

# **Exodus 4:1-9 and the Over Demand for Miracles Among the Laity in Contemporary Christian Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

*The desire for the spectacular (miracle) has led a lot of people down the road to destruction, everyone wants a message from God, A sign or miracles! People over demand for miracles with the presupposition that if they see a miracle, it must be God and through this many have been caught in the web of false prophet. Therefore, the task of this paper is to make a critical scrutiny of the causes of over demand for miracle among laity in Nigeria Christianity trying to excavate the reality of this challenge. This study examined the drive behind many Christian laity in search for miracle in our contemporary time. Also, this study employs an exegetical and contextual methodology; with Exodus 4:1-9 as the theological framework.*

**Keywords:** Over Demand, Miracle, Laity, Contemporary, Christian and Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

One of the interesting developments on the current religious scene is the surge of interest in visible phenomena. On one hand, as people become increasingly dissatisfied with the occurrence of fake miracle invasion others may well be approaching the attitude of mind that Gideon had when, in a time of Israel's oppression, he remonstrated with God, "Oh, my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of,

saying, did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (Judges 6:13). “Where are all His miracles?” people who think of themselves as the people of God often ask in a time of spiritual adversity. In response to this sense of spiritual need, there are increasing numbers of religious leaders and increasing masses of religious followers who claim that the age of miracles has broken upon us in a new way.

The word miracle has reentered our vocabulary and has become an object of intense interest. We sing songs about miracles, and many Christians claim to have seen God work in miraculous ways. But, in addition to this, we have miracle magazines, miracle handkerchiefs, and miracle publishing houses, miracle valleys, miracle messages, miracle meetings, and many who claim openly or by implication to have the gift of working one or another kind of miracles. This involvement has long been the case with the religious lunatic fringe, but extensive and loose talk about miracles has now entered into legitimate Christian circles. This research is significant in the sense that it addresses and redresses the laity on the over demand for miracles which is prevalent in the contemporary Nigerian Christianity. This study delves into the concept of miracle through the biblical purview. In essence, this study is aimed at excavating the over demand for miracles among the laity in the contemporary Christian Nigeria with reference to Exodus 4:1-9 as a biblical thermometer and thermostat. Based on the scope and objective of this work, it is imperative that the researcher carefully choose a suitable research methodology for the goal of this work. The study adopts exegetical and contextual methodology for the research.

### **Background to the Book Exodus**

Profoundly, the book of Exodus continues the story line of God’s dealing with the descendant of Abraham that began in Genesis. Exodus is of focal importance in the Old Testament history. Janzen claims that to eliminate this book would

downfall the Old Testament history as the elimination of the four Gospel would downfall the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> In the same vein, John Muddiman (2010:92) submits that the book of Exodus is in various way the center piece of Pentateuch. Genesis exploration is about the Israel's progenitors while Exodus notifies how they come to be a nation through the act of God. It reveals their foundation history, identity document, informing them where they emanated from and their place in the plan of God's sovereignty.<sup>29</sup> The title "Exodus" is quite appropriate, though that was not the original name in the Hebrew text. The text accompanies the custom of designation of a book by the opening words. That is, "These are the names" (We'elleh shēmōth), or more simply, "names" (shēmōth). Longman and Dillard are of the view that the title "Exodus" originated from the Latin Vulgate which denotes the book as Liber Esodus. "We'elleh shēmōth" which is the opening word of this book provides a link with Genesis. The book started with the use of conjunction "and" indicating that it continues a previous narrative. On the other hand, Genesis 46:8 used the phrase "these are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendant) who went to Egypt during the era of Joseph. The concluding part in Genesis account also provides a link between Genesis and Exodus (Gen. 50:22-26).<sup>30</sup>

Traditionally, it is believed that the book of Exodus was written under the direction and superintendent of Yahweh. Merrill posits that the book of Genesis is the primary options for the composition of Exodus which fall into two categories. The first category alleges the use of various sources, gathered and edited by someone long after the Moses and the second views Moses as having some responsibility as the author or

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<sup>28</sup> Janzen, Waldemar (2000) *Exodus: Believers Church Bible Commentary*. Waterloo, Ont.; Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press.

<sup>29</sup> John Muddiman and John Barton, (2010) *The Oxford Bible Commentary: The Pentateuch*. New York: Oxford University Press, 92.

<sup>30</sup> Tremper Longman III & Raymond B Dillard, (2006) *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 63-70.

source of the traditions.<sup>31</sup> Long and Longman III opines that some school of thought holds that Moses wrote the major parts of Exodus while some additions were later made by a redactor. For instance, the genealogy recorded in 6:14-27.<sup>32</sup> Extensive third person narrative of Exodus along with various parenthetical insertions were added by someone other than Moses. Hill and Walton point to the four literary units that were clearly Mosaic regarding the book of Exodus (15:1-21; 17:8-16; 19:1-24; 34:1-28) and he also affirms that Exodus remain -substantially as the literary product of Moses.<sup>33</sup> This is obvious within the book itself, there are occasions when it is clearly stated that the Lord said to Moses “Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” (Ex 17:14); “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord .... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people” (24:4, 7); “Then the Lord said to Moses, write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” (34:27). To date the event of the book of exodus is somewhat difficult because there are different dates suggested regarding its dating. E.H Merrill opines that no exodus at all.<sup>34</sup> In the middle of the twentieth century, the two primary options were a late date (c. 1250 BC) and an early date (c.1446 B.C). There ensue a debate between the initial and later dating of the book, thus it become an intramural debate within the purview of the evangelicals. On the one hand, important interpretive issues are involved in the portion one takes that have implications for the way one interprets numerous OT

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<sup>31</sup> E.H Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, (2011) *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 190- 206

<sup>32</sup> Provon, V.P. Long and T. Longman III, (2003) *A Biblical History of Israel*. Westminster: John Knox Press, 97- 115.

<sup>33</sup> Hill and Walton, (2001) *A survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 104.

<sup>34</sup> E.H Merrill, (2008) *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 140- 147.

passages. In other words the debate is not meaningless or insignificant. Although evangelicals differ in the way they understand OT chronology and certain archeological discoveries, but they share an important common heritage. Michael noted that two significant passages are pertinent to the dating of Exodus. Considering 1 Kings 6:1, it says “in the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.” This biblical text places the dating of Exodus to 480 years before King Solomon’s fourth year which scholars date to be 967 BC. Exodus is then dated circa 1447 B.C or thereabout with the probability of a round-off-number and the related passage in Judges 11:26. However, going by the biblical accounts along with the indications of various archaeological discoveries also seems to favor strongly the early date position.<sup>35</sup>

## Exegetical Analysis of Exodus 4: 1-9

### Hebrew Translation

4:1.

ויען משה ויאמר והן לא יאמינו לי ולא ישמעו בקלי כי יאמרו לא נראה אליך יהוה

4:2. ויאמר אליו יהוה [מזה: כ] [מה: ק] (זה) בידך ויאמר מטה

4:3.

ויאמר השליכהו ארצה וישלכהו ארצה ויהי לנחש וינס משה מפניו

4:4.

ויאמר יהוה אל משה שלח ידך ואחז בזנבו וישלח ידו ויחזק בו ויהי למטה בכפו

4:5.

למען יאמינו כי נראה אליך יהוה אלהי אבתם אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. E.H Merrill, (2008)

4:6.

ויאמר יהוה לו עוד הבא נא ידך בחיקך ויבא ידו בחיקו ויוצאה והנה ידו מצרעת כשלג

4:7.

ויאמר השב ידך אל חיקך וישב ידו אל חיקו ויוצאה מחיקו והנה שבה כ בשרו

4:8.

והיה אם לא יאמינו לך ולא ישמעו לקל האת הראשון והאמינו־לקל הא ת האחרון

4:9.

והיה אם לא יאמינו גם לשני האתות האלה ולא ישמעון לקלך ולקחת־מי מימי היאר ושפכת היבשה והיו המים אשר תקח מן היאר והיו לדם בבי שת

### English (KJV)

1 And Moses answered and said, but, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.

2 And the Lord said unto him, what is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod.

3 And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it.

4 And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand:

5 That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.

6 And the Lord said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow.

7 And he said, put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh.

8 And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign.

9 And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, nor pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land.

The reluctance of Moses to undertake the part of leader, indicated by his first reply at his first calling, “Who am I that I should go?” etc. (Exodus 3:11), was not yet overcome. God had promised that he would succeed; but he did not see how he could succeed, either with the people or with Pharaoh. It was not enough for him that God had declared, “They (the people) shall hearken unto thy voice” (Exodus 3:18); he does not, cannot believe this, and replies: “Behold, they will not believe, neither hearken unto my voice” (Exodus 4:1). This was plain want of faith; but not unnatural, and not, in God's sight, inexcusable. God therefore condescended to the human weakness of his servant, and proceeded to show him how he intended that he should persuade the people of his mission. He should persuade them by producing the credentials of miracles (Exodus 4:2-9).

Exodus 4:1. This verse begins with the response of Moses to God “**Behold, they will not believe.**” Attempts have been made to soften down this word which is somewhat in contradiction of God’s words in Exodus 3:18, and to represent Moses as merely saying, “What if the people will not hearken, etc. What shall I do then?” (So the LXX; Geddes, Boothroyd, and others.) But the phrase is really emphatic and peremptory. As Rosenmuller says: “Vox est negantis et detractantis officium.” **The Lord hath not appeared to thee.** It is quite probable that the Israelites would have so spoken, if Moses had had no sign to show. There had been no appearance of Jehovah to anyone for above four hundred years. And the Israelites, who had not seen Moses for forty years, would not know whether he was a veracious person or not.

Exodus 4:2. The word “**Jehovah**” used in this text means is a theological power which denotes the proper name of the one true God. Moses replied to Jehovah saying it is “**A rod or a staff.**” Some suppose the ordinary shepherd’s staff, or crook, to be meant; but it is objected that this would have been an unfit object to have brought into the presence of Pharaoh (Kalisch), being unsuitable for a court, and emblematic of an occupation which the Egyptians loathed (Genesis 46:34); and the suggestion is therefore made, that it was the *baton* or long stick commonly carried by Egyptians of good position and especially by persons in authority. But Moses in Midian, forty years after he quitted Egypt, is not likely to have possessed such an article; nor, if he had possessed it, would he have taken it with him when shepherding. Probably a simple staff, the natural support of a man of advanced years, is meant.

Exodus 4:3. **It became a serpent.** The word “serpent” used in other translations from the word *nakhash*, is a generic word applicable to any species of snake. We cannot assume that the *cobra* is the serpent meant, though no doubt Moses, when he **ran from it**, believed it to be a venomous serpent. Various reasons for God's choice of this particular sign have been



given. Perhaps the best is, that a trick of the kind was known to the Egyptian conjurors, who would be tempted to exhibit it in order to discredit Moses, and would then be discredited themselves by his stick swallowing theirs. (See Exodus 7:10-12.) It is fanciful to suppose a reference either to the serpent of Genesis 3:1-24. (Keil and Delitzsch) or to the uraeus (*cobra*), which the Egyptian kings bore in their headdress as a mark of sovereignty.

Exodus 4:4-5. **By the tail.** A snake-charmer will usually take up his serpents by the neck, so that they may not be able to bite him. Moses was bidden to show his trust in God by taking up his serpent by the tail. His courage, as well as his faith, is shown in his ready obedience. **It became a rod.** A veritable rod once more, not a mere stiffened snake like the “rods” of the magicians (Exodus 7:12). **That they may believe.** The sign was to convince the Israelites, in the first instance, and cause them to accept the mission of Moses (see Exodus 4:30, Exodus 4:31). It was afterwards to be exhibited before Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21), to try him and prove him, but not to convince him.

Exodus 4:6. **Furthermore,** the first sign is followed by a second, equally simple and easy of performance, and perhaps, in the eyes of the Israelites, even more marvelous. Leprosy in a developed form was regarded as absolutely incurable. (Celsus, 'De Re Medica,' 5.7-8.) Its instantaneous production and removal were contrary to all experience, and in themselves thoroughly astonishing. Further, while the first miracle was simply a sign of supernatural power—a credential, the second was a warning and a lesson. What might not he do to smite or to save on whom God had bestowed such power over the human organism? Each man would naturally fear to resist or disobey one so dangerously gifted. **Leprous as snow.** The Greek name for the worst form of leprosy, λεύκη, was based on this fact of whiteness. The loathsome disease is thus described by Kalisch “It begins with mealy crusts and scurfy scabs, originally not larger than a pin's point, a little

depressed in the skin (Exodus 13:3, 30), and covered with white hairs (Exodus 13:3, Exodus 13:20). These spots rapidly spread (Exodus 13:8), and produce wild [proud?] flesh (Exodus 13:10, Exodus 13:14). The leprosy symptoms appear most frequently on the hairy parts of the body, and also on members which have been ulcerously affected. When the leprosy has gained ground, *the whole skin appears glossy white* at the forehead, nose, etc; tuberated, thickened, dry like leather, but smooth; sometimes it bursts, and ulcers become visible. The nails of the hands and feet fall; the eyelids bend backwards; the hair covers itself with a fetid rind, or goes off entirely (Lev. 13:42). All external senses are weakened: the eyes lose their brightness, become very sensitive, and are continually blaring; from the nostrils runs a fluid phlegm."

Exodus 4:8-9. **The voice of the first sign.** Some understand "the voice of Moses as he gave them the first sign;" but it is better to regard the sign itself as speaking to them. According to the sacred writers everything that can teach us anything day, night, the heavens, the firmament, the beasts, the fowls of the air, the fishes, nay, and the very stones have a voice. They teach us, speak to us, declare to us, cry out aloud, lift up their voice, shout, sing, proclaim God's will, whether man will hear or whether he will forbear. (See Psalms 19:1-3; Job 12:7, Job 12:3; Habakkuk 2:11; Luke 19:40, etc.) Equally, or rather much more, must a miracle be regarded as having a voice. God speaks to us by it. **If they will not believe also.** "*Even*" would be a better translation than "**also.**" **The river** is of course "the Nile." See the comment on Exodus 2:3. Of the three signs given, the first would probably convince all those who were religious, well-disposed, and fair-minded; the second, acting upon their fears, would move all but the desperately wicked, who despised Jehovah and put their trust in the gods of the Egyptians (Joshua 24:14; Ezekiel 20:7, Ezekiel 20:8; Ezekiel 23:3, Ezekiel 23:8, etc.). The third sign was for these last, who would regard the Nile as a great divinity, and would see in the conversion of Nile water into

blood a significant indication that the God who had commissioned Moses was greater than any Egyptian one.

### **Causes of Over Demand for Miracle among Christian Laity: The Nigeria Situation**

A critical analysis of observation of the religio-cultural situation of Nigeria many Christians is captured by the yearning to free themselves from pathetic conditions such as diseases, poverty, unemployment, family curses, etc. The grip of this demand is so rooted that their prayer life is shaped and fueled by over demands for miracles. Nigeria Christians are compelled to rely on God for their daily provision. God becomes their first and last resort. In fact, their only resort. Their lives and the lives of their children depend on it. With this, the act of performing miracle is now the demand of the day. As noted earlier, the main cause of over demand for miracle among laity in Nigeria is poverty. Poverty is described as lack of opportunity to develop one's abilities and to control one's own life because of economic deprivation. Some factors have contributed to poverty in Nigeria. These include over population, inadequate health care, illiteracy, ethnic strife and corruption.<sup>36</sup> Unemployment is also a major contributing factor to over demand for miracle among laity in Nigeria.

On one hand, due to long search for gainful employment, this situation has led many frustrated Christians to magic or sorcery. Which is satanic in origin and works by coercion through manipulation. Notably, some of these "miracles" tend to follow magical principles and rituals. However, since mystical powers, such as magic, are condemned in the Bible, it comes to the church in the garb of miracles and wonders. The waves of these "miracles" are reaching every nook and cranny of the country through the media. On the other hand, some Christians have ran to ministries or denominations that

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<sup>36</sup> Kunhiyop, S.W. (2001). "Poverty: Good News for Africa". *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 20(1): 5-8.

operates in the miracle ministry as a result of over demand for miracles (with the saying “the church is fire branded”). As a result of this, for your ministry to make wave it must be linked with the manifestation of miracles and the power to deliver people from opposing forces because it will win people’s attention. In view of this, Abogunrin makes an observation that the appearance of thousands in place of worship today (Christians and non-Christians) are not after spiritual growth or Christ but for miracles.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Drives behind Christian Seeking After Miracles**

Our God is a God of wonders (Psalm 136:3-4). As the Creator and Sustainer of all that is, God has the power to suspend natural laws in order to fulfill His purposes. Miracles were a part of the ministries of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and of course Jesus and the apostles, and their miracles primarily served the purpose of confirming their message as being from God (Hebrews 2:3-4). Today, many Christian still seek to experience the miraculous, and some will go to great lengths to have that experience. Some Christians seek after miracles because they want confirmation of the truth of God. There is nothing inherently wrong with this desire. In fact, God willingly gave signs to Moses (Exodus 4:1-9) and Gideon (Judges 6:11-22) to confirm His word. Miracles can aid a person’s coming to faith, as in John 2:23, “Many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.” However, there comes a time when enough miracles have been performed the truth has been proved and it is time to exercise faith. When Moses hesitated to obey after a series of miracles at the burning bush, “the LORD’s anger burned” (Exodus 4:14). Also, it is nobler in God’s sight to believe without needing a miracle. Jesus visited the Samaritans, and “because of his words many more became

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<sup>37</sup> S.O. Abogunrin, (2004) *Preface to Biblical Healing in African Context, Bible study series*, eds., Ibadan: A Publication of the Nigeria Association for Biblical studies, ix.

believers” (John 4:41, emphasis added). Just a few verses later, Jesus rebukes the Galileans: “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders you will never believe” (John 4:48). Unlike the Samaritans, the people of Galilee required signs.

Some Christian seek after miracles because they do not believe the signs and wonders which have already been performed. The Pharisees of Matthew 12 were just such a lot. Jesus had been performing miracles for quite some time when a group of scribes and Pharisees came to Him with an insolent demand to see another sign. In response, Jesus condemned them as “wicked and adulterous” (Matthew 12:38-39). They were “wicked” in that they refused to believe the signs and wonders Christ had already performed. “In spite of his wonders, they did not believe” (Psalm 78:32). Their hearts were hardened towards the truth, even after numerous public miracles. Nothing would make them believe; their hearts were as pharaoh’s, hardened after witnessing so many of Moses’ miracles in Egypt (Exodus 9:34-35). They were “adulterous” in the spiritual sense, having left the true worship of God to follow a man-made set of rules and traditions. Not satisfied with the miracles Jesus was doing, they demanded something even greater. As commentator Matthew Barnes puts it, “They looked for signs of their own devising.” So entrenched was their rejection of Christ that, when later presented with the “sign of the prophet Jonah” (Christ’s resurrection, Matthew 12:39-40), they still would not believe.

Some Christian seek after miracles because they seek an occasion to excuse their unbelief. There were people in Jesus’ day who “tested” Him by seeking a sign (Matthew 16:1; Luke 11:16). Since they specified that the sign be “from heaven,” they most likely wanted something spectacular, similar to Elijah’s calling down fire from the sky (1 Kings 18:38) or Isaiah’s causing the sun to reverse course (Isaiah 38:8). Probably, their “test” was designed to be something “too big” for Jesus to accomplish they simply hoped He would attempt

it and fail in the attempt. Some Christians seek after miracles because they are curious thrill-seekers. Like the crowds in John 6:2 and King Herod in Luke 23:8, they want to see something sensational, but they have no real desire to know the truth of Christ. Lastly, some Christians seek after signs and wonders because they hope to get something for themselves. After Jesus fed the multitudes, a large crowd followed Him to the other side of Galilee. Jesus saw their true motivation, however, and rebuked it: "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (John 6:26). The crowd's desire was not to know Christ or even to see more miracles; it was simply to fill their stomachs again. Better than seeking after a new miracle is taking God at His Word. Simple faith is more pleasing to the Lord than a reliance on a dazzling sensory experience. "Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:29).

## **Conclusion**

The desire for the spectacular has led a lot of people down the road to destruction. People assume that if they see a miracle, it must be God, but not all miracles are God's miracles. Signs can deceive; the Word never will. Some Christians loved miracles instead of the truth. They put experience ahead of the Word and ran on emotion, not truth. Notably, Jesus Himself warns in Mt 24:24, "for false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." Therefore, this is a thoughtful warning to contemporary Christians that get hung up on signs and look out. False prophets will do some amazing things and even deceive believers. Hence, chasing after miracles and false prophets without discernment just because they do some miracle can lead to eternal destruction. This is what happens to people who get enamored with miracles. Christians must note that the word of God rules over miracles.

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