullible many Christians were to chase after someone who was an obvious fraud. But I kept writing the articles. In fact, at one point I made an appointment to

interview Joshua, and I asked a local pastor from Lagos to accompany me. It was while I was in the creepy Synagogue compound—where the prophet lived in a lavish, five-story apartment—that I became fully convinced he was a full-blown warlock.

During that interview, I saw several young white women scurrying barefoot in and out of his office suite. I told my friend Ladi, “Those girls act like zombies.” It was obvious that Joshua had mesmerizing control over his followers. I also met a young man named Didas who had served as a valet for the prophet. Didas told me that he often saw evidence that the “man of God” was abusing girls in his bedroom.

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The accusations of sexual abuse weren't surprising, because religious imposters usually are immoral. But I became most concerned when I realized that many Christian leaders who got close to Joshua died suddenly. The Dutch editor of a Christian magazine in Holland fell over dead at age 50 after he began publishing articles by the prophet. A South African pastor who received prayer from Joshua died of cancer in 2013. A ministry leader in Singapore died after hosting Joshua in the Asian nation. A former president of Ghana, John Atta Mills, died unexpectedly in 2012; he had become a follower of Joshua a few years earlier.

I began to connect the dots—and realized that Joshua was not just a garden-variety false prophet, but one of the most sinister spiritual sorcerers of our generation. His thirst for attention pushed him to start his “Emmanuel TV” broadcast in 2006, which spread his influence around the world. Even Christian broadcasting networks began to carry his programs.

But Joshua's house was built on sand, literally. In 2014, a

multi-story hotel he built next door to his church collapsed because of shoddy construction, killing at least 115 foreign visitors. The disaster awakened some of his brainwashed followers to see what was really going on inside the cult. Yet Joshua continued to spread his deception until he died in 2021 at the age of 57.

The real story of what was going on at the Synagogue Church of All Nations is now being unraveled. This month, BBC Africa released a gripping, three-part documentary called “Disciples: The Cult of T.B. Joshua.” The programs are painful to watch, but I urge all Christians to view them. ([Visit this link.](#))

In the programs, former followers of Joshua share how they lived like slaves in the Synagogue compound. Many young women served the prophet seven days a week as they endured verbal abuse and were deprived of sleep. Some followers were also subjected to beatings, slaps to the face and kicks in the stomach.

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Eventually, some of the female followers were routinely summoned to Joshua’s apartment, where they were raped. And many of these women were forced to undergo abortions—in a secret room in the church compound—all because the “man of God” could not allow evidence of his abuse to become known.

“It was a psychological prison,” said one of Joshua’s followers. Another said: “I became T.B. Joshua’s puppet. He pulled all the strings.”

A man who served Joshua closely and then left the cult admitted that the prophet would often travel to his “prayer mountain” retreat in another area of Lagos to perform juju rituals. Witchcraft, not the Holy Spirit, was the secret source of his “power.” One of the British women who followed the prophet for several years told the BBC: “He is probably the greatest con man to ever exist.”

My question is: Why did so many Christians who claim to be Spirit-filled follow this despicable charlatan? Why did so many believers in Jesus go to Joshua's "church," witness his strange antics and then go home and convince others to visit him?

Jesus told us this would happen, obviously. He said: "For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24, NASB). But those words don't give an excuse to be gullible.

Joshua would never have been as popular as he was without the applause and approval of Christians who should have known better. I pray we will stop being charmed by the fakes and the weirdos. Let's get serious about developing the Holy Spirit's discernment. {eoa}

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