



Monday, November 17, 2025

There is no classical Jewish text that plainly says “Moses was a White man” or “Moses had ginger/red hair.”

What *does* exist are a handful of Jewish and Jewish-adjacent texts about Moses’ skin, light, and hair in very specific contexts, plus a lot of much later art and internet folklore. Those limited sources sometimes get stretched to argue for a White / ginger Moses – usually by people working backwards from European images, not from the Torah or Talmud.

Below is a map of what actually exists, and how it has been (and could be) used.

1. Torah texts involving Moses and “whiteness”

1.1 Exodus 4:6 – the “white hand”

When God first gives Moses signs to show Israel, one of them is:

“He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow.” (Exodus 4:6)

Classical rabbinic midrash (Shemot Rabbah 3:12–13) reads this as a temporary punishment for Moses speaking negatively about Israel and as a sign of *tzara’at* (spiritual leprosy). [Yeshivat Har Etzion](#)

Key points:

- The text is not describing Moses’ *normal* skin colour.
- The whiteness is linked with disease/corrective punishment, not with beauty or superiority. [Yeshivat Har Etzion+1](#)
- Modern Jewish writers and scholars use this verse when talking about whiteness as a curse (e.g. in work on albinism and biblical tradition). [ResearchGate+1](#)

How it has been used in racial arguments

- In some African contexts, this “white as snow” hand has fed readings of whiteness as a sign of divine curse, especially around albinism. [ResearchGate+1](#)

- In online debates, a small number of people try to twist this into: “Moses’ skin could become white, therefore he must have been naturally white,” but that goes *against* the plain sense of the story (his hand returns to “his other flesh” – i.e. its normal colour – immediately afterwards). [Yeshivat Har Etzion+1](#)

So Exodus 4:6 is about temporary, diseased whiteness, not about Moses being a White man.

1.2 Exodus 34:29–35 – Moses’ “shining” or “horned” face

After Moses comes down from Sinai the second time:

“...the skin of his face shone [*karan or panav*] because he had been talking with YHWH.” (Exodus 34:29)

Jewish tradition consistently understands this as divine light radiating from his face. Rabbinic commentators (Rashi, etc.) explain *karan* as light that projects like horns – rays of light, not literal horns. [The Schechter Institutes+1](#)

Key points:

- This is again not about race or normal complexion, it is about supernatural radiance from being close to God. [The Torah+1](#)
- The Latin Vulgate famously mis-translated this so that Moses appears with horns; medieval Christian art then depicts Moses as a horned, usually pale, European man. Jewish scholars today spend a lot of time correcting that. [Israel Institute of Biblical Studies+1](#)

How it gets used in “White Moses” arguments

- Some people conflate “shining face” with “bright / fair / white” skin and fold it into a picture of a pale Moses – but the Hebrew text doesn’t say his skin changed colour, only that it radiated light. [The Torah+1](#)
 - In practice, the white European Moses image mainly comes from Christian and secular European art, not from Jewish exegesis. [Wikipedia+1](#)
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1.3 Numbers 12 – Miriam becomes “white as snow”

The story of Moses’ Cushite (Ethiopian) wife is crucial for race:

- Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses “because of the Cushite woman whom he had married.”
- God strikes Miriam, not Moses, and “Miriam was leprous, white as snow.” (Numbers 12:10) [chabad.org+1](#)

Jewish and modern Jewish-studies writers read this as:

- A story condemning anti-Kushite / anti-Black prejudice: Miriam’s criticism of a dark-skinned woman is punished by being turned grotesquely white. [blogs.timesofisrael.com+1](#)
- Again, whiteness as affliction, not a racial ideal.

This is not used in serious Jewish scholarship to make Moses White. If anything, it highlights that his wife is Black and that mocking that Blackness is punished.

2. Jewish and Jewish-adjacent texts on Moses’ appearance

2.1 Hellenistic Jewish writer Artapanus (“tall and ruddy”)

Artapanus of Alexandria (2nd c. BCE) is a Jewish author writing in Greek. He greatly expands Moses’ story and includes a physical description:

Moses, at 80 years old, is “tall and ruddy, with long white hair, and dignified.”[Wikipedia](#)

What this *does* and *doesn’t* mean:

- “Ruddy” in ancient texts usually means a healthy, reddish or bronze complexion, not necessarily Northern-European pale or ginger. It’s the kind of word also used for David.[My Jewish Learning](#)
- The long white hair is the hair of an old man, not “white race.”
- It reflects a Hellenistic heroic aesthetic more than any racial theory.

Could someone use this to argue Moses was “White”?

- Yes, people do sometimes quote Artapanus and equate “ruddy + white hair” with a White/ginger old man.
- But that reading is projecting modern race categories backward into a text that’s really about heroic beauty and dignity, not about European vs African.

Still, if you’re mapping every text that can be used, Artapanus is the closest thing to a “whiteness” description coming from a recognisably Jewish source.

2.2 Rabbinic traditions of light and beauty

Rabbinic literature heaps praise on Moses’ beauty and radiance, but without race language:

- House filled with light at his birth – midrash and Talmud (Sotah 12a) say that when Moses was born “the entire house filled with light,” drawing a link between “he was good” and “God saw the light, that it was good.”[thegemara.com+1](#)
- Radiant, angelic face – later summaries of rabbinic tradition say his countenance was “like that of an angel” and extremely handsome.[chabad.org+1](#)

These are:

- Spiritual / symbolic descriptions, not skin-tone descriptions.
 - They get borrowed visually in paintings where Moses is given a light halo and pale skin, but that’s driven by European visual culture, not by the words themselves.[Rabbi Yaakov Bieler](#)
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3. Red / ginger hair in Jewish lore and how it gets linked (wrongly) to Moses

3.1 A legend about red-haired Israelites (not Moses)

A 19th-century compilation of Jewish legends reports a tradition that some Israelites’ black hair turned red as punishment after the Golden Calf, and that this change was passed to their descendants. It explicitly has Moses say he is *not* among those red-haired sinners.[Wikisource](#)

So in that legend:

- Red hair is a mark of guilt, not holiness.
- Moses *distances* himself from it.

But later Christian and popular writers sometimes flatten this to “Jews say their red hair comes from Moses’ generation” and people then misremember that as “Moses had red hair.” That’s already one layer away from the actual Jewish tradition.

3.2 Modern Jewish chatter: “Moses and David supposedly had red hair”

If you go into modern internet discussions, you’ll find Jews casually saying things like:

“Moses and King David supposedly had red hair.” [Reddit](#)

Important:

- These comments almost never have a direct classical source citation attached.
- They’re usually based on conflating “ruddy” language (which the Bible uses clearly for David, not for Moses) with general Jewish red-hair folklore. [My Jewish Learning](#)

So yes, in modern Jewish popular talk you can find people *saying* Moses was ginger. But when you ask “Where in Torah, Talmud, or Midrash does it say that?” – there isn’t a clear, solid answer.

4. Non-Jewish and fringe uses of Jewish material to “whiten” Moses

Your question is specifically about Jewish texts, but part of the picture is how non-Jewish readers grab those texts.

4.1 “Flaming red hair and white skin – Moses the Egyptian”

In some Christian / identity-politics Facebook circles you’ll find claims like:

“He has flaming red hair and white skin. Moses the Egyptian...” [Facebook](#)

These often:

- Present themselves as based on “Jewish sources,” but don’t actually cite any rabbinic text.
- Combine:
 - the fact that Moses is once called an “Egyptian” (Exodus 2:19),
 - plus modern myths that ancient Egyptians were white,
 - plus the vague Jewish red-hair folklore mentioned above.

The result is an assertive but source-thin picture of Moses as a white or ginger man.

4.2 Western art feeding back into Jewish imagination

European Christian art, from Michelangelo onwards, standardised Moses as:

- A white, often ruddy-cheeked, bearded man,
- Sometimes even with horns of light (from the translation issue),

- Painted in the same palette as white European saints and nobles. [Wikipedia+1](#)

Because Jews in Europe lived surrounded by this imagery, some of that white Moses visual language leaked into:

- Jewish illustrators' work,
- Children's books,
- Modern Israeli and diaspora art.

That can create the *impression* that there is a strong Jewish textual tradition for “white Moses,” when really the texts themselves are silent and the art is copying Christian models. [Rabbi Yaakov Bieler](#)

5. So, “exhaustive” – what do we actually have?

If we list every *meaningful* Jewish or Jewish-adjacent textual hook that could be (and sometimes has been) used to argue for a White / ginger Moses, it looks like this:

1. Exodus 4:6 – white, leprous hand

- *Type:* Torah
- *Content:* Hand becomes “leprous, white as snow” temporarily.
- *Use:* Sometimes (mis)used in race debates; in Jewish tradition it's punishment, not normal skin. [Yeshivat Har Etzion+1](#)

2. Exodus 34:29–35 – shining (karan) face

- *Type:* Torah + rabbinic commentaries
- *Content:* Face radiates light after encountering God.
- *Use:* Visually rendered as rays / halo; in Christian art often with a White European face, feeding later assumptions. [The Schechter Institutes+1](#)

3. Numbers 12:10 – Miriam “white as snow”

- *Type:* Torah + midrash
- *Content:* Miriam punished for speaking against Moses' Cushite (Black) wife; becomes leprous and white.
- *Use:* Key in Jewish reflections on anti-Black racism; not evidence for Moses' own colour. [blogs.timesofisrael.com+1](#)

4. Birth traditions – house filled with light; exceptional beauty

- *Type:* Talmud (Sotah 12a), Midrash, later summaries
- *Content:* Whole house fills with light at Moses' birth; he is extremely beautiful, angelic. [thegemara.com+2chabad.org+2](#)
- *Use:* Can be drawn as a very bright, pale-lit figure in art, but no text says “white skin.”

5. Artapanus – “tall and ruddy, with long white hair”

- **Type:** Hellenistic Jewish historiography
- **Content:** Moses at 80 is tall, ruddy, long white hair, dignified. [Wikipedia](#)
- **Use:** Most concrete physical description in anything near a Jewish source; can be (and sometimes is) quoted in arguments that Moses looked like a white / reddish-complexioned hero. But “ruddy” ≠ European race, and white hair here is age, not race.

6. Golden Calf legend – red hair as punishment (Moses excluded)

- **Type:** Post-biblical legend reported in secondary collections
- **Content:** Some Israelites’ hair turns red after sin; Moses says he’s not part of that group. [Wikisource](#)
- **Use:** Supports *red-haired Jews* folklore, but actually distances Moses from red hair. Later tellings sometimes drop that nuance.

7. Modern Jewish popular claims (“Moses had red hair”)

- **Type:** Internet / oral, not classical texts
- **Content:** Casual claims in forums that “Moses and King David supposedly had red hair.” [Reddit](#)
- **Use:** Often used to normalise ginger Jews, not to claim racial superiority; usually lacking any cited rabbinic source.

8. Modern racial polemics using Moses texts

- **Type:** Academic + polemical
- **Content:** Studies on “white hand of Moses,” whiteness as curse, or on Moses’ Cushite wife and racism. [ResearchGate+1](#)
- **Use:** Mostly *challenge* anti-Black myths, not support a White Moses.

6. What is not there

Just to be crystal clear about the silences:

- There is no verse in the Torah or Tanakh that says Moses’ skin was “white,” “fair,” or “pale.”
- There is no classical rabbinic source that unambiguously says “Moses had red/ginger hair.”
- There is no Jewish legal or theological text that builds any doctrine on Moses being White.

The real pattern in Jewish tradition is:

- Moses is Hebrew / Israelite, born in Egypt, living among Egyptians and Midianites – so historically he’d have looked like other ancient Near Eastern people (browns, not Northern-European white). [Mi Yodeya+1](#)
- The texts focus on his holiness, leadership, light, and proximity to God, not on race.

Most “White / ginger Moses” claims are therefore late, indirect, and often based on Christian art + modern racial categories, not on the core Jewish textual tradition itself.

Signed

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	IC5		O1 Chinese O9 Any Other Oriental	
	IC6		M1 White & Black Caribbean M2 White & Black African M3 White & Asian M9 Any Other Mixed	
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Who are you?



BIRTH PLACE



LINEAGE



APPEARANCE



STATE OF MIND



DNA

UK Government Race and Ethnicity Codes.

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