Was Moses’ wife black? More specifically, was Zipporah, Moses’ wife, a Kushite—a dark-skinned woman—as indicated in Numbers 12:1? And why did Miriam and Aaron become upset with Moses for marrying a Kushite woman? If Zipporah was Kushite, why does the Bible say her father, Jethro, was a Midianite—a people from the Middle East generally identified with lighter skin? Or did Moses have another wife besides Zipporah?

Scriptural Clarity on Moses’ Wife

Answer: No. The Scriptures give no indication that Moses married anyone other than Zipporah.

To better understand Zipporah’s ethnicity, let’s examine the passage:

> Numbers 12:1–3 (ESV):
>
> Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. And they said, ‘Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?’ And the LORD

> heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.

Who Were the Kushites?

Kush is generally identified with the ancient kingdom located in what is now Ethiopia and parts of Sudan. It was known biblically for its dark-skinned people:

> Jeremiah 13:23 (ESV):
>
> Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

This rhetorical question underscores the permanence of the Kushite’s skin color, implying that Zipporah’s skin was likely dark, consistent with Kushite ethnicity.

The Puzzle: Midianite or Kushite?

Why then does the Bible say Zipporah’s father, Jethro, was a Midianite? The Midianites were a nomadic people in the Arabian Peninsula, generally considered lighter-skinned.

The key to this apparent contradiction lies in understanding ethnicity versus nationality. Jethro was Midianite by nationality but Kushite by ethnicity. This is comparable to a person born and raised in a foreign land adopting its nationality but retaining ethnic roots:

For example, a person of Chinese descent born and raised in Tanzania is Tanzanian by nationality but ethnically Chinese.

Similarly, Jethro was a Kushite who settled in Midian, making him a Midianite by residence and citizenship, but Kushite by birth.

Moses’ Identity and the Egyptian Connection

When Moses fled Egypt, he ended up in Midian and met Jethro’s daughters. They described Moses as “an Egyptian” because of his upbringing and appearance, although ethnically he was Hebrew.

> Exodus 2:15–22 (ESV):
>
> When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. ... The priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. ... When they came to Reuel their father, he said, ‘Why have you come back so early today?’ They said, ‘An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and also drew water for us and watered the flock.’ ... Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah.

This passage clarifies that Moses married Zipporah in Midian and lived there before God called him to lead Israel.

Why Were Miriam and Aaron Angry?

Miriam and Aaron’s complaint in Numbers 12 was not about skin color per se but about Moses marrying a foreign woman—a woman outside Israel’s ethnic and religious community.

Jewish law and tradition strongly discouraged intermarriage with

foreigners, especially pagans, because of the danger of idolatry and spiritual compromise. The opposition to Moses’ marriage reflected this concern.

Theological Insight: God’s Perspective

Interestingly, God rebuked Miriam and Aaron, affirming Moses’ unique prophetic role and indicating that their complaint was unjustified.

> Numbers 12:6–8 (ESV):
>
> Hear my words: When there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles.

This emphasizes Moses’ special relationship with God, and that personal circumstances like marriage should not detract from his divine calling.

The Law and Intermarriage

Later, the Law given through Moses forbade Israelites from marrying foreigners:

> Deuteronomy 7:3–4 (ESV):
>
> You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods.

However, Moses’ marriage to Zipporah predates this law. Thus, he was not violating the covenant because the law was not yet given.

What Does This Teach Us Today?

Biblical Consistency: The Bible does not contradict itself but requires careful interpretation of ethnicity, nationality, and culture.

Marriage and Faith: The New Testament teaches believers not to divorce unbelieving spouses who are willing to live with them, emphasizing the sanctifying power of a believing partner.

> 1 Corinthians 7:12–14 (ESV):
>
> To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ... For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Marriage Within the Faith: While believers are not to abandon unbelieving spouses, the Bible also encourages believers to marry “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39), meaning marriage between two Christians sharing faith, baptism, and spiritual unity.

Spiritual Unity:

> 2 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV):

> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

This warns believers against forming binding relationships that can lead to spiritual compromise.

Final Thoughts

Moses’ marriage to Zipporah, a Kushite woman, reflects God’s providence and grace beyond ethnic and national boundaries. It challenges believers today to look beyond superficial divisions and to prioritize faith and obedience to God.

If you have not accepted Jesus Christ, no matter how much knowledge or wisdom you possess, without salvation you will perish. Salvation through Jesus is essential for eternal life.

Maranatha!

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