

Did Moses Have Multiple Wives?

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Confusion exists for many students of Scripture regarding the number of women Moses married. Unfortunately, based on what we have recorded for us in the inspired Scriptures, it is hard to be absolutely certain in providing a definitive answer.

Let's talk about what we do know. Moses had a wife named Zipporah. She was the daughter of a priest in the land of Midian named Jethro, who was also called, Reuel (Ex. 2:16-21; Ex. 3:1).

In Exodus 4:20 it appears that Moses only had one wife. We read in that verse:

So Moses took his **wife** and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.
Exodus 4:20 (Emphasis Mine)

Notice that the verse speaks of the wife (singular) of Moses. There is no indication at this point in his life that Moses had any other. The wife in view here is Zipporah. This matter is simple until we come to this scene that takes place on Israel's journey to Canaan:

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses **because of the Cushite woman whom he had married** (for he had married a Cushite woman).
Numbers 12:1 (Emphasis Mine)

Who was this Cushite woman? Many believe this is a reference to Zipporah. The Bible even gives some indication that Midian and Cush were possibly two names for the same region. Consider the words of the prophet Habakkuk:

I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,
The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.
Habakkuk 3:7

This *might* be the prophet identifying Cush and Midian as being one and the same, or closely related.

However, there are some other possibilities to explain what is going on here. It could very well be that this Cushite woman is another wife. This is not to suggest that Moses was a polygamist. It is possible that Zipporah had passed away, although the Bible does not record her death at this point, or ever. If this is indeed a reference to Zipporah, it seems a little strange that Aaron and Miriam would complain about it, since Moses and Zipporah would have been married, at this point, for somewhere around forty plus years.

So, was this a recent marriage, or could it be that Aaron and Miriam are looking in his past to dig up some dirt on Moses in their complaint? Whichever, God was not pleased with their actions (cf. Num. 12:5-15).

Relating to the possibility that this is another woman, Josephus, from an uninspired historical perspective, talks about an event that *supposedly* occurred while Moses was in Egypt, before he had fled to Midian (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 2.10.2). He recounts how Moses was promoted to a position of leadership over Egypt's army in a battle against the Ethiopians, to which the Cushites were sometimes associated.

Josephus mentions a woman named, Tharbis, who was the daughter of the king of the Ethiopians. She fell in love with Moses due to the great courage and skill he demonstrated in battle. She sent one of her servants to discuss the possibility of marriage. Moses agreed, but only if she would assist him in conquering the city, which she did. Upon his victory over the Ethiopians, Moses is said to have taken her as his wife.

Now remember, this is from Josephus, an uninspired writer. None of this is recorded in Scripture. I am mentioning it only as a possible explanation of the Cushite woman he married. As to why Aaron and Miriam complained about it, again, it was possibly to bring up dirt from the past (much like is done today in campaigns for political office) in order to bolster their case for being leaders on an equal, or greater level than Moses.

The Jewish Midrash (an ancient uninspired Jewish commentary) gives an entirely different explanation for the Cushite woman.

All of this brings us back to what we mentioned at the start of this article. It is hard to be absolutely certain of all the details in this matter of identifying the Cushite woman. Praise God for the clarity of the Scriptures in matters relating to salvation, living as a child of God, and the great hope we have in Jesus Christ.