

Who Was Cush?

The African Kingdom in Scripture

Uncovering Our Biblical History | Bible Study 2

Purpose: Explore Cush/Kush as an ancient African region and kingdom, identify its biblical appearances, and learn to read geography and historical context carefully.

Opening thought - from Malisa Michelle

When I say that Africa was already present in the biblical world, I want us to go beyond a slogan and open the Scriptures. One name that deserves our attention is Cush. Too often we read right past it without asking where Cush was, who lived there, and what their presence tells us. Today, I want us to slow down, study, and see what the text actually says.

1. What does Cush mean?

In the Hebrew Bible, **Cush** is a name used for a person in a genealogy and for peoples or lands associated especially with the region south of ancient Egypt. Historians commonly connect the biblical land of Cush with **Nubia**, particularly in what is now Sudan. The ancient kingdom is also written **Kush** in historical scholarship. The boundaries and political centers changed over time; we should not treat every biblical occurrence as a reference to a single fixed modern country.

Genesis 10:6 names Cush among the sons of Ham, alongside Mizraim (Egypt), Put, and Canaan. This is a biblical genealogy, not a modern racial classification. Read Genesis 10:6-8 and note that Cush also appears in the genealogy connected to Nimrod.

2. Where was the kingdom of Kush?

The historic kingdom of Kush developed along the Nile south of Egypt. Major political centers included **Napata** and later **Meroe**, both in present-day Sudan. Kush maintained its own political and cultural traditions, traded with neighboring societies, and at one period Kushite rulers governed Egypt as its Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. This is important context, although the Bible does not narrate all of Kushite history.

Older English Bible translations often render Cush as “**Ethiopia**.” That term reflected ancient Greek and later translation traditions and should not automatically be equated with the borders of the modern nation of Ethiopia. Likewise, “Cushite” does not identify a single modern nationality or prove any modern group’s lineage.

3. Where do we meet Cushites in Scripture?

Numbers 12:1: Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses concerning his Cushite wife. The verse identifies her as Cushite; interpreters debate her relationship to Zipporah and other details. The text should not be made to say more than it states.

2 Chronicles 14:9-13: Zerah the Cushite comes against Asa with a great force. The narrative presents Cush in a military and political context and emphasizes Asa's reliance on Yahweh. Scholars debate the historical identification of Zerah.

Jeremiah 38:7-13; 39:15-18: Ebed-Melech the Cushite, an official in the royal house, intervenes to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern. Later he receives a word of deliverance. His courage and action matter more to the narrative than any speculation about his appearance.

Isaiah 18:1-7: The prophet speaks concerning a land beyond the rivers of Cush. The passage situates Cush within international relationships and prophetic imagery; some geographical details remain debated.

Psalms 68:31: Cush is pictured stretching out hands to God (the KJV says "Ethiopia"). Read it in the context of the psalm's vision of nations acknowledging God.

Amos 9:7: Yahweh asks Israel whether they are not like the Cushites to Him. This is a striking reminder that Yahweh's sovereignty and concern are not limited to one nation. It also distinguishes Cushites from Israelites in the passage.

4. What about the Ethiopian official in Acts 8?

Acts 8:26-40 tells of an official serving Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who meets Philip while reading Isaiah. This is a powerful account of the gospel crossing geographical boundaries. The Greek term translated "Ethiopian" belongs to the ancient world and does not map neatly onto modern national borders. The official's exact homeland and the historical relationship to Meroitic Kush are subjects for careful study; the passage does not explicitly call him a member of the biblical tribe of Judah.

5. What should we learn?

First, Africa belongs in an accurate telling of the biblical world. Second, biblical references to Cush show African people in military, royal, prophetic, and personal narratives. Third, we must not erase these people, but neither should we force modern racial categories or unproven ancestry claims onto ancient texts. Our commitment is to Scripture, historical context, and careful interpretation.

My encouragement: Do not allow familiar translations to stop your questions. Look at the maps. Compare translations. Read the entire chapter. Ask what we know, what we infer, and what remains uncertain. Being rooted in truth means having the courage to learn.

Discussion questions

1. What did you previously understand the word Cush or Ethiopia to mean?
2. How does locating Kush along the Nile change your mental map of the biblical world?

3. What do Ebed-Melech's actions teach us about courage and doing what is right?
4. What is the difference between biblical geography, later translation terms, and modern national identities?
5. How can we honor African biblical history without claiming more than the evidence supports?

Study activity

Read Genesis 10:6-8, Jeremiah 38:7-13, and Amos 9:7 in two Bible translations. On a map, locate Egypt, the Nile, Napata, Meroe, and present-day Sudan. Write three observations directly supported by the text, then one question you want to investigate further.

Closing prayer

Yahweh, give us understanding as we open Your Word. Teach us to honor truth, seek wisdom, and recognize the people and places that are part of the biblical story. Keep us humble where evidence is incomplete, courageous where truth has been overlooked, and faithful in how we live. In Yeshua's name, amen.

Scripture reading and historical notes

Primary reading: Genesis 10:6-8; Numbers 12:1; 2 Chronicles 14:9-13; Jeremiah 38:7-13 and 39:15-18; Isaiah 18; Psalm 68:31; Amos 9:7; Acts 8:26-40.

Historical study terms: Kingdom of Kush, Nubia, Napata, Meroe, Egypt's Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. For independent reference, consult museum and academic resources on ancient Nubia and Kush alongside a reliable Bible atlas. Historical identifications and biblical interpretations are not equally certain in every passage.

Prepared for Rooted Kingdom Ministries

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