

M O U N T

THE TRUE LOCATION REVEALED

S I N A I

I N

BY JOEL RICHARDSON

A R A B I A



WINEPRESS

MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA

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*To the God of Sinai and to the small band of forerunners who've born
both the stigma and the pain of carrying His burden for this mountain.*

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INTRODUCTION

It was 2:30 in the morning when a small group of six were anxiously navigating two Toyota Land Cruisers through the night, down an extremely remote and unpaved desert road in north-west Saudi Arabia. We were doing our best to slip quietly past a dozen or so Bedouin camps and reach our destination before the first call to prayer at about 4:30 a.m. As we approached the mountain range known as Jebel al-Lawz, we eagerly scanned the side of the road for a path that we would follow deep into a valley, where we would park our vehicles out of site and sleep on the desert floor for maybe an hour. Our goal was to rise and climb to the top of the mountain that the Bible calls Mount Sinai.

In years past, large sections of the mountain had been fenced off and declared to be forbidden. Gun-toting security guards were stationed in guard shacks at the mountain's base. In more recent years, the security had been loosened; the guards had disappeared, and portions of the fencing had been knocked over.

It had all become somewhat blurry as to exactly what was legal and what was not. From all reports that we had heard, trying to explore the mountain was a gamble. Parts of the northwestern regions of Saudi Arabia are somewhat like the wild west. My friend and guide had traveled there twice in recent years and on one of the trips had been arrested. Others who had recently visited related that depending on who you ran into, the locals could either be very friendly or downright hostile. All things considered, we didn't want to take any chances. We decided to slip in as covertly as possible. We finally found the path to our hiding spot in the valley, killed the engines, and did our best to take a 4:00 a.m. power nap.

Just a couple hours later, with the hot, Saudi Arabian sun rising fast, we were hiking up an incredibly rugged mountain. It was absolutely stunning. Many weeks before I departed, as I was preparing for the trip and pondering what I was about to encounter, I felt a sense of holy fear creep over me. Nothing, however, could prepare me for the awe I felt actually being there. For the next three days, we continued to explore the mountain and many of the areas around it. The sense of wonderment never subsided, and I'm still carrying it with me.

As I climbed the mountain, I reflected on its significance. There is something about Mount Sinai that is difficult to put your finger on. This was the actual location of the most powerful, open theophany in all of redemptive history. At no other time or place has God ever manifested Himself before such a large number of witnesses in such an open and powerful way as He did at this mountain. This was the very place where God Himself "came down." This was the mountain described in the New Testament as having been covered in "a blazing fire" in

“darkness and gloom and whirlwind,” where those present heard “the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them” (Hebrews 12:18-19). Even Moses, upon seeing such a sight, proclaimed, “I am full of fear and trembling” (v. 21). This is also the mountain where Elijah fled to and heard the “still small” voice of God. As we will discuss later, it is also likely the place where Paul the apostle likely traveled to shortly after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus and where he would receive a fuller revelation of “his gospel” from heaven. This is a mountain that is drenched with divine history. I’m not normally one who is too sensitive to such things, but when I was there, it was as if I could still feel the echoes and reverberations of all that unfolded in that place so long ago. I’ve traveled all over the world; I’ve been to Israel numerous times. There is no question that visiting the actual locations where the biblical prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples lived and ministered is a deeply moving experience. Visiting Jebel al-Lawz, however—which I very much believe to be the true Mount Sinai—was the single most soul-stirring and faith-building experience of my life.

Since my initial visit to the mountain, and after having published this book, I have since returned to Saudi Arabia several times, bringing hundreds of other guests. In fact, roughly a year after this book was written, in 2019, I had the tremendous privilege to lead the first official Christian tour to Saudi Arabia in the history of the kingdom. With every visit, we have been received with tremendous warmth and hospitality. Since that time I have also gained many new insights and understanding into the mountain. And so, where appropriate, new information

has been added to this expanded second edition.

I've always been someone who, when he discovers or experiences something of excellence, loves to share it with others. As such, my prayer for this book is that it will contribute in some way to seeing this mountain set apart and preserved as a World Heritage Site and opened to the world in order that a multitude of others can also continue to visit the "mountain of God" and experience the same sense of holy awe that I felt, to witness such a critical historical location, and to feel those same holy reverberating echoes. To be clear, while this book presents the case for Jebel al-Lawz as the true Mount Sinai, by no means is it a comprehensive treatment of the subject. Exodus studies can quickly become quite complex, and any thorough treatment of the subject would require a substantially larger volume than this. The problem is that those kind of works tend to appeal to a very small number of specialists and scholars. That is not what this book is. This book is my best effort to unpack the most important underlying issues, while responsibly interacting with the most up to date and best scholarship on this subject, and to present my findings in a way that any reader can easily understand and appreciate. As we will see, once one cuts through some of the thick fog that scholarship too often creates, the subject is actually not that difficult to grasp. Average thinking people can very easily wrap their head around the primary arguments and evidence and make a reasonably solid assessment of their own. Mount Sinai belongs to everyone, not just a small group of scholars.

The time is ripe. Within the sovereignty of God, the season has come in which Jebel al-Lawz is now finally fully opened not only to archeologists but the whole world. The Saudis

are currently building a massive “city-state” called Neom throughout the entire western Tabuk region along the Red Sea where the mountain sits and will soon be ready for millions of visitors.

It is no accident that this mountain, unlike any other biblical site in the world, had been cut off from the outside world for so long. Now, the specific timing of its full exposure and revelation to the world is no accident. In the current atmosphere of increasing unbelief, the same God who descended upon the mountain before multitudes has ordained that it now emerge from the relative shadows to be marveled upon by an even greater multitude.

While the location of Mount Sinai is by no means a matter of doctrine—one’s relationship with God is not affected by where they believe the mountain is located—this does not mean, however, that it is thus irrelevant. This mountain is tremendously important for several reasons. More than a mere site with profound historical and religious importance, it is a living witness. The mountain itself carries the very testimony of the unfathomably mighty things that were done there. Even more so, it bears witness to the things that the Lord is going to do in the future. When one reads the biblical account of the Exodus and the many commandments that were given on Sinai, the repeated command of the Lord was to remember. “But you shall *remember* the Lord your God” (Deut. 8:18, emphasis mine). “*Remember*, do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness” (Deut. 9:7, emphasis mine). “*Remember* this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the Lord brought you out from this place” (Exodus 13:3, emphasis mine).

Yet here we are, living in a day when it seems as though the whole world has forgotten. This is why I believe the Lord has preserved this mountain for this moment. In an age of unbelief, of cynicism, and scorn for all that is holy, would it not be like the Lord to once again remind the world to remember? In the period leading up to the return of Jesus the Messiah, before the appointed judgment of all mankind, I believe that God, in His great mercy is going to use this mountain as a testimony and a trumpet to shout to an increasingly skeptical and rebellious world. As He has been declaring for centuries from heaven, His voice will once more thunder from the mountaintops:

“Repent, for the day of the Lord is near!”

1

THE TRADITIONAL SITE OF MOUNT SINAI

Mount Sinai, unlike any other place in the world, is entirely unique. Nowhere else has God actually appeared before such a vast multitude of people. This is the place where the Lord came down in a cloud, accompanied by thunder, smoke, fire, and trumpets blasting from heaven. It was here where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the Torah. This is one of the most pivotal and foundational locations within the larger grand story of redemption. Surely then, we can assume that archaeologists and experts have some relative agreement as to where this all took place. Biblical scholars must have a fairly good idea as to where Mount Sinai is located. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. In 2013, a group of international scholars gathered together in Israel to debate the location of Mount Sinai. Rather than coming to any kind of consensus, this colloquium exposed the tremendous disagreement within the academic community over this topic. Sad to say, when one reads through many of the books and papers about this subject,

there is an abundance of strongly expressed opinions and very little charity for those with differing opinions.

The traditional location for Mount Sinai is south of Israel, deep in the Egyptian peninsula, today also called Sinai. But only a small minority of scholars today actually believe that is the correct location. At this conference of international academics in Israel, very few were seriously discussing the traditional site as a likely candidate.¹ Yet this is the mountain that Christendom has claimed is the real Mount Sinai for the past sixteen hundred years. Before we can discuss the location of the true Mount Sinai, we must review the history of the traditional site. How did this particular mountain come to be viewed as the mountain of God?

After Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in AD 312, his mother Helena also converted to the faith.² In 326, at nearly eighty years of age, she traveled to the Holy Land to identify various relics and locations associated with biblical history. During her trip, she commissioned two churches to be built. Eusebius, the early church historian, tells the account:

For this empress, having resolved to discharge the duties of pious devotion to the Supreme God . . . had hastened to survey this venerable land. For without delay she dedicated two churches to the God whom she adored, one at the grotto which had been the scene of the Saviour's birth; the other on the mount of His ascension. Thus did Helena Augusta, the pious mother of a pious emperor, erect these two noble and beautiful monuments of devotion, worthy of everlasting remembrance, to the honour of God her Saviour, and as proofs of her holy zeal.³

There is also a tradition that at some point during her journey Helena traveled to Sinai and commissioned a small church to be built to protect the monks living there as well as a tower on the spot where the monks believed the burning bush was located. The earliest record of this tradition is recorded in the *Annals* of Euty chius in the tenth century. This is six hundred years after the events are alleged to have happened. Several hundred years later, in the seventeenth century, we find the tradition repeated in the writings of Bishop Nectarius, who wrote the traditional history of Saint Catherine's Monastery, which sits on the mountain called the Epitome of Holy History.⁵ As one historian notes however, "The pilgrimage of Helena to the East in 326 is well authenticated, but there is no contemporary reference to her entering Sinai."⁶ Eusebius the early church historian certainly makes no mention of Helena visiting the Sinai Peninsula and no other historical support can be found.⁷ The earliest record we have of anyone visiting this particular mountain with the view that it was Mount Sinai comes from Theodoret of Cyr rhus who in AD 444 wrote about the journeys of two monks who had traveled to Mount Sinai several decades previously. The first was Julian Saba who is said to have built a small chapel on the mountain's peak in AD 367. Today a small Orthodox chapel stands on the peak that was built in 1934 on the ruins of a sixteenth-century chapel. Roughly a decade after Saba's visit, according to Theodoret, a man named Symeon the Elder also visited.⁸

About fifty years later in AD 381-384, a woman name Egeria made a pilgrimage to the mountain and described her journey in great detail in a diary called the *Peregrinatio* or "The Pilgrimage."⁹ Around the same time, a monk named Ammonius

from Alexandria traveled to Sinai and witnessed the martyrdom of a few dozen of the monks and hermits living there at the hand of the Saracens, or Ishmaelites, who lived throughout the region. A portion of Ammonius's account follows:

I was, moreover, fired by the desire to see memorable places including the Holy Sepulcher, the place of the Resurrection, and others that were associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. After worshipping at these places, I decided to seek the holy mountain called Sinai. Going into the desert journey together with others who were bent on the same purpose, I journeyed thither (from Jerusalem), with the help of God in eighteen days. And when I had prayed I remained with the holy fathers in order to visit their several cells to the profit of my soul. . . . A few days later, the Saracens whose sheykh (or king) had died fell upon the fathers in their cells and slew them. . . . They would have dealt the same with us, but a great fire appeared on the mountain which scared them so they left behind their women, children, and camels.¹⁰

Between the four late-fourth-century accounts of Julian, Symeon, Ammonius, and Egeria it is clear that by this time, a popular tradition had developed concerning this mountain. Of course, the monks and hermits living on or near the mountain would have believed that it was Sinai for at least a couple decades prior. Such observations must be qualified, however, by noting that neither of the two fourth-century writings—Eusebius's *Onomasticon* (AD 330) and records from Bourdeaux (AD 333)—mention anything about Mount Sinai. As one historian notes, "These silences suggest that Mt. Sinai's identity had still

not been established or publicized at that time.”¹¹ Thus, all evidence points to the traditions that identify this mountain as being Mount Sinai as having developed sometime around the middle of the fourth century.

A little over 150 years later, sometime between AD 548 and 565, Emperor Justinian commissioned that an enormous monastery be built there. Although traditionally known as Saint Catherine’s Monastery, its official name is the Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai. The complex is a series of buildings, including a massive basilica and the world’s oldest library, all surrounded by a massive wall which ranges between forty and fifty feet tall. The story of Justinian was recorded by Procopius, his official historian. According to one nineteenth-century source:

[Procopius] relates that Mount Sinai was then inhabited by monks, “whose whole life was but a continual preparation for death” and that in consideration of their holy abstinence from all worldly enjoyments, Justinian caused a church to be erected for them, and dedicated it to the holy Virgin. This was placed not upon the summit of the mountain, but far below; because no one could pass the night upon the top, on account of the constant sounds and other supernatural phenomena which were there perceptible.¹²

This is a complete survey of all of the earliest attestations concerning the traditional Mount Sinai. As Allen Kerkeslager, associate professor of ancient and comparative religions at Saint Joseph’s University states: “The notion that the ‘mountain of God’ called Sinai and Horeb was located in what we now call

the Sinai Peninsula has no older tradition supporting it than Byzantine times.”¹³ Frank Moore Cross, the late professor emeritus of Hebrew and other Oriental languages at Harvard University, said precisely the same thing, adding, “It is one of the many holy places created for pilgrims in the Byzantine period.”¹⁴ Before the fourth century, there is no evidence that anyone believed this particular mountain to be Mount Sinai.¹⁵ All evidence points to this tradition beginning with the Egyptian monks who had begun moving there earlier in that century. Once Emperor Justinian commissioned the building of Saint Catherine’s Monastery in the sixth century, the tradition was firmly established. The rest is history, or more accurately, *myth*. Although Saint Catherine’s Monastery holds a deeply significant place in church history, particularly as it pertains to the preservation of many priceless biblical manuscripts, in truth, the actual mountain itself is little more than a very old tourist attraction.

THE TRADITIONAL SITE OF MOUNT SINAI



Map 1: The Location of the traditional Mount Sinai



The traditional Mount Sinai in Egypt

MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA



Orthodox Chapel on top of the traditional Mount Sinai



The walls of Saint Catherine's Monastery

2

THE MODERN SEARCH FOR THE REAL MOUNT SINAI

So what about Jebel al-Lawz? When did the mountain known as the “Almond Mountain” begin to become a popular candidate for the real Mount Sinai? As we will see in later chapters, this location is actually the oldest and most well attested of any other candidate. Despite this fact however, at least here in the west, this view was all but nearly forgotten until the 1980s, when a few adventurous investigators visited this mountain and returned to the United States to share their findings. The first such investigator was Ron Wyatt, a man whose life some say was the model for the film character Indiana Jones. In 1984, Wyatt, along with his two sons, entered Saudi Arabia to investigate al-Lawz. Although they did manage to access the mountain, as they were departing the Kingdom toward Jordan, they were caught, arrested, and held for nearly three months in a Saudi prison. Less than a year later, Wyatt returned with a man named David Fasold. Again they were expelled from the country. Convinced that Jebel al-Lawz was the real Mount Sinai,

Wyatt attempted to inform the Saudis about this unfathomable historical and archeological treasure of which they were stewards. Perhaps curious, perhaps leery, it was these initial encounters with Wyatt that led the Saudi authorities to fence off several sections of the mountain and post large signs declaring the areas to be off limits.

Upon returning home, Fasold shared what he had seen with James Irwin, the legendary Apollo 15 astronaut and the eighth man to walk on the moon. Irwin shared what he had heard with his friend Bob Cornuke, then executive vice president of the High Flight Foundation of which Irwin was the president. In 1988, Cornuke and his associate Larry Williams slipped into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to conduct their own exploration. Cornuke and Williams are the first known modern investigators to successfully hike to the top of the mountain. During a second visit, Cornuke and Williams were also caught and arrested.¹ Eventually, they each wrote a book detailing their harrowing experiences and presenting the case for Jebel al-Lawz as the real Mount Sinai.²



Map 2: The Location of Jebel al-Lawz

THE CALDWELLS

The next major step forward in the exploration of the mountain came in 1992 when Jim Caldwell, an engineer working in the Kingdom, with his wife, Penny, and their two children made a total of fourteen visits to the mountain. During their many investigations, they took thousands of photographs, and captured hours upon hours of video. Throughout this time they shared their photographic evidence with others, but because they were still working in the Kingdom, they sought to maintain a very low profile. This allowed them to continue to make more return visits to the mountain than anyone previously. During their many investigations, the Caldwelles made several very significant discoveries. They found a massive field of graves near the mountain that may be where the three thousand Israelite idolaters were buried (see Ex. 32:25-29). They also discovered

numerous petroglyphs and carvings around the mountain, many of which may very well have been left by the ancient Hebrews during their time there. Their most astounding find was a towering split rock on the northwest side of the mountain that the local Bedouins believe to be the rock that Moses struck, from which God miraculously brought forth water (see Ex. 17:6). We will discuss this rock in much more detail later.

In 2003, the Caldwelles returned to the mountain, bringing a team comprised of Dr. Lennart Möller, a professor of environmental medicine at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm; Dr. Glen Fritz, a specialist in the field of environmental geography; and Tim Mahoney, the filmmaker and producer behind the series *Patterns of Evidence*. After their visit, both Möller and Fritz became among the most committed supporters of al-Lawz being the real Mount Sinai. From the Egyptian side, Möller had earlier conducted an extensive underwater filming expedition that documented what genuinely appear to be chariots, wheels, and axles on the floor of the Red Sea. His findings can be seen in the film *The Exodus Revealed*. Möller also wrote a very thorough book on the topic called *The Exodus Case*. Fritz went on to publish his doctoral dissertation, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus*, which is likely the single most thorough analysis of the location of the Red Sea crossing that has ever been written.

FURTHER VISITS

Several others have visited the site over the years yet have remained anonymous. Dr. Sung Hak Kim, a medical doctor from South Korea who personally served the governor of the Mecca province for some years, visited the site several times. Between 2016 and 2018, Ryan Mauro, a well-known

intelligence expert with the Clarion Project and a frequent guest on Fox News, visited the site on a few occasions and made a film about his time there. Finally, “and last of all, as to one untimely born” (1 Cor. 15:8), in the spring of 2018, I was blessed to be able to visit the site myself, along with five others.

THE FUTURE OF JEBEL AL-LAWZ

Since visiting the mountain, I’ve spoken with several of the those mentioned above who visited the mountain long before I did. Each person I spoke with not only shared a lingering sense of awe from their experiences, but they also seemed gripped with a burden to see the place set apart and protected. All who have visited the site seem to share a common passion to see the mountain preserved, first so that it may be further examined, explored, and validated and second in order that others can also experience the wonder and inspiration that we all found there. Each of those who have visited has found a way to make their own unique contribution toward telling the story of this holy place. As discussed in the introduction, I am fully confident that in the years ahead, this mountain will become increasingly recognized by a wider segment of the academic and international community not merely as a place of tremendous sacred and historical importance, but as the actual location where the Creator Himself personally appeared in history’s most overt and powerful theophany, visible manifestation of God. On my last trip, someone asked the renowned biblical archeologist Eli Shukron, what he felt about the mountain as a candidate for Mount Sinai. He commented that it is the best of all of the various candidates. In the next chapter, we will begin to discuss some of the primary reasons why this mountain must indeed be recognized and acknowledged as the true Mount Sinai.

3

LOSING THE YAM SUPH

As we will see, the first clear reason to believe that Mount Sinai may now be found in modern day Saudi Arabia is because the Bible very specifically locates the Exodus sea crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba, also commonly known as the Red Sea. Mount Sinai must therefore be found somewhere in northwest Saudi Arabia. Despite the simplicity of this rationale, however, tradition and history together have done much to blur what should otherwise be very clear. In this chapter, we will cut through the haze of false traditions and clear away two thousand years of confusion.

As we examined in chapter 1, one of the most significant reasons that the location of the real Mount Sinai has been so obscured is because of the power of church tradition. By commissioning Saint Catherine's Monastery to be built in the southern Sinai, Emperor Justinian bestowed profound validation upon the claims of the desert monks. Whether true or not, after the sixth century, the full weight of the Roman Empire was behind the Byzantine tradition that Saint Catherine's

Monastery marked the location of Mount Sinai. The logical implications were then simple; since Mount Sinai was in the southern Sinai Peninsula, the sea crossing had to be somewhere on its western side. Thus, for the past sixteen hundred years, this is where the majority of Christians have assumed the exodus sea crossing took place.



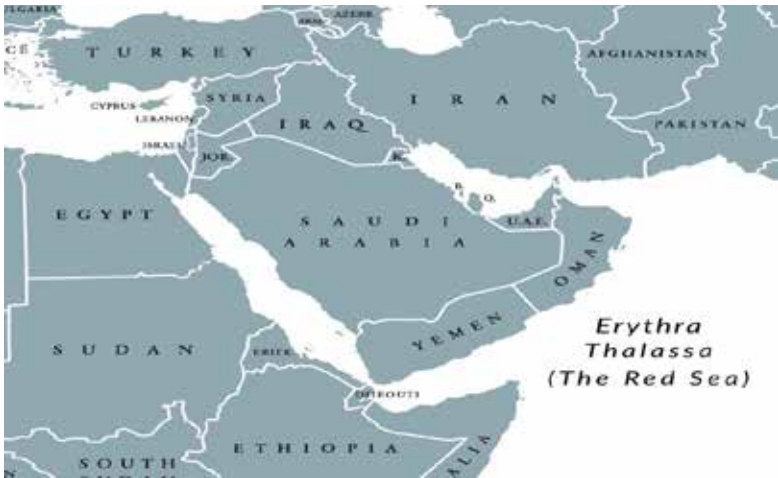
Map 3: The Location of the Traditional Sea Crossing

THE YAM SUPH

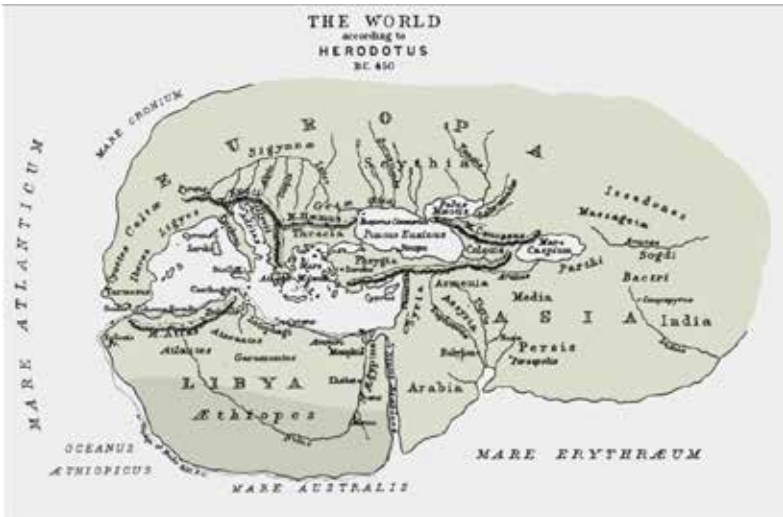
To further complicate matters, there is also a confusing translation issue that needs some untangling. The specific phrase in the Hebrew Bible used to describe the location of the sea crossing is *Yam Suph*. While the Hebrew word *Yam* means “sea,” the meaning of *Suph* in this case is not nearly as clear. Scholars do agree, however, that it definitely does not mean, “red.”¹ That’s

right! The Hebrew phrase *Yam Suph*, translated in nearly every modern English Bible as “Red Sea,” is not accurate. So how did this faulty translation make its way into our Bibles? The answer is essentially because of Greek geographical misconceptions. Let me explain. In the third century BC, a Greek translation of the Old Testament was undertaken known as the Septuagint. When the translators came to the Hebrew phrase *Yam Suph*, they used the Greek phrase *Erythra Thalassa*, which means “Red Sea.” Why? Because this was the name that the Greek world used for the vast sea that lay much to the south, below the Arabian Peninsula as far as the Indian Ocean and even the Persian Gulf.² (See *Maps 4 and 5*) The “Red Sea” was essentially a catch-all term used to refer to that distant sea that was very far south. It gets even more complicated though. The Greek geographers of this period actually did not have clarity regarding the piece of land known today as the Sinai Peninsula. The classical Greco-Roman geographers seem to have combined the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba into a single inlet that they called the Gulf of Arabia. In the Greek conception of the world then, there was simply Egypt in the west and the Arabian Peninsula to the east. The piece of land today called the Sinai Peninsula was so obscure that it was almost as if it didn’t even exist.

LOSING THE YAM SUPH



Map 4: Erythra Thalassa (The Red Sea)



Maps The World According to Herodotus and The World According to Strabo



The result of all this is that when the translators of the Septuagint came to references to a sea (*yam*) south of Israel, they assumed that they must be speaking about the Red Sea, as this was the only sea they were aware of in that region. Thus, instead of using a literal translation, they inserted their own interpretation and passed on the flawed Greek geographical misconceptions of their day into the Bible. So this is where the massive snowball of error all began. Six hundred years later, Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation used the words *Mare Rubrum*, which also means "Red Sea." The rest as they say is history. Because the Vulgate has had such a wide-reaching influence on later Bibles, this faulty translation has now become completely entrenched in Western tradition.



Map 5: Periplus of the Erythraean Sea

REED SEA OR SEA OF THE BOUNDARY?

So what then is the correct translation? To support a sea crossing on the western side of the Sinai, traditionalists argue that *Suph* is an Egyptian loan-word that refers to “reeds.”³ Thus they argue that *Yam Suph* should actually be translated as “Reed Sea.”⁴ Since reeds are common to the lakes and marshes north of the Gulf of Suez, this settles where the sea crossing took place. Or so the argument goes.⁵ This view is known as the Reed Sea Hypothesis.⁶ Within the academic world this has by far become the consensus view. So much so in fact that contrary opinions are often met with derision. Despite this, there are some scholars

who strongly disagree with this translation.⁷ Bernard F. Batto, professor emeritus of religious studies at DePauw University, says: “Despite its popularity, this Reed Sea hypothesis rests upon flimsy evidence indeed. A review of that evidence, plus new considerations make it clear that the hypothesis must finally be laid to rest.”⁸ Glen Fritz, whose very thorough work *The Lost Sea of the Exodus*,⁹ rightly refers to the Reed Sea Hypothesis as being built upon nothing more than “linguistic conjectures and not biblical geography.”¹⁰ These argue that the correct translation is something more akin to the “Sea of the End.”¹¹ As Fritz points out, of the 116 total times that the Bible uses the word *Suph* or one of its variants, there are only four instances that can be argued to connect the word to reeds or some kind of plant.¹² Alternately, the word is used eighty-seven times to mean “end,” “cease,” “perish,” “fulfill,” “consume,” “hinder part,” or something similar.¹³ In this view, *Yam Suph* is thus the sea at the southern-most end of the promised land.¹⁴ Alternately it is: “that distant scarcely known sea away to the south, of which no men knew the boundary. It was the sea at the end of the land.”¹⁵ As we will see, this view synthesizes perfectly with the consistent testimony of Scripture. When we understand the Hebrew phrase *Yam Suph* to primarily refer to the body of water known today as the Gulf of Aqaba, the same body of water that is consistently used in Scripture to refer to the southeastern border of Israel, then so much of the accumulated haze and confusion simply disappears.



Map 6: The approximate Location of the Red Sea Crossing

CONCLUSION

A belief that seems to have first arisen among the desert monks eventually became validated by the Roman Emperor Justinian. With the passing of centuries, this tradition became all the more calcified. Compounding all of this was the infection of the Septuagint with classical Greek misconceptions concerning the geography of the region. This produced the faulty translation of *Yam Suph* as Red Sea. Ironically, scholars who later sought to correct this faulty translation produced the equally unlikely translation of “Reed Sea.” As a result of this whole tangled mess, most modern scholars today have worked exclusively from the assumption that the miraculous sea crossing took place on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula, north of the Gulf of Suez. It’s no wonder that most average Christians are somewhat lost

when attempting to understand exactly where the Lord parted the sea and the Israelites crossed. As we will see, despite the confusion that has long surrounded this topic, when we turn to Scripture, a convincing case emerges that the sea crossing took place through the Gulf of Aqaba.

4

THE EXODUS SEA CROSSING

The first reason that we may be sure that Mount Sinai is in modern day northwest Saudi Arabia is because the Exodus sea crossing took place on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula, through the Gulf of Aqaba, as I mentioned in the last chapter. There are several ways in which Scripture makes this clear. First, let's read carefully through the biblical account of the miracle itself.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through

his chariots and his horsemen.” The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. At the morning watch, the Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them against the Egyptians.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.” So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the

sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses. (Exodus 14:14-31)

The first point that we must note is that throughout the biblical narrative, the location of the miraculous crossing is repeatedly called a sea. The Hebrew word, *yam* is used throughout the Bible to refer to deep bodies of water, such as the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, occasionally the Sea of Galilee, or even the Dead Sea. It is never used of shallow lakes or marshes such as some of the crossing sites suggested north of the Gulf of Suez.

WALLS OF WATER

While it is common among some traditionalists to somewhat laugh away the dramatic imagery portrayed in Cecil B. DeMille's *Ten Commandments* movie, Scripture does in fact describe a sea opening up and forming two massive walls of water on the right and left of the Israelites. The Bible doesn't allow us to reimagine this event as some otherwise naturally occurring phenomenon that the Lord caused to happen at just the right moment. Those who seek to do so tend to only emphasize the blowing of the "strong east wind," while minimizing many of the other references found throughout Scripture. Among these descriptions are the references to the high walls of water that formed on either side of the Israelites. As Douglas Stuart, Old Testament professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, rightly states:

The text, however, says that the wind actually pushed one part of the sea away from the other part (“drove the sea back . . . the waters were divided,” v. 21) and created a “wall of water on their right and on their left.” The term used for “wall” here, *hōmāh*, connotes a very large wall—not a small stone wall or retaining wall but always a massively large (usually a city) wall, towering above the Israelites, who marched on dry land with walls of water on either side of them. It is clear from the descriptions given that the sea through which the Israelites walked was deep water, not something shallow. A city-wall sized wall of water on either side of them implies the division of a deep body of water, not merely the drying out of a shallow one or the drying out of wet terrain. Even the use of the term *yam* (“sea”) here implies the depth of the water. *Yam* is never used for swamps or mud flats but is used consistently to describe large bodies of water (what we would call either lakes or oceans).

Moses goes on to take these descriptions even further. After Pharaoh’s army was engulfed by the closing of the sea over them, Moses and the Israelites broke out into a jubilant song of triumph. If we take his words at face value, then his description of the fate of Pharaoh’s most elite soldiers simply cannot be understood to have taken place in some shallow marsh. Consider his description:

Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. “The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself

on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’ But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. (Exodus 15:4-5,8-10, NIV)

Moses refers to the place of the crossing as having occurred through, “deep waters” and “the depths.” As the Jewish commentator Nahum Sarnah notes, the word used here is the Hebrew *tehomot*, which is “the intensive plural form of *tehom*, the term for the cosmic, abyssal waters that lie beneath the earth, as mentioned in Genesis 1:2.”²² In the beginning, the Spirit of God was over the dark, deep, chaotic abyss, not a marsh or shallow lake. Stuart says this word “consistently refers to the ocean in the Old Testament.”²³ The Bible says that Pharaoh’s best soldiers were washed over by the mighty waters and sank to the bottom of the sea like stones. Moses also uses other very unusual terms. For example, rather than mere natural winds, Moses says that they were blasts from the Lord’s nostrils. Of course, we need not take this in a rigidly literal sense, though it does point to the miraculous, divine nature of the winds and not some otherwise natural or scientifically explainable event. As Stuart says, “the wind is described as coming specially from him as if he had blown it up with his nostrils—not just a wind that happened along.”²⁴ If one were inclined to understand the sea crossing through a more naturalistic lens, then Moses’s next very unusual comment should remove all doubt as to its miraculous nature. Moses says that “the deep waters congealed.” This seems to infer that they formed into some kind of a “solid mass.”²⁵ Some Jewish commentaries argue that the waters actually froze solid. Or HaChaim, the medieval Jewish commentator says that God, “hardened the deep waters and then split the upper part of the Sea, which was not hardened. This allowed the Jews to

cross easily, walking on the solidified lower waters, through the path in the upper waters.”⁶

In the verses that refer to Moses and the exodus, the language used for the sea crossing implies something far greater than any naturally occurring event. In Isaiah, the prophet asks, “Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; Who made the depths of the sea a pathway for the redeemed to cross over?” (51:10). Later, Isaiah speaks of the Lord as He “Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name” (Is. 63:12). The word Isaiah used for “divided” is the Hebrew *baqa*, which means to split or cleave in two. In Psalm 78:13, we are told that God “divided the sea and caused them to pass through, and He made the waters stand up like a heap.” Nehemiah declares that God “divided the sea before them, so they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground” and He “hurled into the depths, like a stone into raging waters” the Egyptian pursuers (Neh. 9:11). More than simply using a wind to dry up the sea, Psalm 74:13 says God “divided the sea by [His] strength.” This is in keeping with Moses’s previous description in which He repeatedly described the event as having occurred by the hand of God. Biblical scholar Alec Motyer describes Moses’s Victory Hymn (see Ex. 15): “Within the two sections on ‘The Lord’s hand’ . . . there are sixteen occurrences in the Hebrew of the second person singular, whether as a verb or a pronoun, underlining the sole activity of the Lord in the great victory. The hand is the organ of personal intervention and action—God did it, and he alone.”⁷

So despite the efforts of some to minimize the most miraculous deliverance in all of redemptive history as something that

can be explained scientifically, the exodus crossing must be seen as a profound divine intervention, a miracle of the highest form; the Lord of hosts Himself literally split the sea in half in order to deliver His beloved and chosen people. The most powerful army in the world at the time was swallowed by the destructive waves and sank like lead to the bottom of the deep sea. The Bible uses this kind of language because this is exactly what happened. To claim that this all took place in the shallow marshes or lakes north of the Suez is to reduce the Bible to mere hyperbole and flamboyant language. If we accept the words of Scripture in a way that is even remotely close to a face value reading, then the crossing had to have happened at the Gulf of Aqaba. In my view, the alternative traditionalist narratives are simply not an option.

ELOTH AN DEDOM

Further proving that the crossing took place through the Gulf of Aqaba, Scripture gives us several very clear geographic descriptions that no serious student of the Bible can ignore. Let's examine the most important of these passages. Throughout the twenty-four verses in the Bible that refer to the Red Sea (*Yam Suph*), not a single verse connects it to the bodies of water north of the Suez. Several passages, however, clearly connect it to the Gulf of Aqaba. The clearest of these is 1 Kings 9:26, where we read that, "King Solomon also built a fleet of ships in Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom." The ancient city of Eloth (today's Eilat in Israel) was on the shore of the Red Sea in Edom. Edom sat just to the north of the Gulf of Aqaba. If this were the only verse that identified the location of the Red Sea, it alone would be sufficient to settle the debate.⁸



Map 7: Eilat / Eloth / Edom

Very strangely, after admitting that this passage is a problem for the traditional view, James K. Hoffmeier, a professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern archeology, says, “We may never know why the Gulf of Aqaba is called *yam sūf* in 1 Kings 9:26, but this lone reference is insufficient evidence.”⁹ Hoffmeier is under the very false impression that this passage is an anomaly, the only time *Yam Suph* is used for the Gulf of Aqaba. Hoffmeier could not have gotten it more perfectly backwards. As we’ve already said, there is not a single verse that connects *Yam Suph* to the lakes north of the Suez, whereas there are several that connect it to the Gulf of Aqaba. Let’s look at the other passages.

THE SOUTHERN BOUNDARY OF THE PROMISED LAND

Another very important reference to the location of the *Yam Suph* is found in Exodus where the Lord defines the southern

boundary of the promised land. The Lord said to Moses: “I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you” (Ex. 23:31). Israel’s southern boundary would extend from the *Yam Suph* to the sea of the Philistines, which is simply the Mediterranean Sea by the modern-day Gaza Strip. The only way that this description can make any sense is if Israel’s southern boundary line were to run from the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba (*Yam Suph*) north-west to the Mediterranean coast, which is essentially the southern boundary of Israel today, running from Eilat to the Gaza Strip. If the Lord were referring here to the lakes north of the Suez, then such a boundary line would make very little sense. It would leave a small sliver of land along the northern coast of the Sinai, but on the eastern side, it would be completely open ended.



Map 8: Southern Boundaries of the Promised Land

JEREMIAH'S ORACLE AGAINST EDMON

Another important passage referring to the *Yam Suph* is found in Jeremiah, where the prophet describes the Lord's judgment on Edom. When Edom is destroyed, where does it say that the outcry of those perishing will be heard? It is the Red Sea (*Yam Suph*):

Therefore hear the plan of the Lord which He has planned against Edom, and His purposes which He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: surely they will drag them off, even the little ones of the flock; surely He will make their pasture desolate because of them. The earth has quaked at

the noise of their downfall. There is an outcry! The noise of it has been heard at the Red Sea. (Jeremiah 49:20-21)

The proximity of the Red Sea (*Yam Suph*) to Edom here is clear. As the famed German commentators C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch note, “the cry of anguish from the perishing people will be heard on the Red Sea.”¹⁰ When the judgment of the Lord falls, the people in Edom are said to let out a cry

that can be heard at the neighboring *Yam Suph*. Obviously, the cries will not be heard two hundred miles away in the regions north of the Suez.

We now have three clear passages where *Yam Suph* is used for the Gulf of Aqaba. Hoffmeier’s claim that 1 Kings 9:26 is a “lone reference” is simply not correct. Yet, there are more.

THE YAM SUPH IN EDM

Another example is found in Numbers where we read that the Israelites “set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom” (Num. 21:4). Once more, it is impossible to make such a passage make any sense if this were referring to the lakes north of the Suez. Such passages only make geographical sense if the Israelites were passing by the Gulf of Aqaba in Edom. Yet another example is found in Deuteronomy where Moses describes Israel’s wanderings: “Then we turned and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me, and circled Mount Seir for many days” (Deut. 2:1). Here, the *Yam Suph* is located next to Mount Seir, a prominent mountain in Edom.

Passage after passage, the Bible uses *Yam Suph* to refer to the Gulf of Aqaba.¹¹ Contrary to Hoffmeier’s claims, there is

not a single passage in the Bible that locates the *Yam Suph* on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula.

AN EXCEPTION?

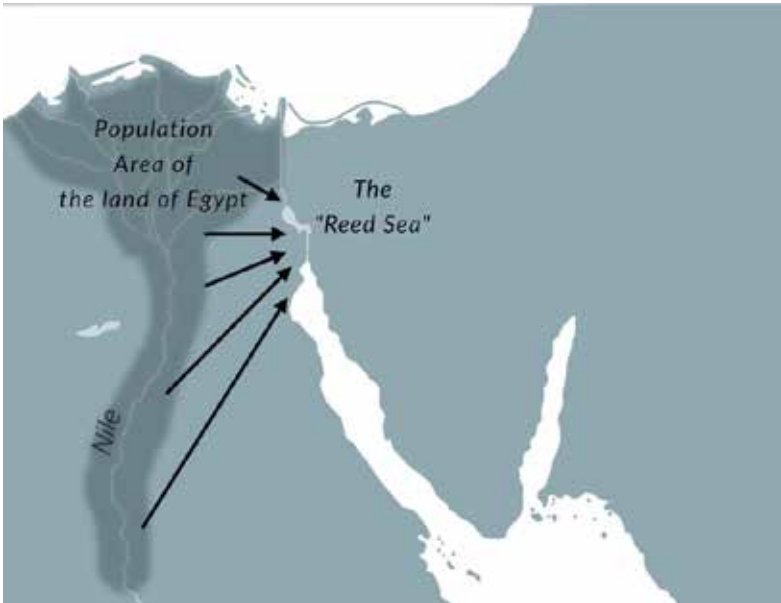
The single exception in all of the Bible that traditionalists consistently use in their attempt to prove that *Yam Suph* may at times refer to the marshy lakes north of the Gulf of the Suez is Exodus 10:19: “So the Lord shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt.” The common assumption is that this west wind drove the locusts to their deaths into the marshes and lakes north of the Gulf of Suez. There are four problems with this.

First, as Douglas Stuart notes, “The term here translated “Red Sea” is *yam sup*, rendered “Sea of Reeds” by many commentators, a far too limited body of water for the scenario described here.¹² In other words, the lakes and marsh lands which most traditionalists claim the locusts were driven into were far too small to have absorbed the locusts that, “covered the surface of the whole land . . . of Egypt” (Ex. 10:15).

Second, once they were driven out, they were specifically said to no longer be in the land of Egypt. As we will discuss below, the Bible defines the land of Egypt as including the lakes to the north of the Suez.

The third problem is that most translations are actually a bit misleading. As Stuart comments: “Note that the text does not say that the locusts drowned in the Red Sea—only that the wind blew them in that direction out of Egypt.”¹³ So they were driven by a very strong sea wind *toward* the Red Sea, out of the land of Egypt.

The fourth problem concerns the shape of the land of Egypt. Again, we note that the text says that the locusts covered the entire land of Egypt. Since the traditionalist argument is that the *Yam Suph* here refers to the “Reed Sea,” specifically the marshy lakes to the north of the Suez, this would mean that the locusts in southern Egypt would have had to have been blown in a northeastern direction, whereas the locusts around the northern Nile Delta would have had to have been blown in a south-westerly direction. Winds do not blow in opposite directions at the same time, however. Since the winds were said to be blowing from the direction of the Mediterranean Sea, they would have blown in a south-westerly direction, and thus driven the locusts toward the Gulf of Aqaba.



Map 9: The Whole Land of Egypt

When all is said and done, there is not a single verse in the Bible that can clearly be shown to use *Yam Suph* to refer to the bodies of water on the northwestern side of the Sinai Peninsula. Every single verse where *Yam Suph* is connected to other geographic locations, it is always used for the Gulf of Aqaba. Is it possible that the term *Yam Suph* could have been used for both the Gulf of Aqaba as well as the Gulf of Suez? Perhaps, but if we are to be honest with the biblical data, then we must acknowledge that the Bible gives us no such evidence. Instead, the weight of evidence from Scripture points us to the Gulf of Aqaba as the body of water that was meant by the term *Yam Suph*.

JOSEPHUS'S RED SEA

Outside of the Bible, further evidence for the crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba may be found in the testimony of Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian. Josephus specifically describes the location of the miraculous sea crossing as having been closely surrounded on both sides by impassably tall and rugged mountains:

Now when the Egyptians had overtaken the Hebrews, they prepared to fight them, and by their multitude they drove them into a narrow place; for the number that pursued after them was six hundred chariots, with fifty thousand horsemen, and two hundred thousand footmen, all armed. They also seized on the passages by which they imagined the Hebrews might fly, shutting them up between inaccessible precipices and the sea; for there was [on each side] a [ridge of] mountains that terminated at the sea, which were impassable by reason of their roughness, and obstructed their flight; wherefore they were pressed upon the Hebrews with their army,

where [the ridges of] the mountains were closed with the sea; which army they placed at the chops of the mountains, that so they might deprive them of any passage into the plain.¹⁴

Josephus could not have described the coastline of the Gulf of Aqaba any better. On both sides, much of its shores are lined by exceedingly rugged mountains. If one were to survey the height of the mountains that run along the western side of the Gulf of Aqaba for example, they range from about nine hundred feet high to upwards of three thousand feet. When we look to the area north of the Suez however, it rarely reaches an elevation of more than one hundred feet.

Some have objected to using Josephus as a support for an Aqaba crossing because elsewhere he states that the journey out of Egypt to the *Yam Suph* took only three days.¹⁵ Josephus's error is likely because he determined the time it took to reach the *Yam Suph* by assuming that the Israelite's two encampments meant two nights at camp and three days of actual travel. His erroneous calculations, however, do not do away with the fact that he viewed the sea crossing to be at Aqaba. First, as we will discuss in much more detail in chapter 6, Josephus believed that Mount Sinai was close to Midian, which in his day was a well-known city on the eastern side of the Gulf of Aqaba.¹⁶ Second, Josephus's description of the physical characteristics of the crossing site can only be reconciled with the Gulf of Aqaba. Even the best effort to identify somewhere near the Suez that might match Josephus's descriptions fall drastically short. Immediately north of the Suez is a mountain called Jebel Ataqa. While this is indeed a tall mountain, it is ten miles west of the shore.¹⁷ The other side, the eastern shore of the canal, is a desert

plain. Again, Josephus describes both sides of the crossing being hemmed in by an impassable ridge of mountains. There simply is nowhere near the Suez that we can point to that aligns with Josephus's descriptions. If Josephus was describing a real place, he could only have been speaking of the Gulf of Aqaba.¹⁸



West Coast of the Gulf of Aqaba (© 2018 Google Earth)



Map 10: Wadi el-Arish / Brook of Egypt / Border of Egypt

THE BORDER OF EGYPT

Before we conclude our discussion of what the Bible says on this matter, we must also consider another critical Scriptural proof for a crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba. The Bible is quite clear in defining the border of Egypt. It is “the Brook of Egypt, now known as the Wadi el-Arish, the natural boundary between the southwestern Negev and the northeastern Sinai Peninsula regions.”¹⁹ Wadi el-Arish is 140 miles east of Port Said, Egypt (the northern end of the Suez Canal) and thirty miles west of the Gaza Strip.

When the Lord defined the promised land to Abram, He defined it as extending “from the river of Egypt [in the

southwest] as far as the great river, the river Euphrates [in the north]” (Genesis 15:18). In other passages, we find the terms “the river of Egypt” and “the border of Egypt” used interchangeably. The southern boundary of Solomon’s dominion, for example, was defined by “the land of the Philistines” and “the border of Egypt” (1 Kings 4:21). Thus, the biblical land of the Philistines, now known as the Gaza Strip, is described as the border of Egypt. In other passages, the southern boundary of Israel is defined as extending “to the brook of Egypt” (1 Kings 8:65). In Numbers 34:5, the southwestern borders of Israel are defined as, “the brook of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the sea.” In yet another passage, the same description describes the southernmost tribe of Judah’s southwestern border (Josh. 15:4).

In light of all this, there is another critical proof that the exodus sea crossing had to have taken place on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula. The Bible informs us that when the Israelites reached the Red Sea, they were no longer in Egypt. Scripture says that “when Pharaoh had let the Hebrews go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines” (Ex. 13:17), instead the Lord led them, “by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea” (Ex. 13:18a). Then Moses recorded that “the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt” (v. 18b). So somewhere during their march to the Red Sea, the Israelites had crossed out of the land of Egypt. This is reiterated again in the next chapter where it says that as Pharaoh and his armies drew close to the Israelites by the Red Sea, they “became very frightened” and said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing

us out of Egypt?” (Ex. 14:10-11). Again, this point is critical. The Israelites had not yet crossed the sea, yet they were already outside of the land of Egypt. As we saw above, the Bible places the border of Egypt some 140 miles east of the Nile Delta. Therefore, unless we wish to contradict the scriptural definitions of the land of Egypt, it is impossible to say that the Israelites were outside the land of Egypt, while remaining back near the marshy lakes close to the Nile Delta. When Pharaoh had the Israelites pinned down against the Red Sea, being outside of the land of Egypt, they had to have been at the Gulf of Aqaba.²⁰

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when we consider what the Bible says with regard to the location of the Exodus sea crossing, everything points to the Gulf of Aqaba. First, when we consider the biblical language used to describe a “sea,” “the deep,” and “the depths,” the evidence points us to the Gulf of Aqaba, not the shallow lakes or marshes north of the Suez. Second, when the Bible specifically mentions the location of the Red Sea, it is always beside the city of Eilat and the land of Edom. Third, the Lord used the Red Sea to define the southeastern boundary of the promised land. Such descriptions only make sense if the Lord was referring to the Gulf of Aqaba. Fourth, Josephus refers to the location of the crossing as being surrounded by high and impassable mountains on either side. Once more, this describes the topography along the coast of the Red Sea, but not the areas north of the Suez. Fifth and finally, the biblical definition regarding the border of Egypt places the crossing to the east side of the Sinai Peninsula, not on the western side by the Suez. All of the biblical and historical evidence informs us that the crossing

was at the Gulf of Aqaba. Despite the centuries-old tradition of placing the crossing north of the Gulf of Suez, this view simply cannot be reconciled with the testimony of Scripture. The implications of this as it relates to the location of Mount Sinai are inescapable. Mount Sinai must be east of the Red Sea in modern-day Saudi Arabia.



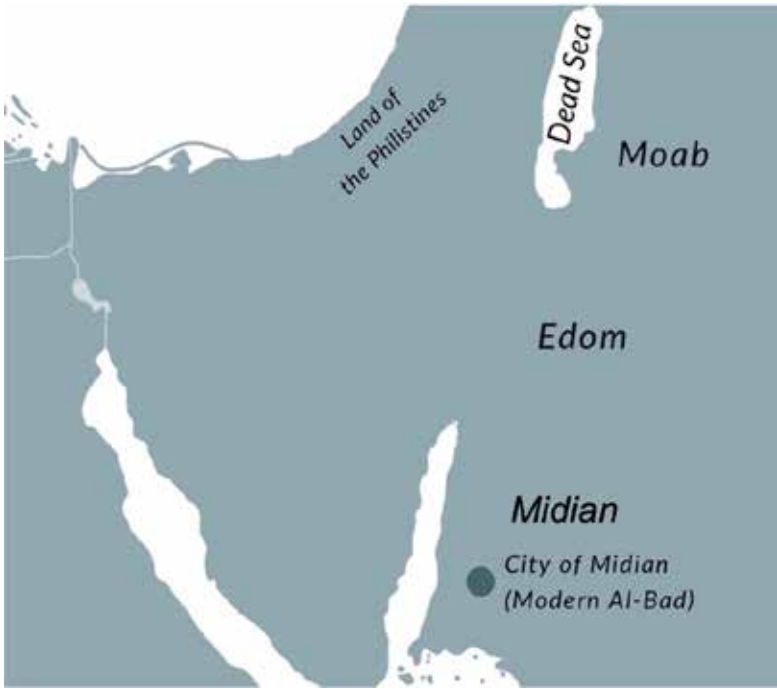
The rugged mountains round the Gulf of Aqaba(© 2018 Google Earth)

5

MOUNT SINAI IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN

Beyond being east of the Gulf of Aqaba, the Bible gives us a second critical witness regarding the location of Mount Sinai. As we will see, Scripture describes Mount Sinai as being either within the territory of, or beside the land of Midian. Thus, determining where Midian was located is essential. Some argue that the Midianites were an entirely nomadic people group who never had a specific or definable homeland.¹ It is true that throughout biblical history, the Midianites appear in quite a variety of locations. Shortly after the time of Deborah and Barak for example, Midianites are seen attacking Israel from the southwest, near Gaza (see Judges 6:3-4). During the time of Gideon, about a hundred years later, Midianites appear far more north and to the east of Israel (see Judges 7-8). In no way, however, does any of this change the fact that a few hundred years earlier, during the life of Moses, there was indeed a well-known, identifiable, principal homeland of Midian. This is unarguable as the Bible specifically refers to the land of Midian. After Moses killed an

Egyptian man who was beating a Hebrew, for example, the Bible says, “Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian” (Ex. 2:15). In several other passages, Midian is described as a specific place in which Jethro was a priest (cf., Ex. 2:16; 3:1; 4:19; 18:1; 1 Kings 11:18; Is. 60:6; Hab. 3:7; Acts 7:29). So where was this land of Midian? According to Hebrew scholar Frank Moore Cross, “the consensus is that ancient Midian was south of Eilat on the Saudi side.”² This is confirmed when we consult any number of a wide range of Bible atlases, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and commentaries.³ As stated above, the reason this is important is because the Bible places Mount Sinai either within or beside the land of Midian. First, let’s review the biblical evidence, then we’ll review the actual evidence on the ground.



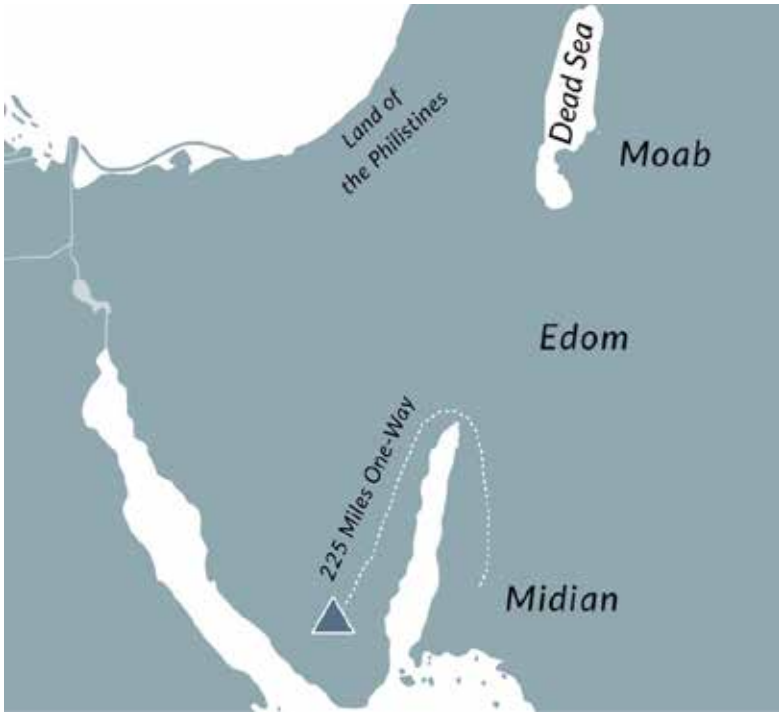
Map 11: The Land of Midian

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

After Moses married into Jethro's family, he seemed to have fully embraced Midianite culture and life. Having been accustomed to the palaces of Egypt, he became a shepherd. The Bible says that "Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God" (Exodus 3:1). The natural reading of this text points to both the wilderness and the mountain being somewhere within or adjacent to Midianite territory.

Some have suggested that because many translations place Sinai west of Midian, this rules out Jebel al-Lawz as it is roughly twelve to fifteen miles east of the ancient capital city of Midian, now called al-Bad. This argument has also been used to support the traditional site, pointing out that it is indeed to the west of Midian. The obvious problem of course is that Moses did not place Jethro's flocks on a boat and sail west across the Gulf of Aqaba. Instead, if he had gone to the traditional site, he would have had to have traveled well over a hundred miles north, then over another hundred miles southwest to reach the mountain. As Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton correctly point out however:

The Hebrew for the west side of the wilderness should not be understood geographically. The word translated as west side is really the word meaning "behind" or "after." . . . Most translations interpret the word here to refer to the area beyond or "after" the wilderness through which Moses was leading the flock.⁴



Map 12: Midian to Traditional Mount Sinai Location

In other words, the text doesn't actually say the mountain was on the "western" side of Midian, rather that it was on "the other side of the desert" from Midian. There is certainly no indication within the text that Moses traveled through multiple deserts, through the territories of multiple foreign peoples to reach the mountain.

Those who hold to the traditional location of Sinai are forced to make the rather extreme claim that Moses traveled 450 miles round-trip, through the lands of the Edomites and the Amalekites, through multiple harsh desert lands, simply to graze

Jethro's flocks. This is not a reasonable claim to make. To make his argument more acceptable, Egyptologist and author David Rohl, in his book *Exodus* actually fudges the numbers, trimming Moses's theoretical journey by at least 150 miles!⁵ One could very reasonably say that Moses walked fifteen or perhaps even as much as thirty or more miles to graze his flocks somewhere within Midianite territory, but 450 miles is an extreme stretch to say the least. Without the text directly stating that Moses went on such an incredibly extended journey, we have no basis to make such claims. This problem is greatly amplified when many years later, Jethro visited Moses and all of Israel as they were camped at the mountain:

Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt... Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God. He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her." Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. (Exodus 18:1, 5-7)

At this point in his life, the youngest that Jethro could have been was in his eighties. (He was likely much older.) Needless to say, it seems rather unlikely that he made a 450-mile round trip journey through several harsh deserts to visit Moses. It is entirely reasonable however, to believe that Jethro traveled roughly fifteen to twenty miles to Sinai, which would be the case if Mount Sinai is indeed Jebel al-Lawz.

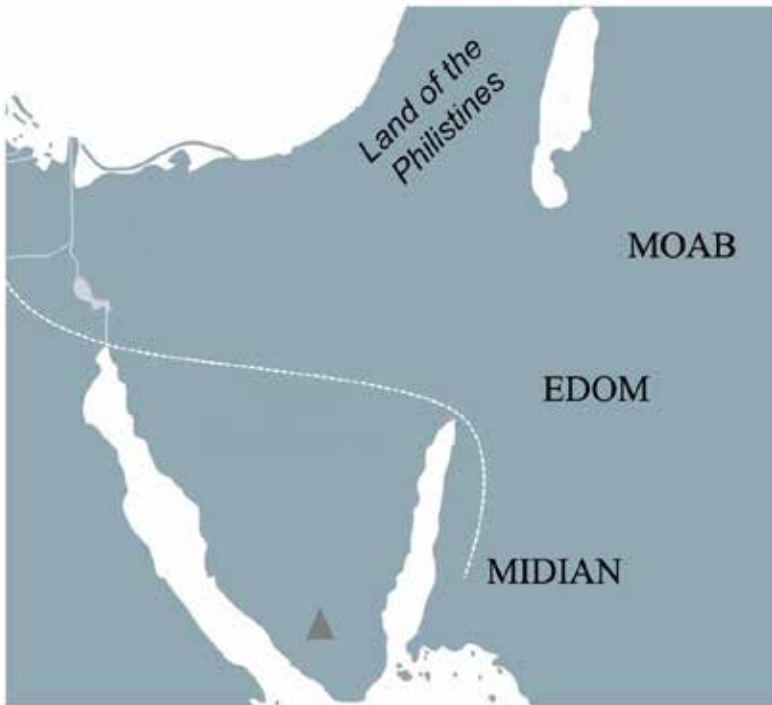
THE BURNING BUSH

In Exodus 3 we read of Moses's initial encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the burning bush. There the Lord called Moses to become His spokesman and confront Pharaoh. In chapter 4, we read of Moses's fear-filled response. Moses says to God, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" (Ex. 4:1). Although the Lord reassured Moses he persisted in uncertainty:

Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say." But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will." (Exodus 4:10-13)

At this point, the Lord became angry, "and He said, 'Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart'" (v. 14). So according to this passage, Aaron had already left Egypt and was in the process of coming to meet Moses. After this Moses went back to Midian, packed his family up, and headed toward Egypt: "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" (v. 20) As Moses was on his way to Egypt, he stopped at Mount Sinai. This is where Scripture says that Aaron met Moses (v. 27). Thus, in the time that it took

Aaron to travel from Egypt to the Mountain of God, Moses traveled from the mountain, back to Midian, packed up his family, said goodbye to Jethro, and then traveled back to the mountain. This rules out the traditional site of Mount Sinai in the southern Sinai Peninsula entirely. First because the traditional site is nowhere near the road from Midian to Egypt. Why would Moses have taken a hundred-mile detour?



Map 13: Road from Midian to Egypt

Second, if Mount Sinai were in the traditional location, there is no way Moses could have traveled from there to Midian

and then gone back again to Sinai, roughly 450 miles, in the time that it took Aaron to get there from Egypt which is only roughly 250 miles. Aaron would have easily beat Moses there. But he didn't. This passage also rules out other mountains in the Sinai that have been suggested as Sinai candidates such as Jebel Sin Bishar, a mountain that is very close to the Gulf of Suez. Unlike these other candidate mountains however, if Jebel al-Lawz is Mount Sinai, it would have been easy for Moses to have traveled from there back to Midian and back again and still beat Aaron there, as the biblical account describes.

HOBAB THE MIDIANITE

Later in the narrative, as Moses was preparing to depart Mount Sinai through Midian toward the promised land, he asked Jethro's son Hobab if he would serve as a local guide:

And Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will do good to you, for the Lord has promised good to Israel." But he said to him, "I will not go. I will depart to my own land and to my kindred." And he said, "Please do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us." (Num. 10:29-31)

Hobab accepted the invitation and served as a guide to the Israelites. As commentator R. Dennis Cole in the *New American Commentary* says,

Moses appealed to Hobab's experience in the desert regions of Sinai and Paran to provide valuable assistance to the Israelites in the harsh conditions they would face during the coming journey. This setting provides a model of shared human leadership under the ultimate direction of God through the cloud and the positioning of the ark of the covenant. Moses functioned as the director of the people... Hobab provided the desert tracking services.⁶

As it relates to the location of Mount Sinai, this is an important part of the story. If Israel was camped in the southern Sinai Peninsula, hundreds of miles outside of Midian, why in the world would Moses have needed someone from Midian to help guide him to the promised land? This wouldn't make any sense. On the other hand, since Moses was about to travel through the land of Midian toward the promised land, then taking on Hobab, the Midianite guide would have been quite reasonable.

FROM SINAI TO ZION

While the previous biblical passages strongly infer that Mount Sinai was within or just beside Midian, several others seem to put Mount Sinai quite directly in northwestern Saudi Arabia. There are three very important songs in the Bible that locate Mount Sinai to the south and east of Israel. From the vantage point of Jerusalem, these passages portray Mount Sinai on the other side of Edom. This is seen in the following three passages: the Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33), the Prayer of Habakkuk (Hab. 3), and the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5). All three passages speak of God coming from Sinai, through the land of Edom, making His way towards Jerusalem. These

passages are all part of a common tradition that describes the route of the Exodus, portraying God leading the Israelites up from Sinai to Jerusalem. In Deuteronomy 33 the Lord is seen coming from Sinai through Mount Paran, and Seir. Both names are synonymous with Edom. Habakkuk similarly speaks of the Lord passing through the area of Mount Paran and Teman, another name used to refer to Edom. In Habakkuk, as the Lord departs Sinai, it is the land of Midian that is trembling in fear. Judges 5 also speaks of God coming up from Sinai through Seir and Edom. The implications of these passages as they relate to the location of Mount Sinai are not missed by scholars. Speaking of these passages, Frank Moore Cross said they “are our most reliable evidence for locating Sinai/Horeb, the mountain of God.”⁷ Even more specifically, in his book *From Epic to Canon* he stated:

The archaic hymns of Israel are of one voice. Yahweh came from Teman, Mt. Paran, Midian and Cushan (the song of Habakkuk); the song of Deborah sings of Yahweh going from Seir, marching forth from Edom; the Blessing of Moses states that Yahweh came from Sinai, beamed forth from Seir, shone from Mount Paran. These geographical designations cannot be moved west into the peninsula now called Sinai.⁸

Others have seen in these passages a picture of the glorious manifestation of the Lord being so brilliant that like the dawning of the sun, its glow would have been seen over the great Edomite mountains of Paran and Seir which lie between Zion and Sinai. As H. D. M. Spence describes in his classic *Pulpit Commentary*:

These places are not mentioned as scenes of different manifestations of the Divine glory, but as indicating the extent to which the one manifestation given at Sinai reached. The light of the Divine glory that rested on Sinai was reflected also from the mountains of Seir and Paran.⁹



Map 14: Mount Sinai to Jerusalem

Similarly, Keil and Delitzsch explain that “the glory of the Lord, who appeared upon Sinai, sent its beams even to the eastern and northern extremities of the desert.”¹⁰

These passages show the glory of God shining from Mount Sinai toward Zion, shimmering over the mountains of Edom.

Alternately, God is seen marching resolutely from Sinai to Zion. These passages are another problem for the traditional view, for they do not describe God zig-zagging His way from the southern Sinai east through Edom and then back toward Jerusalem, as if He were confused or lost. Whether we are speaking then of the previous biblical passages that specifically place Mount Sinai within Midianite territory or these particular texts, the Bible consistently indicates that the mountain of God is south of Edom and east of the Red Sea.

BEDOUIN TRADITION

Many are surprised to find that the Arabs who live in northwest Saudi Arabia today also believe this to be the ancient land of Midian. Standing at the base of Jebel al-Lawz, I asked a local Bedouin what he called the mountain that towered above us. He pointed up at the peak and without hesitation said, “Jebel Musa,” which is simply Arabic for the “Mountain of Moses.” I have since confirmed this with several others who live close to the mountain. The same is true of the giant split rock north of the mountain, which the locals referred to as, the “split rock of Moses.” One of my friends who lives and works in the Kingdom, while visiting the mountain in early 2018, spoke to a Bedouin whose tent was pitched close to the split rock. He explained that he believed that this was indeed the rock that Moses struck, which brought forth water. When he was pressed further regarding where he learned this, he said it had been passed down to him for generations. Thus, before the Caldwells found this rock, the local Bedouins who live there had long believed it to be the rock that Moses struck. Evidence is not limited to anecdotal stories, however. The Saudi Commission for Tourism and

National Heritage (SCTNH) has fenced off many areas around the mountain and in the nearby oasis town of al-Bad believing they are connected to the Midianites, Jethro, and Moses. Along the western coast of the Gulf of Aqaba is a massive valley-gorge that is most often referred to as Wadi Tayyib Al-Islam (which basically means the valley with a nice name). Its alternative name is Wadi-Musa (the valley of Moses). According to local legend, when Moses split the Red Sea, the shock waves of God's power extended beyond the ocean and split the mountains on the opposite side of the sea, creating this massive gorge. While this story is most likely just that—a local legend, it does demonstrate the deep roots of local tradition that connect this region to Moses and the Israelites. Let's review a few of the other natural features and archeological sites around al-Bad.

THE OASIS OF AL-BAD

According to a Saudi Arabian–sponsored archeological survey of the greater al-Bad region:

The town of al-Bid' lies in Wadi Àfal bed. It is an ancient oasis which has been inhabited continuously from the pre-historic era and throughout the historic period. Al-Bid' had been known as Midian. It is one of the most important towns in northwestern Arabia during the reign of Adom [Edom] and Midian kingdoms. These kingdoms were among other Arab kingdoms that appeared during the second millennium BC and continued to the middle of the first millennium B.C. Al-Bid' was one of the most important caravan towns located along the trade route connecting the northwestern Arabian Peninsula with Bilal al-Sham [Syria], Egypt and Palestine.¹¹

The Midianites settled in al-Bad with very good reason. First, as stated above, it is an oasis well placed along the heavily traveled trade route that spanned the Arabian Peninsula from Sheba in the south to Aqaba in the north. Numerous caravans made this trip carrying the renowned spices, resins, and incense of southern Arabia. al-Bad would have been one of the most important stops along this route where travelers could find fresh water before they departed north into the rugged Midianite mountains and scorching red deserts of Edom. Coming from the north, it would have been the first oasis after the arduous one hundred miles from the oasis in modern day Eilat. Not only would al-Bad have been a popular stop for travelers, but it's rare, well-watered land would have also been the ideal place for settlers to call home. This would have been true for both the Midianites, and Moses after his flight from Egypt. Finally, it would have been the most natural destination for the Israelites after their escape from Pharaoh. As Hershel Shanks, founder of the Biblical Archaeology Society, rightly observed:

If the Israelite contingent from Egypt survived long in the southern wilderness, it was because they headed for an area in which there was civilization, irrigated crops, the means of sustenance. Southern Edom and Midian supply this need, and so I believe they headed there.¹²

Further, Frank Moore Cross contrasts the fact that while we have an abundance of archeological evidence of peoples living in northwest Arabia during the period of the exodus, there is no (absolutely zero) evidence that anyone was living in the southern Sinai during this same period:

The geographical terms Se'ir, Edom, Teman, as well as Cushan and Midian, point east of modern Sinai. Moreover, on the basis of both Egyptian records and surface exploration of such sites as Qurayyeh southeast of Elath in Midian, we know that there was a substantial civilization in this area at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. On the other hand, the evidence for extensive occupation in the same period in modern Sinai is virtually nil, despite intensive investigation.¹³

Thus, from a geographical, geological, or historical perspective, the town of al-Bad is the most natural and reasonable location throughout that region for the events described in Exodus to have taken place. This is confirmed when we discover that several archeological sites in and around al-Bad have long been associated specifically with the biblical narrative.

THE CAVES OF JETHRO

Several very important archeological sites in al-Bad are closely associated with Moses or his father-in-law Jethro, who the Muslims call Shuaib (transliterated variously as Shuy'ib, Sho'aib, or something similar). In fact, another name for al-Bad is *Muhgair al-Shuaib*, which means, the "Caves of Jethro." At the center of this small town is a cluster of caves hewn into the hillside that are believed by some to be the ancient home of Jethro and Moses.

The entire area has been turned into an archeological park surrounded by a large fence with a visitors center at the entrance. While some of the caves are little more than a single room carved into the rock, others are adorned with decorative

facades similar to what we find in Petra. It is very possible that these caves were originally Midianite dwellings that were later modified and used by the Nabatean Arabs as tombs. This tradition is well attested to by many early Arab geographers from the region.¹⁴ The famous ninth century geographer Harbi al-Himyari, for example, spoke of the caves and some nearby mounds as being the ruins of the homes originally belonging to Jethro and the Midianites:

In the mountains are rock-cut houses, inside the houses, there are graves which contain such rotten bones as those of camels. . . . It is believed that in the days of al-Zullah the people of Shú aib entered the houses. Next to these houses are some big mounds which are believed to be the houses of the people of Shú aib.¹⁵

The Nabateans, who later occupied these caves are believed to have been the descendants of Nebaioth, the son of Ishmael, as well as the brother-in-law of Edom (see Gen. 25:13; 28:9).¹⁶ They had their own independent kingdom southeast of Judea from 169 BC to AD 106. Whereas the magnificent city of Petra in southern Jordan was their northern capital, the stunning site of Madain Saleh, three hundred miles south of al-Bad, marked the southern border of their kingdom. Further supporting the idea that this essentially was the ancient capital city of Midian, Saudi archeologists have found an abundance of Midianite pottery in and around al-Bad.¹⁷

MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA



The Caves of Jethro



The Caves of Jethro (above and below)

MOUNT SINAI IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN



The Caves of Jethro

THE WELL OF MOSES

Less than a mile from Jethro's Caves is another notable site believed to be the well mentioned in the opening chapters of Exodus. After fleeing from Egypt to Midian, the Bible tells us that Moses "sat down by a well" (Ex. 2:15). Little did he know that he was about to meet his future wife, the daughter of Jethro, also called Reuel:

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. Then the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them and watered their flock. When they came to Reuel their father, he said, "Why have you come back so soon today?" So they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and what is more, he even drew the water for us and watered the flock." He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat." Moses was willing to dwell with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. (Exodus 2:16-21)

The locals call this place, the Well of Moses. Like Jethro's Caves, this area has also been fenced off and designated as an archeological site by the Saudi authorities. Like the Caves of Jethro, the well is also referenced by numerous early Arab historians and geographers from the region. According to the Saudi sponsored archeological survey of the area:

Magharat al-Bid' [the well of al-Bad] had always been a site of importance and was renovated and restored by Muslim rulers

and governors, during all periods of Islamic history. The reason for the renovation, maintenance and special attention given to this well was its importance as a main water source for al-Bid oasis and for the pilgrim caravans.¹⁸

There is another site in the nearby oasis town of Magna that is also sometimes called Moses's Well. That site is not actually a well, though, but a natural spring where the water bubbles up through the sand in a couple spots forming a small freshwater pond. Because that well is twenty miles to the west of al-Bad and off what would have been the trade route, it is not likely to be the well where Moses met Zipporah. The well in al-Bad, however, is reasonably close to Jethro's Caves such that it would have been possible for Jethro's daughters to get water there without much difficulty.

When one visits al-Bad and sees the location of these sites and their relation to one another, it is very easy to believe that they may indeed be the very places described in the Exodus account.

THE VIEW FROM JETHRO'S CAVES

Also fascinating is the truly stunning view that greets you when you step out from any of Jethro's Caves. There in front of you, dominating the horizon, is a breathtaking view of the Jebel al-Lawz mountain range. The range sits about twelve miles to the northeast and appears as multiple towering peaks. These peaks would be what the Bible refers to as Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai. We will discuss these peaks in much greater detail in chapter 9. As I exited one of the caves, I stood there and pondered with amazement that this was likely the very view (or very

close to the location) that Moses would have witnessed when he stepped out of his home and gazed at the contours of these ancient mountains. Did he ever have an inkling that one day he would encounter the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, face to face on those mighty peaks?



The peaks of Jebel al-Lawz from Jethro's Caves in al-Bad

CONCLUSION

When one visits the oasis town of al-Bad and witnesses the archeological sites and observes how they are arranged in relation to one another, it is not at all difficult to recognize how well they all seem to fit so well with the biblical descriptions of the land of Midian. The implications of all that we have seen so far are striking. First, the academic consensus identifies Midian as being the northwest region of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Second, Scripture places Mount Sinai south of Edom, either in or beside the land of Midian. Third, we have the testimony of the locals,

who themselves believe that they live in the ancient homeland of Jethro, Moses, and Mount Sinai. Fourth, we have the testimony of the archeological record that this was indeed Midianite territory. From nearly any angle that we might consider, the case for Mount Sinai being in northwest Saudi Arabia is strong. Supporting all of this, as we will see in the next chapter, there is an unbroken ancient tradition found within Jewish, Christian, and Muslim writings that not only identifies the town of al-Bad as ancient Midian but which also specifically identifies Jebel al-Lawz as Mount Sinai.

6

ANCIENT JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

Building upon the evidence we've examined thus far, there is also a vibrant tradition concerning Jebel al-Lawz that dates back to the middle of the third century BC. In this chapter, we will review the unbroken tradition among ancient Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sources, all of which agree: Mount Sinai is in the land of Midian, in modern-day northwest Saudi Arabia.

THE SEPTUAGINT

The oldest extrabiblical witness to the location of Mount Sinai are clues that we find in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint.¹ This translation began roughly 250 years before the birth of Jesus.² The translators of the Septuagint believed Midian to be a particular city in northwest Arabia. How do we know this? First, when they came across passages with the name Midian, they used either “Madian” or “Madiam.” For example, the Septuagint translation of Exodus 2:15 reads:

And Pharaoh heard this matter and sought to slay Moses; and Moses departed from the presence of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Madiam; and having come into the land of Madiam, he sat on the well.³

There are three reasons this is important. First, Madiam was a well-known city of that time that was located in the heart of the traditional Midianite territory. Second, in passages where the Hebrew phrase “the elders of Midian” is found, the Septuagint uses the Greek term *gerousia*, a word that specifically refers to a city council.⁴ Third, in Exodus 18:5, when Jethro went to visit Moses at Sinai, the Septuagint alters the text slightly to say that Jethro “went out” from Madiam “into the desert” to meet Moses. This indicates that the translators of the Septuagint believed that Jethro lived in the city of Madiam, and in order to visit Moses, he had to leave the city and go out into the desert.⁵

As we discussed in the previous chapter, the oasis city of Madian/Madiam/Midiam was located in Arabia, east of the Red Sea, and is now the town of al-Bad. So the Septuagint translators understood Midian to refer to modern al-Bad with Mount Sinai being located in the desert somewhere outside of the city.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

Next let’s consider the testimony of Philo of Alexandria. Philo was a Jewish philosopher and biblical commentator who lived about the same time as Jesus. Philo gives us another very clear, early witness as to where many Jews of this period believed Mount Sinai was located. In his commentary on the Exodus, Philo placed Mount Sinai east of the Sinai Peninsula and south of Palestine—in other words, in northwestern Arabia. When

Philo describes the path that Moses took after departing Egypt, he specifically says that he did not take the direct route up to the promised land, but instead, “he found an oblique path, and thinking that it must extend as far as the Red Sea, he began to march by that road.” This road, according to Philo, was, “a pathless track... through a rough and untrodden wilderness.” When Pharaoh caught up to the Hebrews, Philo says, “they were already encamped along the shore of the Red Sea.”⁶ Thus, for Philo, the exodus seems to have taken the Hebrews all the way across the Sinai Peninsula to the Red Sea/the Gulf of Aqaba.

Even more important, Philo also describes Mount Sinai as “the loftiest and most sacred mountain in that district.” He also describes it as “a mountain which was very difficult to access and very hard to ascend.”⁷ By describing Mount Sinai as a rugged mountain and the tallest in the land of Midian, Philo has described the soaring mountain range of Jebel al-Lawz perfectly.

JOSEPHUS

Shortly after Philo, in AD 90, Josephus, the Jewish historian, also pointed us to Jebel al-Lawz. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus described Midian as a city that was close to the Red Sea.

When he [Moses] came to the city Midian, which lay upon the Red Sea, and was so denominated from one of Abraham’s sons by Keturah, he sat upon a certain well, and rested himself there after his laborious journey, and the affliction he had been in.⁸

In all likelihood, he was referring to the modern town called Magna. Later, on two occasions Josephus specifically

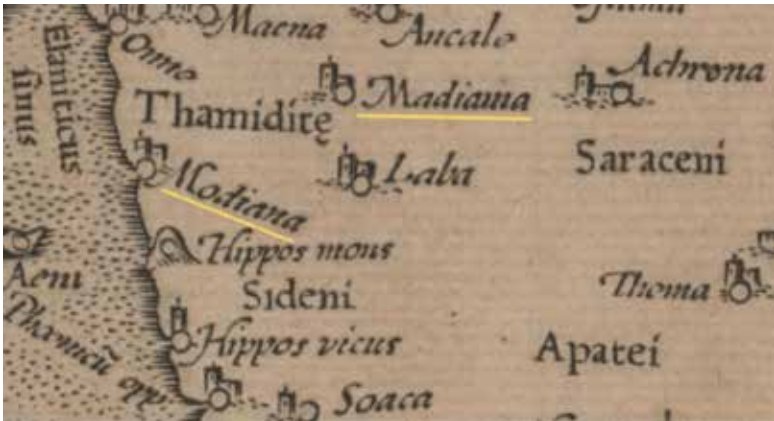
describes the location of Mount Sinai. In the first account, Moses is portrayed shepherding Jethro's flocks and coming to Mount Sinai, which Josephus also describes as being the tallest mountain in that region. According to this account, the reason Moses brought the flocks to Mount Sinai was because it had far more vegetation than other mountains. Apparently, other shepherds believed that God lived on that mountain and thus avoided it out of fear:

Now Moses, when he had obtained the favor of Jethro, for that was one of the names of Raguel, staid there, and fed his flock; but some time afterward, taking his station at the mountain called Sinai, he drove his flocks thither to feed them. Now this is the highest of all the mountains thereabout, and the best for pasturage, the herbage being there good; and it had not been before fed upon, because of the opinion men had that God dwelt there, the shepherds not daring to ascend up to it.⁹

Josephus also describes Moses's ascent up Mount Sinai as the Israelites camped at the base: "[Moses] ascended up to Mount Sinai, which is the highest of all the mountains that are in that country."¹⁰ As I described earlier, when you are in the town of al-Bad, the tallest mountain peaks that dominate the northeastern horizon are the two peaks of the Jebel al-Lawz range. There is no doubt in my mind that these are the peaks that the Bible refers to as Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai. We will discuss this matter in more detail in chapter 9.

CLAUDIUS PTOLEMY

Another very important ancient source that validates the Jewish view concerning the location of ancient Midian is Claudius Ptolemy. Ptolemy was a Roman geographer of the second century AD who wrote a famous work known as *The Geography*. It features an extensive and very detailed compilation of geographical coordinates of cities and regions throughout the Roman Empire. What makes *The Geography* so unique and helpful is his thorough use of coordinates for every location he references. Based on these coordinates, various geographers over the centuries have created detailed maps. As we have seen, the Septuagint and other sources from this period offer variations of the name Midian, such as Madian, and Madiam. Ptolemy seems to have been confused by these variations, placing two distinct cities with almost identical names side by side. One is called Madiam; the other is Modiam. They both sit in northwestern Arabia, essentially at the location of the modern towns of al-Bad and Magna.



Map 15: The World According to Ptolemy: Arabian Coast

ANCIENT CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Among the early Christians, these traditions that placed Mount Sinai in Arabia just outside of Midian would continue. The first and most important of these witnesses is the apostle Paul. Because Paul's testimony is such an important and much-debated topic, we've reserved the next two chapters to discuss his comments exclusively. As we will see, not only did Paul believe that Mount Sinai was in the region of modern-day northwest Saudi Arabia, but you can make a solid case that he visited there himself in order to be instructed by God. For now, however, we will jump directly to the post-apostolic period.

- Demetrius (AD 189-232): The first early Christian witness after the apostle Paul was Demetrius, a bishop from Alexandria during the third century. Regarding Moses and his wife Zipporah, Demetrius said: "And they dwelt in the city Madiam, which was called from one of the sons of Abraham."¹¹ Like those who came before him, Demetrius understood the passages about Moses living in Midian as references to the city of Madiam or modern day al-Bad.
- Origen (AD 185-254): During roughly the same period, Origen of Alexandria, one of the more well-known early church writers, continued this tradition of associating Midian with the city of Madiam east of the Red Sea.¹²
- Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260-339): Several decades later, Eusebius, the great historian of the early church, identified Madiam as a city that "lies beyond Arabia to

the south in the desert of the Saracens, east of the Red Sea. From this they are called Madianites, and it is now called Madiam.”¹³ The phrase, “beyond Arabia” is more accurately translated as, “on the far side of Arabia.”¹⁴ Concerning Mount Horeb, Eusebius identified it as the “mountain of God in the land of Madiam. It lies beside Mount Sinai beyond Arabia in the desert.”¹⁵

- Jerome (AD 347-420): Then from the late fourth to the early fifth centuries, Jerome, the great Latin theologian and historian, translated Eusebius’s geographical work, *Onamosticon*, occasionally adding his own commentary. There Jerome also located Mount Sinai near Madyan in northwestern Arabia east of the Red Sea.¹⁶

It is critical to note that in the fourth and fifth centuries, these important historians and theologians of the early church openly contradicted the traditions that placed Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula. By the time of Jerome, it was fifty or more years since the traditional location had been widely embraced. The view that Mount Sinai was east of the Red Sea had already been well established in both the Jewish and Christian communities for over six hundred years. Allen Kerkeslager, PhD., is a professor of ancient and comparative religions at St. Joseph’s University near Philadelphia. He rightly states, “the various writings that express this tradition all seem to agree: Mt. Sinai was in Arabia.”¹⁷ The tradition did not die after Jerome, however. “The tradition of locating Mt. Sinai near the city of Madyan apparently persisted in Christian circles until sometime after the Arab conquest. Islamic sources refer to anchorites who

lived in the mountains around Madyan.”¹⁸ By “anchorites,” Dr. Kerkeslager is referring to Christian hermits and monks who were living in the mountains near Midian. So three or more hundred years after Jerome, it is clear that the Midian-Sinai tradition had persisted.

ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

It was likely through these Christian monks and hermits that the Midian-Sinai tradition was passed on, eventually making its way to Muhammad, the founder of Islam. These traditions were then passed on, in quite a detailed manner in many passages throughout the Quran. The Quran contains a mixture of many older Jewish and Christian stories that Muhammad no doubt had heard while living in Arabia during the seventh century. While many of the quranic stories are seen as distorted versions of actual biblical stories, others remain very close to the biblical accounts. The Quran is thus very helpful in providing insight into the ideas and traditions that were common in Arabia in Muhammad’s day.

Throughout Islam’s scriptures, there are eleven references to Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, and ten references to Midian. The name used in the Quran for Jethro is Shuaib. He is portrayed as a prophet sent to the people of Midian to call them back to faithfulness to God. In the chapter of the “Heights,” we read: “And to [the people of] Madyan [We sent] their brother Shu’aib. He said: O my people! serve Allah, you have no god other than Him” (Quran 7:85).¹⁹ Jethro is portrayed similarly in a few other passages. Elsewhere, the Quran also refers to Moses having found refuge in Midian: “Then you stayed for years among the people of Madyan; then you came hither as ordained, O

Musa” (Quran 20:40). In other passages, the Quran references God giving Moses the Torah at Sinai (e.g., Quran 2:63; 2:80; 28:44; 95:1, 2). On all of the essential points then, the quranic understanding of the land of Midian, the city of Madiam, its association with Jethro and Moses seems to have remained unchanged from the ancient Jewish and Christian traditions.

After the life of Muhammad, various Muslim theologians and historians continued to connect Jethro and Moses to Midian.

- Muhammad Ibn Ishaq (704-770): In the eighth century, the famed Muslim historian said: “The people of Madyan are the descendants of Madyan, son of Midyan, son of Ibrahim. Shuaib was the son of Mikil bin Yashjur. In the Syrian language, his name was Yathrun (Jethro).”²⁰
- Ahmad al-Yaqubi (d. 898): In the late ninth century, the famous Muslim geographer al-Yaqubi spoke of the modern town of al-Bad thusly: “Midian is a populous, ancient town with many springs, rivers and an abundance of gardens, orchards and plan trees inhabited by different ethnic groups.”²¹
- Al-Sharif al-Idisri (1100-1165): The twelfth century Muslim geographer, quoting from earlier Muslim geographers said, “at the coast of Quzlum Sea, lies the city of Midian, which is larger than Tabuk. Inside the town was the well from which Moses (Peace be upon him) extracted water for the livestock of Shu’aib... Midian was named after the tribe of Shu’aib.”²²

- There are actually several more Muslim historians after this time who continued to describe the town of al-Bad as the town or city of Midian and associate it with the biblical story of Jethro, Moses, and Mount Sinai.

CONCLUSION

As we have now seen, from roughly 250 BC, when the Septuagint translation was produced, until this very day there has been an unbroken tradition that supports Mount Sinai as being in Saudi Arabia. Among the three major monotheistic traditions, whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, all three uniformly point us to the same place, the tallest mountains in the range just outside of al-Bad, known today as Jebel al-Lawz.

7

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO MOUNT SINAI

As we very briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, Paul the apostle stands out as a towering giant among the various historical witnesses to the location of Mount Sinai. Not only did Paul very specifically locate Mount Sinai in Arabia, but it's also very likely that shortly after his conversion, he actually journeyed to the mountain to receive further revelation from the Lord. In this chapter, we will discuss the first of Paul's much debated references to Arabia in his Epistle to the Galatians.

PAUL'S VISIT TO ARABIA

Let's begin by considering the first passage in Galatians in which Paul mentions Arabia. Paul describes the manner in which he received his gospel, shortly after his initial conversion experience:

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it

through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia." (Galatians 1:11-17)

Why did Paul go to Arabia? This is a question that has greatly puzzled commentators. Three reasons have been suggested. The first possibility is that Paul went to Arabia for the purpose of preaching the gospel throughout the Nabatean Arab Kingdom. The second suggestion is that Paul simply went to Arabia to find some solitude and seek the Lord for further clarification concerning the nature of the gospel. The third reason is simply a more specific version of the second: Paul went to Mount Sinai in Arabia in imitation of Moses and Elijah to seek greater understanding and instruction from the Lord. Having worked through the various arguments for each of these positions, I believe that all three reasons are likely true.

PAUL PREACHED THE GOSPEL TO THE ARABS

First, we must acknowledge the evidence both within and outside of the text of Galatians that Paul did engage in evangelistic efforts while he was in Arabia. In verses 15-17, we see

strong indications that this was at least part of his purpose for going there. He says that after God revealed to him his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, instead of going up to Jerusalem, he went right to Arabia. The implication is that in his zeal, Paul did not hesitate to obey the Lord's calling on his life to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. The Arabs were the first to hear Paul proclaim the gospel. F. F. Bruce claims:

the primary purpose of his Arabian visit appears to have been the immediate fulfillment of his commission to preach the Son of God 'among the Gentiles'. There were Gentiles in abundance in the Nabataean realm, both settled population and Bedouin. Nothing is said of the planting of any church, but a beginning in preached the gospel is indicated.¹

Further evidence that Paul engaged in some kind of disruptive gospel preaching activity while in Arabia is seen in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33. There, Paul describes how some years later while he was in Damascus, "the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me." This "ethnarch" was a representative of Aretas, the king of Nabatea. Apparently, he was so upset with Paul that he sent his representative all the way to Damascus to kidnap Paul and bring him back to Arabia. Paul managed to escape, however, by hiding in a basket that was let down outside of the city wall. Obviously, whatever Paul had done in Arabia, it was more than merely praying and seeking God. As Paul always seemed to do, he had definitely caused a stir when he was there.

PAUL RECEIVED HIS GOSPEL ON MOUNT SINAI

While a very good case exists that Paul indeed preached the gospel in Arabia, there are also strong indications within his comments that he had other very important reasons for his journey as well. After Paul had his life-altering encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he stressed the fact that he did not go to Jerusalem to consult with the other apostles. He didn't consult any other man for that matter. Instead of consulting men, Paul says that he went to Arabia. This may seem to be a strange contrast. The inference, however, is that he went there to consult with God. Donald Campbell, former professor at Dallas Theological seminary explained, "The point of Paul's declaration is clear. He formed his theology not by consulting with others, but independently as he sought God's guidance."² This is such a critical point. After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, after having his entire theological world flipped upside down, Paul's immediate response was to go to Arabia to seek greater clarification from the Lord. But why of all places would Paul have gone to Arabia to seek the Lord's instruction? New Testament scholar N. T. Wright rightly notes the most likely reason he went to Arabia was to visit its most important landmark:

The word "Arabia" is very imprecise in Paul's day, covering the enormous area to the south and east of Palestine; but one thing we know for sure is that, for Paul, "Arabia" was the location of Mount Sinai. Indeed, Gal. 1:17, our present passage, and 4:25, "for Sinai is a mountain in Arabia," are the only two occurrences of 'Arabia' in the whole New Testament.³

In other words, in light of both the immediate and larger context of Paul's Epistle, the natural inference is that he went to Mount Sinai. This was not just any vague retreat into solitude but was a very deliberate journey to the mountain of God where Paul's predecessors, Moses and Elijah, had also spoken directly with God. This view is held by a wide range of scholars and commentators. Allen Kerkeslager states: "Paul, like many other Jews in this period, may have briefly gone into the desert to acquire revelation in conscious imitation of Moses and Elijah. The odd choice of Arabia for this quest is best explained if Paul actually went so far as to go to Mt. Sinai itself."⁴ Likewise, although F. F. Bruce opts for the view that evangelism was his primary focus, he also acknowledges, "It is possible that in 'Arabia' Paul communed with God in the wilderness where Moses and Elijah had communed with him centuries before"⁵ Wright sees such strong similarities in the stories of Paul and Elijah that he believes Paul was actually imitating Elijah's pilgrimage to Sinai: "when stopped in his tracks by the revelation on the road to Damascus, he again did what Elijah did. He went off to Mount Sinai."⁶ Finally, Wilfred Knox summarizes the whole episode quite well:

After his conversion he retired from Damascus to Arabia; it was there that he worked out what was implied in the revelation of the risen Lord given to him on the road to Damascus. By Arabia is meant the desert lying east and south of Palestine, the country of the Nabatean Arabs. The region included Mount Sinai, the scene of God's original revelation of Himself to the Jewish nation. St. Paul's journey to this region was not a missionary journey, but a retirement

into solitude comparable to that of Elijah. Its purpose was to enable him to adjust his life and teaching to the new truth revealed to him that Jesus was in fact the Messiah and not an impostor. In this sense he had learnt his Gospel not from flesh and blood, i.e., from human teachers, but by the revelation which caused his conversion and his subsequent meditations on what that revelation implied.⁷

Such an interpretation is in keeping with the very logical flow of Paul's previous comments. Paul describes himself as a man who had always been, "extremely zealous" for the traditions of his fathers, (Gal. 1:14). Elsewhere in the New Testament we're told that Paul had heretofore observed Torah blamelessly (see Phil. 3:6) and had been a lifelong Pharisee of Pharisees (see Acts 23:6). It is quite reasonable then to understand that in seeking revelation from heaven, Paul would have gone to the mountain of the Law. For although Paul had encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he didn't immediately understand the gospel and its relationship to the Torah in all of the rich complexity and nuance for which Paul is so well known.⁸ Such great understanding did not come instantly at the moment of his conversion. No doubt the Damascus encounter had completely thrown his entire world upside down, but it also would have left him with many remaining questions. Yet Paul repeatedly emphasized that he did not consult with any other men to find his answers. Instead, he looked to the same God who he had always served so zealously. To do so, Paul said he went to Arabia—the home of Mount Sinai.

CONCLUSION

In the end, we cannot say with absolute certainty that Paul went to Mount Sinai. Although he never actually comes right out and says so directly, he does, however, very strongly infer such. The implications of such a scenario of course are stunning. This would mean that while Paul first encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, it was on Mount Sinai where the Lord completed Paul's instruction concerning the gospel that he would go on to preach all over the world. "In the solitudes of Arabia," wrote the legendary Charles Spurgeon where "Paul studied the Old Testament, communed with God, and obtained insight into the deep things of God; his testimony was therefore fresh from heaven."⁹ Or as D. D. Whedon describes so poetically: "where Moses gave the law, and where Elijah's soul was strengthened to restore it, Paul receives from Christ the sublime apocalypse of his gospel."¹⁰

8

PAUL LOCATED MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA

As fascinating as it is that Paul likely visited Mount Sinai, where did he believe it was located? How might we determine where Paul was referring when he specifically said that Mount Sinai is in “Arabia”? I contend that there are at least five factors that we must consider, all of which would have no doubt influenced his perception of the world. First, we must examine the immediate context of his comments in Galatians 1:17 and 4:25. Was Paul making mere passing statements or is there more to his comments? Second, we need to consider who Paul was and the various factors that would have influenced his worldview. As a very devout Jewish Pharisee, the Bible would have no doubt been the most important influence in his life. Further, the common Jewish traditions and beliefs of his day would have also had a formative impact on his view of the world. Finally, we must also carefully study the classical Greco-Roman geographical designations of Paul’s day, and how these might have influenced Paul’s understanding. There can be little question that in the hierarchy

of influences in Paul's life, the Bible would have come first, Jewish tradition second, and the Greco-Roman world would have been last. With this in mind, how would Paul have understood the location of Mount Sinai? When he said quite directly that it was in Arabia, what would that have meant to him?

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF GALATIANS

First, we will begin by considering the immediate context of Paul's comments in Galatians. No one can read Paul's words and claim that he was making a random, off-hand, vague geographic statement. Far from it. Clearly Paul was making a very nuanced, even rabbinic argument. Paul was specifically drawing from the biblical narrative of Ishmael's birth and speaking very distinctly about his ancient biblical homeland known as Arabia. Carefully consider the focus of his argument:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more numerous are the children of the desolate Than of the one who has a husband." And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was

born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.” (Galatians 4:22-30)

Since Paul connected Mount Sinai to the land of Hagar and the Ishmaelites, we must ask: What land would Paul likely have associated with these names? Where exactly did they settle? Let’s begin with Hagar. As church historian and senior theological advisor for *Christianity Today* Timothy George explains:

According to Gen 25 (vv. 6, 18), Hagar and Ishmael were expelled to “the land of the East,” that is, to the region later known as Arabia. The word “Hagar” itself is still preserved in the name of the modern city of Chegra, located in what is today the extreme northwestern section of Saudi Arabia.¹

What about Ishmael? Where did he settle? First, we see that Ishmael came to settle, “in the wilderness of Paran” (Gen. 21:20-21). Okay, so where was Paran located? Deuteronomy 1:1 tells us that it was east of the Jordan: “These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel.” So Paran was east of the Jordan, in the southern deserts close to the Red Sea (*Suph*). And what of the larger Ishmaelites? Where did Ismael’s children come to settle? In a general, we’re told that they settled to the south and east of Israel (e.g., Gen. 37:25; Ezek. 27:20-21; Isa. 60:7). Specifically, Nebaioth, Ishmael’s firstborn son, came to occupy the regions of Edom and as far south as

al-Ula, 350 miles into Saudi Arabia.² Kedar, Ishmael's second son, is identified as having lived "to the east and slightly to the south of Israel in what is today the southern part of Jordan."³ Duma and Tema were other sons of Ishmael. Duma settled in the area now known as *Dumat el-Jendel*, about 350 into Saudi Arabia.⁴ Tema settled near, "an oasis located 400 miles north of Medinah," once again in modern day Saudi Arabia.⁵ Because Paul specifically located Mount Sinai in the ancient biblical homeland of Hagar and Ishmael, obviously he believed this was south of Israel and east of the Red Sea. Based on the context of Paul's comments in Galatians alone, Mount Sinai for him was somewhere in the southern deserts of northwest Saudi Arabia.

PAUL'S JEWISH IDENTITY

Beyond the immediate context of Paul's comments in Galatians, let us also consider the fact that as a devout Jew, Paul's understanding of the location of Mount Sinai would no doubt have been formed by his knowledge of the Bible. First, as we have already seen, the Bible placed the miraculous sea crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba. Every single verse in the Bible that attaches a geographic marker to the term *Yam Suph* connects it to the Gulf of Aqaba. There is not one verse that clearly connects the *Yam Suph* to the various bodies of water on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula. Paul knew that the holy mountain lay somewhere close to the Red Sea. Second, this view would have been reinforced by the Jewish tradition that we discussed in chapter 6. This tradition, observed in the Septuagint, in the writings of Philo and Josephus, all recognized Mount Sinai to have been just outside of the town of Madiam, or modern-day al-Bad in modern day northwest Saudi Arabia.⁶ In order to claim that

Paul would have placed Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula, traditionalists must specifically explain why Paul would have taken such a strong departure from this well-established Jewish perspective. Not only do traditionalists tend to avoid having such discussions, they also don't even mention this very important Jewish tradition that identifies Midian and Mount Sinai east of the Gulf of Aqaba. Whether this is done in ignorance or is deliberate, we cannot say.

TRADITIONALIST ARGUMENTS

Obviously, the fact that Paul specifically locates Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia is a devastating blow to the traditionalist perspective. As such, various scholars and commentators have made great efforts to confuse what is otherwise clear.⁷ The basic argument traditionalists use is essentially always the same. First, they claim that the common understanding of the term "Arabia" in Paul's day would have included the Sinai Peninsula. We agree with this. From there, however, without any basis to do so, they simply say that this is where Paul *must have* been referring. James Hoffmeier, for example, begins by stating, "the term Arabia as used in Greco-Roman times included Sinai."⁸ Then without ever explaining why, he simply asserts, "Hence, Paul is plainly using the geographical term that was understood in his day to refer to Sinai."⁹ David Rohl goes so far as to state that any suggestion that Paul was *not* referring to the Sinai Peninsula is, "complete nonsense."¹⁰ Traditionalist Gordon Franz, a Bible teacher and a prolific writer with a particular interest in biblical archeology, uses misdirection when he argues, "The Galatians 4:25 reference might indeed support the view that Mount Sinai was in Saudi Arabia if the Apostle Paul was looking at a 1990

Rand McNally Atlas. However, it would not be true if he was looking at a First Century AD Roman road map.”¹¹ This is a silly comment. Of course the region where Mount Sinai sits was not called “Saudi Arabia” back in Paul’s day, but it was called “Arabia,” and it has not moved. While the names for various locations have changed, the geography itself remains unchanged. All three men infer that since the Sinai Peninsula *could have been* included in a first-century reference to Arabia, this, therefore, *must have been* where Paul was pointing. As we have said, the logic simply does not follow.

We must reiterate that we agree that in Paul’s day, the term “Arabia” could be used in a variety of ways. That said, one cannot simply choose one of these and assert that this must have been what Paul meant without giving any solid reasons why. To better understand this matter, let’s briefly review the three primary ways that the term Arabia would have been used in Paul’s day, and then we will discuss which usage makes the most sense.

ARABIA AS A GENERAL REFERENCE TO THE EAST

The first and most broad manner in which the terms, “Arab” or “Arabia” could have been used is observed in the book of Acts. There we find the term used to refer to the lands and the people east of Israel. In Acts 2:9-11, we find a list of the Jews of the Dispersion who were present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. These were those who had lived all over the world outside of Israel. The list begins by mentioning those from the East: “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia.” Today, these regions correlate roughly to Iran, Kurdistan, and Iraq. Next, it mentions those from Judea. Finally, it lists the Jews from the Western Dispersion: “Cappadocia,

Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome.” These were, “both Jews and proselytes,”—both ethnic Jews and Gentile converts. Finally, it summarizes the list into two simple categories: “Cretans and Arabs.” Those from the Western Dispersion were referred to as “Cretans” while those from the Eastern Dispersion were referred to generally as “Arabs.” Thus, here we see a clear example of the term “Arab” used in a very broad sense to simply refer to the East.

ARABIA AS ANY REGION INHABITED BY ARABS

Another broad manner in which the term “Arabia” was used in Paul’s day was as a reference to any region outside of Israel that was inhabited by Arab peoples. Franz cites a few different Greek historians who refer to the areas of Lebanon, Syria, and Mount Hermon as “Arabia.” He states, “For these historians, the part of ‘Arabia’ that Alexander the Great was fighting Arabs in, was in what is today Lebanon and Syria, not Saudi Arabia.”¹² His comments are somewhat misleading, however. Saudi Arabia would have absolutely been considered Arabia; it simply was not the part of Arabia being referenced where Alexander was fighting Arabs. So we agree with Franz that the term “Arabia” could be used in a very broad sense. This is also how the term was used for much of the Sinai Peninsula. It also was a place outside of Israel where Arabs lived. Of course, Franz would never claim that Paul believed Mount Sinai was in Lebanon or Syria. To do so, one would need to provide some reason why this is where Paul was pointing. The same applies to the Sinai Peninsula.

ARABIA PROPER

Arabia could also be used in a much more specific sense, referring to Arabia proper. Graham I. Davies is emeritus professor of Old Testament studies at the University of Cambridge. He wrote a book about the wilderness wanderings in which he stated, in Paul's day, the term Arabia "included the Sinai Peninsula as well as Arabia proper."¹³ By "Arabia proper" Davies is referring to the Arabian Peninsula. Even among the Greco-Roman geographers, unqualified references to Arabia would most likely point to the Arabian Peninsula. In the fifth century BC, the Greek historian Herodotus used the term "Arabia" to identify the Arabian Peninsula. As we have discussed elsewhere, even though Herodotus was not aware that the Sinai Peninsula even existed, he still would have viewed it to be part of Arabia. In the writings of Strabo, another Greek historian-geographer who lived in the first century BC, the Arabian Peninsula continued to be the heartland of Arabia and was called Arabia Felix (meaning "happy," "blessed," "fortunate Arabia"). Another smaller region in southern Jordan was called Arabia Deserta. So while it is most certainly possible that in Paul's day references to Arabia could have been pointing to the Sinai Peninsula, this would have been much more of a secondary reference. If no qualifier was given, the Arabian Peninsula would likely have been understood as the primary region.

Consider a simple analogy. Imagine that I said, "God Bless America." No one living today would understand me to be referring to Canada, Costa Rica, or Brazil. Technically however, these are all parts of North, Central, or South *America*. Now imagine if two thousand years from now a few scholars asserted that because in the twenty-first century the term "America"

could technically be used to refer to Canada then my “God Bless America” was *plainly* referring to Canada—and any claim to the contrary was complete nonsense. Being so far removed in time, I am sure that some from the twenty-third century would accept these arguments. Those of us who understand this expression in the context of our day, however, see such an argument as being quite laughable. The claim that Paul was referencing the Sinai Peninsula in Galatians is equally unlikely. One cannot ignore a careful consideration of the immediate and broader context of Paul’s words and rely instead unsupported assertions. Yet this is exactly what traditionalists have done. They assert that Paul’s reference to Arabia was to the Sinai Peninsula, yet they give absolutely no reason whatsoever to explain why Paul would have had the Sinai in mind.

SUMMARY

All things considered, among all our options, overwhelmingly, the most reasonable view is that Paul located Mount Sinai in northwest Arabia. Let us review the reasons why we have arrived at this conclusion, in their order of importance:

1. The context of Paul’s comments in Galatians (his references to the land of Hagar and Ishmael) indicates that he was most likely pointing to the regions of southern Jordan and northwest Arabia.
2. Paul’s worldview, informed first and foremost by the Bible, would have led him to believe that the exodus sea crossing took place at the Gulf of Aqaba (see chapter 4).

3. Paul's biblical worldview would have most likely led him to believe that Mount Sinai was near Midian in northwest Saudi Arabia (see chapter 5).
4. Paul's identity as a Jew would most likely mean that he would have agreed with the common Jewish traditions of his day (the Septuagint, Philo, and Josephus) that placed Mount Sinai just outside of Midian in northwest Saudi Arabia (see chapter 6).
5. Given the range of possible meanings for the term "Arabia" in Paul's day, his reference in Galatians 4:25 was most likely to Arabia proper, or the Arabian Peninsula.

All five of these factors point to the same general region.

CONCLUSION

When we review arguments employed by traditionalists, we find that among these five factors, they tend to focus almost solely on the Greco-Roman geographers while barely considering the other four points. When one is determined to place Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula, one is forced to ignore the much more relevant sources of the Bible and Jewish tradition and focus instead on outside sources. In this sense, traditionalists have it precisely backwards. In our final assessment, the traditionalist claim that Paul was pointing to some place outside of Arabia proper simply cannot be substantiated.¹⁴ All evidence considered, the conclusion is simple: Paul located Mount Sinai just outside of the city of Madiam, in what is now northwest Saudi Arabia.

JEBEL AL-LAWZ

So far, we've seen quite an array of evidence that Jebel al-Lawz is the real Mount Sinai. Whether we're considering the geographical, biblical, historical, or traditional evidence, everything seems to converge on this one particular mountain. But what of the actual on-the-ground topographical evidence? What of the actual physical description of the mountain itself? Does it align with what we would expect to find if it were indeed the true Mount Sinai?

HOREB AND SINAI

Before we begin, it is important to define exactly what we mean when we speak of Jebel al-Lawz. There is actually quite a bit of misunderstanding that surrounds the name of the mountain. Until this point, I've simply referred to the mountain as Jebel al-Lawz because this is the name that most recognize. If you read other books or articles online, you may have also heard it referred to as Jebel al-Makklah—the “Quarry Mountain.”

This is due to the massive seam of marble near the top of the mountain that was used as a quarry. The truth, however, is that Jebel al-Lawz is actually the name that the locals use to refer to the entire mountain range. Many of the Bedouins who I have asked refer to the peak in question as Jebel Musa, which means “Mountain of Moses.” The larger range itself is referred to as Jebel al-Lawz. When we read the biblical account of Mount Sinai, it also is referred to by different names. At times it is called Mount Horeb and at other times it is called Mount Sinai. This has led to some confusion. Hershel Shanks, the founder of the Biblical Archaeology Society and the editor emeritus of the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, for example, wrote that “The Bible actually gives two names for the Mountain of God: Mt. Sinai and Mt. Horeb. Are they the same mountain, or are they different? The question remains open.”¹ A careful analysis of the biblical evidence may point to two different mountains. This is certainly how some early Christians understood it. Eusebius, for example, defined Horeb as, “The mountain of God in the land of Madiam. It lies beside Mount Sinai.”² The famed German commentators C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch however see it differently: “Horeb was more general and comprehensive than that of Sinai; in other words, that Horeb was the range of which Sinai was one particular mountain, which only came prominently to view when Israel had arrived at the mount of legislation.”³ It seems quite likely that in the same way that Jebel al-Lawz is used today to refer to the whole range, this is how Horeb was used in ancient times. The specific mountain sometimes called Makklah, and which many of the locals call Jebel Musa, was known as Sinai.

In chapter 5, I mentioned the beautiful view of the Jebel

al-Lawz range that greets you as you step out of any of the caves of Jethro. The view is absolutely breathtaking. I estimate the mountains to be roughly twelve miles from the center of al-Bad. It is very easy to understand how both Philo and Josephus described Mount Sinai as the tallest mountain just outside of the ancient city of Midian.



The peak of Jebel al-Lawz (above and below)



THE MOUNTAIN OF ALMONDS

Further evidence that Jebel al-Lawz is the real Mount Sinai may be seen in the modern Arabic name for this range: Mountain of Almonds, or Almond Trees. One of the most important pieces of furniture in the tabernacle and the temples of Israel was the golden lamp stand. It was there on Mount Sinai that the Lord gave Moses the specific design for this sacred treasure. According to the divine design, the stems and cups of the menorah were specifically modeled to resemble the branches and blossoms of an almond tree. As the Lord said to Moses:

Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand and its base and its shaft are to be made of hammered work; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. Six branches shall go out from its sides; three branches of the lampstand from its one side and three branches of the lampstand from its other side. Three cups shall be shaped like almond blossoms in the one branch, a bulb and a flower, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms in the other branch, a bulb and a flower—so for six branches going out from the lampstand; and in the lampstand four cups shaped like almond blossoms, its bulbs and its flowers. (Exodus 25:31-34)

Another one of the most important artifacts the Israelites took with them from Sinai was Aaron's rod. According to the account in the book of Numbers, a rod from each one of the tribes of Israel was brought into the tent of meeting. The Lord declared to Moses that "the rod of the man whom [He] choose will sprout" (Num. 17:5). Sure enough, after the rods

were placed there, “on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds” (Num. 17:8). As a memorial and a witness to this miracle, Aaron’s rod was one of a few items that were held inside the ark of the covenant. The book of Hebrews lists the contents of the ark: “a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant” (Heb. 9:4).

Although a skeptic could certainly point out that almond trees grow throughout the Middle East, thus there is nothing noteworthy here, the fact remains that Jebel al-Lawz is a place where almond trees grow in such great abundance that it actually came to be named after the almond tree. As we consider the story of the exodus, so many of the Lord’s commandments revolve around His desire for the Israelites specifically *to remember*. As it pertains to the events of the exodus, “You shall remember” (Deut. 8:2; cf., Ex. 13:3; Num. 15:39; Deut. 4:10; 5:15; 7:18; 8:18; 9:7; 15:15; 16:3,12; 24:18, 22; 32:7) was the repeated refrain. With this in mind, the Lord commanded that the menorah be designed and Aaron’s rod be preserved in order to preserve the memory and the testimony of all the things that He did, not as part of some vague sacred mythology but as real events done in real time before the eyes of real men and women *in a very real and identifiable location*. That the mountain range today is still called Almond Mountain, I do not believe, should be seen as an irrelevant coincidence but rather as the living testimony of the marvelous things that took place there so long ago.

AN EXCEEDINGLY RUGGED MOUNTAIN

In the previous chapter, we cited Josephus who described Mount Sinai as the tallest mountain in the region of Midian. Josephus actually goes on to further describe the mountain as an exceedingly rugged mountain, difficult to climb, with very sharp peaks:

He ascended up to Mount Sinai, which is the highest of all the mountains that are in that country, and is not only very difficult to be ascended by men, on account of its vast altitude, but because of the sharpness of its precipices also; nay, indeed, it cannot be looked at without pain of the eyes; and besides this, it was terrible and inaccessible, on account of the rumor that passed about, that God dwelt there.⁴

Anyone who has been to this mountain, and particularly anyone who has climbed it, can attest that Josephus's description is quite accurate. As a whole it is a very challenging mountain to climb. Much of it is comprised of very large boulders. There is no path up the mountain. What you cannot see unless you've been there, is that tucked in between so many of the boulders are all kinds of desert plants, briars, and thorns. If you attempt to climb the mountain without good boots and gloves, you are likely to regret it. Add to all of this, the hot Saudi Arabian sun throughout several months of the year and this is indeed a difficult mountain to climb. While it is unlikely that Josephus ever visited the mountain, his descriptions certainly seem to indicate that he was relaying some first-hand information.

THE MOUNTAIN OF FIRE

Much has been made about the fact that the top of the mountain

is all black. Some have suggested that this is the clear evidence of the Lord having descended on the mountain in fire. I can certainly understand how some would think this. The biblical description concerning the theophany is quite specific: “Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently” (Ex. 19:18). It is also true that amongst all of the surrounding mountains, composed primarily of blond granite, Jebel al-Lawz is unique, the top being composed of a much darker kind of basalt that begins very abruptly about two-thirds of the way up the mountain. In fact, satellite images make it clear that Jebel al-Lawz is by far, the darkest peaked mountain range in all of northern Saudi Arabia or the whole Sinai Peninsula.

Because some advocates have looked to this unique feature of the mountain as proof that it is the real Mount Sinai, critics have responded by pointing out that if Moses was not burnt when he was on the mountain, then neither should we expect the rocks to have been burnt. Unless there is more to the story than what we find through a surface reading of the actual biblical account, this seems to be a very legitimate objection. Although the darker rocks at the top of the mountain do raise some very interesting questions, it is probably fair to say that this feature of the mountain is not likely clear evidence of the divine fire that rested on the mountain.

We must also point out that some critics overly eager to discredit any evidence whatsoever have wrongly claimed that the dark rocks at the top of Jebel al-Makklah are simply discolored as the result of a natural process. James Hoffmeier, for example, claims the “blackened color of the top of Jebel el-Lawz

is explained by geologists as a phenomenon known as desert varnish, which is a black-to-brown coating of iron, manganese, and clay [that] commonly forms on exposed rocks and artifact surfaces embedded in desert pavements... as a result of organic microbial activity on the rock surface.”⁵ While desert varnish is found on many rocks throughout the region, it is not the cause of the dark peak of al-Makklah. Hoffmeier has never been to the mountain. The dark rocks on top of al-Makklah are basalt, a type of volcanic rock. The color of the rocks that form the strikingly dark seam across the top of the mountain range from green, to blue, to brown, and black. Perhaps in time, geologists and theologians may make further observations regarding the basalt mountain, but for now, as I said, it should remain a point of interest, but not proof of the divine event that took place there.

THE CAVE OF ELIJAH

Another physical feature of the mountain that aligns perfectly with the biblical narrative is the cave on the eastern face of the mountain. Scripture informs us that after being pursued by Jezebel and Ahab, Elijah fled for his life “to Horeb, the mountain of God. Then he came there to a cave and lodged there” (1 Kings 19:8-9). While it is fair to say that there are likely dozens of mountains with caves that could be found throughout the region, it is not true of every mountain. This is yet another feature that must be present on any mountain that is considered as a candidate for Mount Sinai. In fact, one of the reasons that the fourth-century monks determined that the mountain in southern Sinai was the mountain of God was due to the presence of a cave, or grotto, near its base. This particular cave on Jebel al-Lawz however, is a distinct and prominent cave on the

eastern face of the mountain that is noticeable from its base. It is about twenty feet deep and has a smooth dirt floor, and one can easily imagine Elijah sleeping there as Scripture states. On my first visit to the mountain, we hiked up to the cave and rested a bit as we looked out at the entire eastern valley below. As I sat there, I looked down at a few of the very important archeological sites associated with the mountain. One of these is what is believed to be the altar that was built by Moses. We will discuss this in the next chapter. The other site is believed to have been the altar where the Israelites worshipped the golden calf. From Elijah's Cave, we climbed down the mountain to investigate these sites. Before we turn to discuss these altars, however, there is one more very important physical feature of the mountain that must be noted.



Cave on the face of Jabel al-Lawz (above and below)



A STREAM ON THE EASTERN SIDE

There are some drastic differences between the environments on the western side of the mountain versus its eastern side. Although the western side of the mountain faces the Red Sea, it is much more dry. The eastern side, however, actually has quite a bit of moisture, including places where occasional streams run down the mountain. I've hiked down the stream in October at the end of the summer, and even then, there were pools of water in various pockets. When the evaporated moisture from the Red Sea reaches the mountain, it deposits far more moisture after it clears the tall peak creating streams on its eastern side. This is very important because the eastern side of the mountain was where a group of the Israelites had given themselves to idol worship, Moses was commanded to burn the idol of the golden calf and specifically throw the ashes into a stream that came down Mount Sinai:

I took your sinful thing, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that came down from the mountain. (Deuteronomy 9:21)

In such a harsh desert environment, brooks and rivers are not common. Yet exactly as we would expect to find if this were indeed the real Mount Sinai, in perfect accord with the biblical narrative, there we find a perfectly positioned brook.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the physical features of the twin mountains of Jebel al-Lawz align with what we find described in the Bible as well as by the historian Josephus. Adding then to the geographical, biblical, historical, and traditional evidence, we see that the topographical features of the mountain align perfectly with what we would expect to find if this were the real Mount Sinai. In the next chapter, we will see that several of the archeological sites that surround the mountain also validate all that we have considered thus far.

10

THE ROCKS CRY OUT

Now let's consider several very important archeological sites around the mountain that serve as even further confirm this as the real Mount Sinai. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, as I sat at the mouth of what is likely to be the Cave of Elijah, I looked down at the first of these sites: an altar that very well may have been built by Moses Himself.

THE MOSES ALTAR

After the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He also gave the commandment that wherever the Israelites dwelled, they were to make an altar for sacrificing animals. If the altar was made from stones and rocks, they were not to be hewn or cut:

You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for

if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.’ (Exodus 20:24-26)

Later, Moses built just such an altar at the foot of the mountain:

Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:4-8)

As I mentioned above, when sitting at the mouth of the cave where Elijah likely stayed while on Sinai, you can look down and clearly see an altar below. From above, it has a kind of hockey-stick angle to it. It is a massive structure—roughly 100 feet long. The structure is comprised of three long angled stone walls; two rows form the outer walls of the structure, and a third dividing wall runs down the middle. The result is two long corridors that turn at a forty-five-degree angle at its midpoint. In accordance with the biblical description, the rocks are not hewn or cut stones; they are simply stacked on top of one another. At

the end of the long corridors, two smaller spaces are segmented off. A Saudi-sponsored archeological survey examined the altar in 2002. The investigators found, “a layer of ash, charcoal and bones found mixed with other organic materials.”¹ In other words, the survey found exactly what we would expect to find if this had been an altar used for the sacrifice of animals. It is also located just as Scripture describes, “at the foot of the mountain” (Ex. 24:4) and sits just beside the brook we previously discussed that is mentioned in Deuteronomy 9:21.



Altar at the base of Jebel al-Lawz (above and below)



TWELVE PILLARS

Further validating the likelihood that this is the very altar that Moses built, in front of it there are several small marble columns or sections of pillars sitting on the ground. Again, this is exactly what the text describes when it says that Moses, “built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel” (Ex. 24:4). Jim Caldwell, the engineer who worked in the Kingdom, and his wife, Penny, speculate that when the text describes Moses sacrificing the animals and sprinkling the blood on the people, it may have actually been on the pillars, which represented the twelve tribes. While we might easily accept the idea of a Roman Catholic priest sprinkling, “holy water” onto his congregation, the idea of Moses walking through the camp of people and splashing them with blood does seem to be odd, though we cannot know for sure. The pillars that sit next to the altar were likely the pillars that the Lord commanded Moses to set up specifically to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, which is exactly what we found at the base of the mountain: an altar made with uncut stones and remnants of stone pillars.



Pillars beside the altar at the base of Jebel al-Lawz

THE GOLDEN CALF ALTAR

Another very important site that is also clearly visible from Elijah's cave, just a few hundred yards to the east of Moses's Altar, is a massive stone formation that is the likely remains of the altar where roughly three thousand Israelites worshipped the Golden Calf. Let's review the biblical account:

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and

made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.” So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” (Exodus 32:1-8)

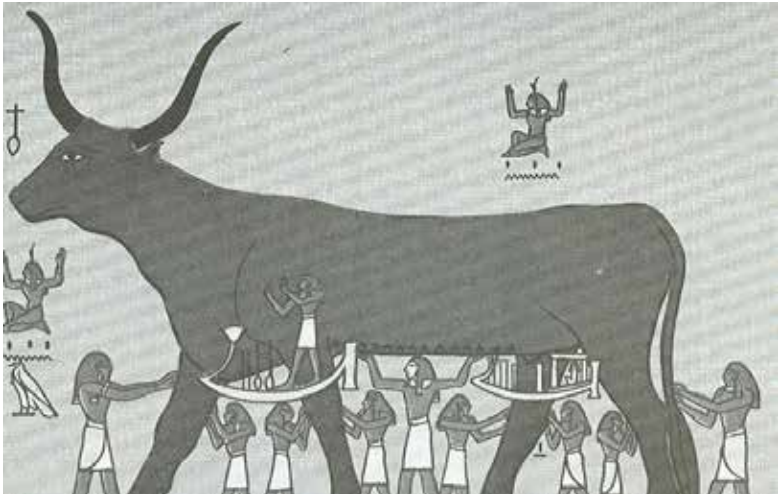
As Moses lingered on the mountain for forty days, many of the people became impatient and determined to make an idol of a calf. This massive pile of rocks, a few hundred yards from the base of the mountain would seem to be an ideal spot to use as an altar. In several places, the rocks are still covered with carvings and paintings of cows. This certainly seems to be a profound confirmation that this was the actual altar where some of the Israelites returned to the idolatry that they had learned in Egypt.



The massive pile of rocks close to the base of Mount Jebel al-Lawz (Photograph courtesy of Jim and Penny Caldwell. Used by permission.)

While it may seem odd to the modern mind that the people chose to worship a cow, this was actually a common practice in Egypt during the period when the Israelites lived there. The Egyptian cow gods were known as Hathor or Apis.³ Most often represented as a calf, Hathor personified motherhood, fertility, as well as music, joy, and celebration. All of this matches well with the biblical description of the idolaters who after sitting down to eat and drink and then “rose up to play” (Ex. 32:6). According to Egyptian religious mythology, Hathor’s son, called Apis, was a bull figure. When one examines the petroglyphs of the cows found on the altar and nearby, several of the images show remarkable similarities to religious iconography found in Egypt. One such image, found in the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I portrays a giant bull with worshippers underneath with arms raised.

THE ROCKS CRY OUT



Drawing of, and the actual image found in the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I



Almost identical images are also found among the petroglyphs there at the Golden Calf Altar.

MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA



Carvings of cows close to the golden calf altar (above and below)



This would certainly confirm that those who carved these images came from Egypt. The images of the cows are not merely pastoral images of cows wandering around the Arabian desert but are in fact ancient pagan religious iconography. The golden calf altar may thus be yet one more confirmation that Jebel al-Lawz is indeed the real biblical Mount Sinai.



Cows carved onto the golden calf altar (above and below)



THE GRAVEYARD

Scripture records that after the golden calf incident, the Lord commanded Moses to execute three thousand of those involved in this rebellion:

Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. He said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’” So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. (Exodus 32:25-28).

This was not the end, however. For after this, Scripture says, “Then the Lord smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made” (v. 35). Altogether roughly twenty-three thousand people died.

In the 1990s while visiting with their two children, the Caldwells also found what appears to be a massive cemetery roughly three miles east of the base of the mountain. It is a large field featuring numerous stones that have been stood up as possible grave markers. The Saudi Arabian archeological authorities have fenced this area off as well.

If indeed this is the graveyard that it appears to be, it would be the location where thousands of Israelites were buried. This site could be hiding unfathomably important archeological

treasures. Perhaps in time, the Saudi Arabian government will allow the site to be carefully excavated.

KEEP OUT SIGNS AT THE BASE OF THE MOUNTAIN

On my first visit to the mountain, within an hour or so after initially setting off, I essentially stumbled onto something quite remarkable. As I was walking past a rock mound, I noticed several paintings on the underside of some of the rocks. The paintings were a series of archers clearly holding bows and arrows. They appeared to have been painted using some kind of red mineral pigment, the same kind of paint and style as some of the golden calf paintings. This may indicate that whoever painted the archers also created the images on the altar. It seems likely that there were originally many more of these paintings around the base of the mountain, but due to exposure to the weather, they have faded or worn off over the centuries. Because these particular paintings were on the underside of the rocks, they were protected from the elements, and thus well preserved. My initial thought was that they were merely portraying some kind of hunting scene, but there were no animals except for one bull, part of which had faded away. I sent my wife the pictures, and she responded by pointing me to Exodus 19. To be honest, I had no idea what she was talking about until I looked up the verses. Once I understood what she was referring to, I was stunned by the prospect of what I may have found. These are the verses my wife directed me to:

The Lord also said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the

third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' (Exodus 19:10-13)

Later, in verse, 23, the Lord again reiterated His command to Moses to set bounds around the mountain.



Paintings of archers at the base of the Mount Jebel al-Lawz



Paintings of archers at the base of the Mount Jebel al-Lawz

As we walked another thirty meters or so, we found another similar series of paintings of archers. They seemed to be an ancient form of Keep Out signs. According to the biblical warning, violators would be, “shot through” with arrows. After speaking with several others who had been to the mountain, I learned that these images had not been photographed or

published anywhere previously. Somewhat haphazardly, I had stumbled upon what may be yet one more very important archeological validation that this is indeed the real Mount Sinai. If I found such paintings on my first visit to the mountain, imagine what else is waiting to be discovered when the vast mountain and its surrounding environs are more fully explored.

THE SPLIT ROCK

Finally, we come to what may very well be the most extraordinary site around the whole mountain: A rock that the Bible refers to as the rock at Horeb. Before we discuss this site, we need to consider the biblical description of this rock. As the people were encamped in the desert, they became thirsty and began to complain to Moses. In a display of great compassion, the Lord commanded Moses to use his staff to specifically strike, the rock at Horeb, out of which would come forth water for the people:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. (Exodus 17:5-6)

Of course, anyone who has been to this area can testify that there are rocks literally everywhere. How would Moses have known which specific rock he was to strike? It is clear that the rock at Horeb was a prominent landmark that was well known

and easily recognizable. Such is most certainly true as it relates to the massive, towering rock that now sits to the northwest of Jebel al-Lawz. The rock itself is far larger than I had imagined it to be by looking at pictures. While standing before it, I estimated that it was roughly sixty-five feet tall. Imagine a five or six story building sitting on top of a hill ten stories high. Not only is the rock massive, but it also is an unusual formation. Think about this: How does a massive rock nearly sixty feet tall simply appear, standing upright, so well balanced on top of a pile of other rocks that are roughly ninety feet high? The rock itself is the same type of granite as the rocks that it sits on top of. So it is not as though the hill upon which it sits is made of one kind of rock that gradually dissolved or was washed away, leaving another kind of harder mineral behind. There is no clear explanation for this odd yet magnificent formation. Even if it had no possible historical or archeological value whatsoever, it would still likely attract visitors. It reminded me of some of the formations of Arches National Park in Utah. The point is that this particular rock most certainly fulfills the description of a rock that would have been a well-known landmark. What other ways does it conform to the biblical descriptions?

Another unique feature is that the rock is split almost perfectly down the middle from the top to the bottom. This is exactly what the Bible describes when it speaks of the rock of Horeb. Isaiah the prophet stated that the Israelites, “did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He made the water flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock and the water gushed forth” (Isaiah 48:21; cf. Psalm 78:15). The Hebrew word for split is the same as that which was used of the parting of the Red Sea: *baqa*, which means “to cleave, break open or

through.”⁴ The biblical description of the miracle that occurred when Moses struck the rock doesn’t allow for a crack from which water bubbled out. The Bible says the rock was cleaved and split through. This is a perfect description of the towering rock north of Jebel al-Lawz.

Furthermore, in Psalm 105, David describes the waters that ran out of the rock as having run like a gushing river. “He opened the rock and water flowed out; It ran in the dry places like a river” (Psalm 105:41). Thus, it’s astounding when you ascend the hill leading up to the split rock and see the area below where it very clearly appears to have been washed away in a massive runoff from above. And while it is possible that the inside of the split at the base of the rock has been washed away merely by wind and time, it certainly has the appearance of significant water erosion.

First, the formation itself aligns with the biblical description of the rock that is an easily identifiable landmark close to Mount Horeb. Second, it features a massive split right through its center. Third, the rock has noticeable water erosion at its base and in the area below. Every description of the rock conforms so perfectly to the biblical descriptions that one may rightly say that if this is not the actual rock that was miraculously split when Moses struck it, then the Lord Himself has created a deliberate and well-staged copycat.

THE ROCKS CRY OUT



The Split Rock at Mount Horeb



The Split Rock



The effects of the water runoff at the base of the Split Rock

TOPOGRAPHY SURROUNDING THE SPLIT ROCK

The split rock further conforms to the biblical narrative in that it sits beside a large and open plain. Why is this important? Because beyond simply calling this the rock at Horeb, it is also described as being in a place called Rephidim (Ex. 17:1, 8). This is where the Israelites camped and fought a large battle against the Amalekites. Any candidate for the split rock must sit beside a large and open plain where such a large group could have camped and where such a massive battle could have taken place. Sure enough, just to the east of the split rock are indeed two massive plains roughly three miles long.

Another important feature of Rephidim was that it was surrounded by some tall hills. Moses informs us in Exodus 17 that he climbed a nearby hill and raised his hands throughout the night as the battle took place (see Ex. 17:10-13). Again, this is a perfect description of the area that surrounds the split

rock. There are several very large hills that could be considered smaller extensions of the tallest Jebel al-Lawz peak. On all of the essential points, the area around the split rock aligns perfectly with the biblical narrative. All factors considered, we are indeed safe to believe that this is most likely the very spot where this foundational and miraculous biblical narrative unfolded.



Open plains and hills surrounding the Split Rock at Horeb (© 2018 Google Earth)

A LIVING TESTIMONY

Of all the various sites that surround the mountain, none was more impressive to me than the split rock. Despite its simplicity, it may be one of the most stunning historical sites in the world. I've been to Israel many times. I'm genuinely in love with Jerusalem and many of the biblical and historical sites through the land. To see the places where King David, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles lived and ministered is a profoundly stirring and faith-building experience. I am convinced that every Christian should try to go on a tour of Israel and see these places firsthand. Yet as powerful as it is to see all of these sites, they have been so drastically altered throughout the millennia

that it often requires some imagination to envision what the places looked like during biblical times. The sites around Jebel al-Lawz, however, are virtually untouched. Apart from the smatterings of Bedouin camps throughout the area, it has remained relatively unchanged for the past few thousand years. It is as if everything remains as it was during the days of Moses and the Israelites. When you are there, you can feel that the place has been providentially preserved by the hand of God. While this is true of most of the sites around the mountain, the split rock in particular stands out. Unlike the ruins of some ancient building or city, the split rock is not simply a place where something historically significant or miraculous once took place; it actually is the miracle. It is a living, towering testimony to the mighty wonders that God performed for the

Israelites so long ago. The Lord split the rock! He miraculously brought forth rivers of water for His people. And there the rock remains to this very day. Anyone who has access to this place can go and see it. Even more important, Paul said the Israelites “were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). Even as the rock was broken to provide life-giving water for the Israelites, so also was the body of Jesus broken for us all. The rock is a testimony not only to a miraculous event, but it is also a testimony to the very gospel itself.

PETROGLYPHS

Surrounding the mountain are numerous petroglyphs. These are letters, words, symbols, and drawings that have been chipped into the rocks, most often through the darker “desert varnish” to expose the lighter subsurface. Petroglyphs are found in

abundance around the mountain, throughout the region, and even throughout most of Saudi Arabia. We've already discussed the petroglyphs of cows on the golden calf altar. Beginning with the investigative work of the Caldwells, hundreds of these petroglyphs have been photographed and documented. Much work has yet to be done of these images and there are a wide array of opinions concerning the dating, origin, and meaning of these ancient markings. Dr. Miles Jones, a life-long linguist with a wide range of experience working throughout the region has posited in his book, *The Writing of God: Secret of the Real Mount Sinai*,⁵ that many of these glyphs represent the earliest form of a written alphabet, having been left there by Moses and his people. While older cultures used pictographs, such as Egyptian hieroglyphics or early Sumerian cuneiform drawings, the symbols and letters found around Jebel al-Lawz may very well represent the first example of an actual alphabet. Dr. Jones posits that this alphabet was actually given to Moses by God as the means whereby the Israelites would not only be able to read, write, and learn themselves, but also to teach the world concerning the truth about God. Of course, as fascinating a prospect as this theory is, it is beyond the scope of this book. Worth highlighting for our purposes is that the many letters and symbols found around the mountain appear to be Proto-Sinaitic script, a precursor to modern Hebrew. On my most recent trip, the renounced biblical archeologist Eli Shukron identified what he said appears to be very ancient primitive forms of the Hebrew letters on one of the petroglyph murals. No doubt, in the days ahead, many more such letters will be discovered and analyzed.

MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA



Paleo Aleph found at the base of Jebel al-Lawz



The author and the archeologist Eli Shukron at the base of Jebel al-Lawz

THE ROCKS CRY OUT



Petroglyphs close to the base of the mountain



Petroglyphs north of the mountain

SANDAL PETROGLYPHS

Among the petroglyphs around the mountain, there are numerous carvings of footprints, or to be more precise, sandal prints. During our visit, my team and I photographed several of these. What makes these unique and noteworthy is the fact that beyond being mere carvings of footprints, they are clearly intended to convey the appearance of a sandal, featuring lines portraying both thongs and straps. Further, the sandals all have three hash lines next to them, representing a primitive *kaph*. The *kaph* is a letter that evolved from the pictograph of the cup of a hand. It could also be used to refer to the sole of the foot.⁶ By placing the *kaph* next to each sandal image, the makers of these petroglyphs were specifically conveying the idea that the soles of their feet had been there. It's especially fascinating when one looks at the specific phrase that God spoke to the Israelites: "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours" (Deut. 11:24). Further, such a central part of the exodus account was the miraculous preservation of the Israelites sandals: "I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot" (Deut. 29:5). This is not to infer that the Israelites are entitled to possess this part of Saudi Arabia, as the Lord specifically defined the promised land with its southern border ending at the gulf of Aqaba. It is absolutely fascinating however, that these images which bear such strong connections to the language of Deuteronomy would be found so abundantly around the mountain and throughout the region.

THE ROCKS CRY OUT



Petroglyphs of sandals north of the mountain close to the Split Rock



Petroglyphs of sandals with the kaph north of the mountain close to the Split Rock

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are several other important sites around the mountain that we haven't discussed here. Our purpose was not to catalogue every important potential site around Jebel al-Lawz, but to simply highlight some of the more important and well-known sites that may validate its legitimacy as Mount Sinai. As we have seen, indeed the rocks around Jebel al-Lawz are crying out. When these various sites are considered alongside all of

the other information that we've seen so far, they are a kind of cherry on top of the larger case. As we have seen through the past five chapters, issue after issue, point by point, all evidence seems to point to this mountain as the genuine mountain of God. One of the most important locations within the larger redemptive narrative, largely forgotten until recent decades, may very reasonably be confirmed. From an archeological and historical perspective, this is truly one of the biggest stories of this century. Of course, while this has been believed in various circles for some time now, the abundance of skepticism, criticism, and outright dismissal combined with its inaccessibility has caused the whole subject to remain in relative obscurity. This period of being closed off, however has finally come to an end.

EPILOGUE

APPROACHING THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

My introduction to Jebel al-Lawz began when I was approached with various pictures of the mountain and surrounding sites. This led me to watch a few videos. They captured my interest, but I was very hesitant to form any strong opinions until I had more thoroughly examined the topic. My investigation quickly led me to a whole array of articles, papers, and books that were highly critical of this particular mountain as the real Mount Sinai. Among these critics, the most openly adversarial was Gordon Franz. Franz is a Bible teacher and a prolific writer with a particular interest in biblical archeology. Franz minces no words in categorizing the al-Lawz theory as, “cracked pot archaeology.” According to Franz, it is a view that “like cracked pots, hold no water!”¹ On more than one occasion, Franz has very dogmatically declared, “there is no credible historical, geographical, archaeological or Biblical evidence to support the thesis that Mt. Sinai is at Jebel al-Lawz in Saudi Arabia.”²

Beyond simply belittling the theory, however, many of these

critiques actually direct much energy toward denigrating the messengers who have sought to bring attention to this mountain. James K. Hoffmeier, a professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern Archeology, denounced the view as, “the fanciful theories of these dilettantes.”³ Franz purposefully refers to those who support the Lawz theory as “our treasure hunters.”⁴ While Franz has written many fantastic articles related to the subject of biblical archeology, his unhealthy fixation on personally discrediting individuals who espouse the al-Lawz-as-Sinai theory has tainted the larger discussion of this topic within the academic community. I initially found and read Franz’s articles because of my sincere desire to learn the truth. I was searching for fair and honest treatments of the strengths and weaknesses of the case. Instead, I was subjected to agenda-driven polemics and personal attacks thinly disguised as academic inquiry. Those sincerely seeking the truth deserve better than this. Such negative treatments, especially when they are disguised as academic articles, do great disservice to the truth.

Admittedly, after I read through several of Franz’s critical articles, I certainly was more cautious about the view that Jebel al-Lawz being Mount Sinai. The last thing I would want to do is destroy my credibility as a teacher by promoting, “fanciful theories” and “cracked pot” ideas. Then I remembered the wisdom of Solomon: “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him” (Prov. 18:17), and “He who gives a [final] answer before he hears [both sides], it is folly and shame to him” (Prov. 18:13). And so I continued my investigation.

What I soon found was that there are actually quite a few academics and specialists who, in varying degrees, affirm Jebel

al-Lawz as the most likely location of the real Mount Sinai.

In fact, according to Frank Moore Cross, professor emeritus from Harvard University, “A great many scholars are now coming around to the notion that Sinai is in fact in northern Arabia.”⁵ I found the work of Dr. Allen Kerkeslager, who we’ve cited above, to be very helpful. After weighing the evidence Kerkeslager said, “Jabal Al Lawz [is] the most convincing option for identifying the Mt. Sinai of biblical tradition.”⁶ The late Dr. Roy E. Knuteson, biblical archaeology adviser and a regular contributor to Dallas Theological Seminary’s theological journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*, said, “The visible evidence is quite overwhelming that the location of the true Mount Sinai has been discovered in the ancient land of Midian.”⁷ In a video promotion for the film, *The Search for the Real Mt. Sinai* (1998), Hershel Shanks, editor for *Biblical Archaeology Review*, said, “Jabal al-Lawz is the most likely site for Mount Sinai.” I was pleased to discover the work of Charles Whittaker, Ph.D., whose dissertation presents the case for Jebel al-Lawz as being “the best candidate for Mount Sinai/Horeb.” In 2006, Dr. Michael Heiser commented on his own website that, “I do think a good case can be made for Jebel el-Lawz as the location of Mount Sinai (though I am not married to it).”⁸ On my last visit with Eli Shukron, he said that of all of the various candidates for Mount Sinai, Jebel al-Lawz is the best of all candidates. Thus, despite the efforts of Franz and other critics, this particular theory, rather than being the exclusive purview of “dilettantes,” “cracked pots,” or six mere “American treasure hunters,”⁹ Jebel al-Lawz actually has a wide range of growing support from many reputable voices within the academic community.

CONCLUSION

For the first time in modern history, Jebel al-Lawz has now been opened to the world. If the Saudi plan to build the city-state of Neom is successful, the entire region will become a hotspot for tourism.



Map 16: The City of Neom and Jebel al-Lawz

Even if one disagrees with the view that al-Lawz is Mount Sinai—and I'm under no illusion that everyone will be convinced—those with integrity must acknowledge it as the most likely location of Mount Sinai. The case for Jebel al-Lawz as the true Mountain of God is far more supportable than any of the other candidates. It is not surprising that this mountain has been attacked far more than any others. It is important that archeologists, academics, and commentators move beyond the very uncharitable spirit that has too often characterized the discussion of this mountain over the past few decades. The mere potential of what this mountain represents within biblical

history is far too important to allow personal trivialities to detract from the more serious examination that it deserves. As we move forward into the next era of the exploration of Jebel al-Lawz, as the attention of the world is turned to this mountain, I pray that academics and religious leaders alike will not only represent their communities well, but more importantly, that we will speak in a way that remembers the solemnity and weight of the topic that we are discussing. While the mountain is no longer that which cannot be touched, the testimony that it preserves belongs to God. He is the one who appeared there in fire, thick smoke, and clouds, and who will indeed come once again on the clouds, *“from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire”* (2 Thess. 1:7) *“to judge the living and the dead.”* (2 Tim. 4:1).

APPENDIX

RESPONDING TO
MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTIONS
AGAINST JEBEL AL-LAWZ

In this appendix, we will address some miscellaneous common objections to Jebel al-Lawz being Mount Sinai. As we discussed in the Introduction, some critics seem rather obsessed with debunking this particular theory above any other. As such, some have made efforts to debunk nearly every facet of the Jebel al-Lawz theory. Rather than allow the discussion to get bogged down by overly critical or superfluous arguments, however, here we will simply address several of the more common “problems” that are often set forth against the Jebel al-Lawz-as-Sinai theory.

“MY LAND”

One common argument that seems to pop up in nearly every critique of the Jebel al-Lawz theory concerns two verses: one in Exodus and one in Numbers. After Jethro visited with Moses and the Israelites, we read, “Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land” (Ex. 18:27).

In Numbers, Moses asks Hobab, his brother-in-law, to guide them in the desert. Hobab refuses and answers: "I will not come, but rather will go to my own land and relatives" (Num. 10:30). The argument is that since Jethro departed from Mount Sinai back to "his own land," the mountain could not have been in "the land of Midian." The same is said concerning Hobab. As Franz argues, "If Moses is consistent with his use of the word [for land], and I think he is, the context suggests Jethro returned to the country of Midian." This argument is answered easily enough. First, it must be pointed out that by making this objection, traditionalists effectively shoot themselves in the foot. If one believes, for example, the traditional location of Mount Sinai, then they are claiming that Jethro, now in his eighties, was about to embark on a 225-mile journey through multiple harsh deserts and foreign lands to go back home. Franz, who holds that Mount Sinai is Jebel Sin Bishar, a mountain just to the east of the Gulf of Suez, is in effect making the claim that Jethro was about to embark on a journey of over three hundred miles. Nothing in the text indicates that such a difficult trip was about to be undertaken.

The simplest answer to this objection is that the word used here for land (Hebrew: *erets*) has a fairly wide range of possible meanings. *The New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* lists the various ways *erets* is translated in the NASB:

common (1), countries (15), countries and their lands (1), country (44), countryside (1), distance (3), dust (1), earth (655), earth the ground (1), earth's (1), fail (1), floor (1), ground (119), land(1581), lands (57), lands have their land

(2), open (1), other* (2), piece (1), plateau (1), region (1), territories (1), wild (1), world (3).¹

In looking at the wide range of meanings for *erets*, we see there is nothing in the text indicating that Sinai was not in the land of Midian. Nothing in the text requires Jethro to have been in one geopolitically defined “country” and about to depart to another. They were in Midianite territory at Mount Sinai and then Jethro went back to his home, which was fifteen to thirty miles away. Nothing in the text indicates that Jethro was about to travel to some far-distant land or one defined as being controlled by a different ethnic or political group. The claim that this *proves* that they were outside the land of Midian is simply without merit.

THE ITINERARY

The itinerary of the exodus—the route the Israelites took to the sea crossing, as well as the many specific locations they stopped or stayed at on the other side—are recorded in both Exodus and Numbers. Among all of the various candidates for Mount Sinai, scholars work diligently to reconstruct an itinerary that will validate their favored mountain. Thus, to defend any particular mountain as a valid candidate within the academic community, one must be able to look not merely to the mountain itself but also to the surrounding regions to see if they can be made to align with the biblical narrative. Can the areas around the mountain accommodate such a large number of people? Are the distances between one encampment and the next realistic in terms of how far a large group of people are able to travel within a certain timeframe? Is there any archeological evidence

that a large group of people were ever there? These are the kinds of questions that scholars ask when assessing any of the various candidates. Such discussions literally fill volumes.

As such, some have argued that the itinerary as described in both Exodus and Numbers cannot be reconciled with the al-Lawz-as-Sinai view. In response, it must be said that first, validating an itinerary is a challenge for each of the various candidates out there. It is by no means a unique objection for Jebel al-Lawz. Second, an itinerary supporting al-Lawz as Mount Sinai is by no means more complicated than any other candidate. Further, none of those who make such charges against the al-Lawz theory has ever even explored or been to the region, making such objections questionable at best. Third, it must be said that among all of the various issues related to the study of the exodus, the itinerary is the most complicated. Instead of identifying one location, we are now trying to validate numerous locations. There is a wide range of complex interrelated issues, from debates concerning how many actual Israelites were present for the exodus, to dating the exodus, to archeology, to seeming contradictions in different accounts, to linguistic textual matters. In the end, as Professor Frank Cross has said: "At best we can only speculate. A mountain of paper has been expended in attempting to locate the stations of the exodus in Numbers 33. There are almost as many views as there are scholars."² So by no means is this objection one that sets al-Lawz apart as more objectionable than any other candidate. While working through an itinerary for Jebel al-Lawz is no doubt a matter that will be worked through by scholars in the days ahead, as we have shown, the evidence that al-Lawz is Sinai is solid enough that we need not let this be viewed as an objection that represents any real problem.

CROSSING THE SINAI PENINSULA

Another argument related to the itinerary concerns the distance and the amount of time that it would have taken the Israelites to cross the Sinai Peninsula. Critics say that it was too far for such a large group to traverse in such a short amount of time. In order to assess this objection, we need to first determine how much time the exodus actually took. How much time did it take the Israelites to cross the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt to the Red Sea? Thankfully, the Lord made sure that the timing of their departure was clearly recorded for future generations. Because the exit from Egypt took place in conjunction with the feast of Passover, we know the exact day of the month in which the exodus took place. Passover was to take place in the month of Nissan, the first month of the year as instituted by the Lord when He said to Moses and Aaron “this month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you” (Ex. 12:1-2). On the tenth day of Nissan, all of the households among the Israelites were to take an unblemished lamb and keep it until the fourteenth day “of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (Ex. 12:6-8)

The Passover feast was to specifically be eaten while dressed in a way that they were ready to flee at any moment. This was to be the night that the Lord was going to kill the firstborn children of the Egyptians, after which the Israelites would flee. It is for this reason that *haste* is the central theme of the Passover feast.

After the firstborn throughout the land were killed at midnight, Pharaoh called Moses and Arron and asked them to take the Israelites and leave:

Now it came about at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, “Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said. Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also.” The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, “We will all be dead.” (Exodus 12:29-33)

Thus, we know that the exodus began on the fifteenth day of Nissan, the first month of the biblical year. The journey out of Egypt began specifically at a place called Succoth (v. 37).

Next, we look to the other end of the exodus. In chapter 15, we’re informed that after they crossed the Red Sea, they went into the wilderness of Shur for three days (v. 22). The next verse says they arrived at Marah after which: “Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters. Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their

departure from the land of Egypt” (15:27-16:1). If we allow for the Israelites to have been at Marah for one or two days and add the three days that it took to get to Elim, then we are left with twenty-five days to cross from Succoth to the Red Sea. The distance is roughly 230 miles. Thus, they would have had to travel about ten miles per day. Is this possible? Let’s consider a couple examples from history. Sometime around the middle of the fifteenth century BC, the sixth pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Thutmose III, and his army traveled an average of fourteen miles per day to get to Megiddo, as recorded by his scribe.³ The army consisted of a large part infantry that marched on foot.⁴ Elsewhere, Scripture records that Ezra took roughly four months to get to Jerusalem from Babylon (Ezra 7:1, 8-9). This route is well known and is approximately nine hundred miles. Assuming Ezra did not travel on the Sabbath, it seems he traveled an average of ten miles per day. Because the Israelites had animals, children, and even the elderly, it is argued that they would have been much slower than either Thutmose’s infantry or Ezra. What such objections do not take into consideration is the fact that the Israelites were essentially fleeing for their lives. It assumes that the people were traveling at normal speeds. The language within the Bible however repeatedly emphasizes that this was anything but a normal journey; it was carried out in a particularly speedy manner with much divine assistance. First, Scripture describes their departure as being in haste, (see Ex. 12:11, 33). Then as they left, Scripture explains that “the Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night” (Ex 13:21). The very purpose of the pillar of cloud and fire was to give them

shade during the day and light to travel at night. Further, the Lord reminds the Israelites concerning his divine assistance and speed at which they were able to travel: “You yourselves have seen... how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself” (Ex 19:4). Like the scene in the *Hobbit* where the giant eagles swoop down to deliver Bilbo and his friends from the hand of the perusing orcs, so also is the Lord portrayed as a mother eagle, who swooped down to rescue her young from the hand of the Egyptians. The analogy is intended to convey both speed and divine assistance. As we have shown above, the Israelites only needed to travel about ten miles a day. This is far less than the twelve to fifteen miles per day that Thutmose III and his army traveled. It is about the same speed that Ezra was able to maintain for a journey that was over three times as long. What then is the problem? The claim that this was too far of a distance to travel or that they did not have enough time is simply not a legitimate objection.

It is also important to point out the double standard of this argument. On one hand critics argue that 250 miles was much too far of a distance for the Israelites to travel. Then they turn around and argue that when Moses was in Midian, it would have been no problem for him to graze Jethro’s flocks and return, making a 450-mile round trip from Midian to the southern Sinai. The same walk that they claim is far too rugged and impossible even in a flight for their lives suddenly becomes an easy, even casual stroll to graze the sheep. Critics argue out of both sides of the mouth here.

JEBEL SIN BISHAR

A final point regarding the Israelites speed and distance traveled

needs to be made concerning the theory of Menashe Har-El, Israeli archeologist and professor. Har-El believes that the real Mount Sinai is a mountain called Jebel Sin Bishar, a mountain only a dozen or so miles from the northern tip of the Suez Canal. Franz also subscribes to this view. Because it is such a minority perspective however, we have not discussed it until now. This view, it must be noted, has precisely the opposite problem that Jebel al-Lawz is argued to have. Instead of trying to account for such a long journey, as in the case of Lawz, supporters of the Sin Bishar theory must explain why it took the Israelites so long to make such a short journey. Jebel Sin Bishar is only around thirty miles or so from where Har-El places the sea crossing. If this is the case, then we are expected to believe that it took the Israelites about a month to travel a mere thirty miles. This would mean they moved at a snail's pace of about one mile a day. Such a claim is actually contradictory to what the Bible describes when it says that the Israelites went in such haste and required such a great display of divine assistance to reach the mountain. A mile a day is certainly not something that would even require the divine covering of the pillar of cloud and fire, neither would it justify using the language of having been carried by the Lord "as on eagles wings."

THE PILLARS

Another objection concerns the "pillars" that have been found beside the altar at the base of the mountain. These have been consistently disregarded as either Nabatean or Roman era pillars. The objections to these claims are two-fold. First, they say that the Jews were prohibited from using tools to cut stone. Second, the critics claim that the Hebrew word *matstsebah*

used in Scripture when the Lord commanded Moses to set up twelve pillars (see Ex. 24:4) always refers to uncut standing stones and never hewn, smooth, or round stones.⁵ For example, David Rohl says,

The twelve pillars' (Hebrew *massebah*) found by Wyatt at the foot of Gebel el-Lawz... are of 'hewn stone,' chiseled and smoothed. This goes against Mosaic law and earlier patriarchal custom [Genesis 28:18, 31:45 & 35:14] which requires *massebah* and altars (Hebrew *mizbeah*) to be natural stones untouched by chisel or the strike of a hammer.⁶

Neither objection is correct. The prohibition against using tools only pertains to altars (Hebrew: *mizbeah*): "If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it" (Ex 20:25). It did not apply to pillars, columns, or any other kind of normal architecture. Second, *matstsebah* refers to any number of things, such as a rock, pillar, or statue that is set upright. It may often describe a simple standing memorial stone, though it is also used of carved idols or statues (see 2 Kings 3:2, 10:26, 18:4, Micah 5:13; Hos. 10:1), as well as other architectural garrisons or pillars (see Ez. 26:11). The idea that *matstsebah* is used of a statue or idol (which are always carved in some way or another) but could never be used of a round column is simply nonsense. There is also no reason to believe that the Israelites wouldn't have been able to create hewn rounded pillars. When I examined the columns, although they had been hewn into a round form, they were actually quite crude. The Israelites had just left Egypt where smooth architectural and incredibly detailed sacred

columns and pillars were abundant. There is no legitimate basis to argue that the Israelites wouldn't have or couldn't have created such pillars.

JETHRO'S CAVES

Another objection concerns the possibility that “Jethro’s Caves” have any connection to Jethro or the ancient Midianites. While we cannot establish with certainty that Jethro and Moses lived in these particular caves, we may very reasonably assert its likelihood. As we referenced in chapter 5, the ninth-century Arab geographer al-Himyari, for example, spoke of the caves and some nearby mounds as being the ruins of the homes originally belonging to Jethro and the Midianites.⁷ Despite the traditions of the locals and the opinions of the Saudi archeologists, Gordon Franz claims to know better, dogmatically asserting that these caves can have nothing whatsoever to do with Moses or Jethro. “The so-called Cave of Moses” Franz says, “were not hewn until long after Moses lived.”⁸ How can Franz make such assertions? In discounting any potential biblical significance to these caves, Franz doesn’t even so much as acknowledge the ancient Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions that connect al-Bad to Mount Sinai, Moses, and Jethro. Likewise, Franz doesn’t address the topographical realities. (We’ve already established that the oasis of al-Bad is by far the most natural and thus best candidate to have been the heartland of ancient Midian.) So also does Franz disregard the local tradition which gives the name, *Muhgair Shuaib* (Jethro’s Caves) to the site. Again, this title has been used since at least the Islamic era. The Saudi archeological authorities didn’t fence off the area because they were influenced by Ron Wyatt or some modern explorer. Quite to the contrary, the

traditions that identify this very city to be the ancient home of Jethro are older than the Nabatean Kingdom itself! Because the caves have Nabatean inscriptions, Franz argues they can be no older than the Nabateans. But the date of the inscriptions do not necessarily correlate with the date that the caves were originally carved. As we said above, Nabatean Arabs assumed these territories centuries after the Midianites had long been firmly established there. The fact that I live in my house now in no way proves that I am the original owner. Archeologists widely acknowledge that Petra, the ancient capital of Nabatea, was built upon the previously existing Edomite capital city of Sela.⁹ Assuming previously established cities seems to have been standard practice for the Nabateans. What basis then does Franz have to claim they didn't do the same in al-Bad where Jethro and Moses lived long before them?¹⁰ What evidence is there to claim that these caves could not be related in any way to Jethro, Moses, or the Midianites? There is none. Even the archeologists who conducted and wrote the Al-Bid survey acknowledge that, "it may be possible that the tombs were built by the Arabs who lived in the oasis before the Nabateans."¹¹ Despite Franz's dogmatic stance on this matter, his arguments simply lack any logical or historical basis.

THE YAHWEH STONE

Another fascinating artifact worthy of our consideration is votive stone possessed by Dr. Sung Hak Kim, now kept in the History of Christianity Museum in Seoul, South Korea. The stone has come to be referred to as the Yahweh stone. This is a small carved stone given to Dr. Kim as a gift by the former governor of Mecca. The stone is of a figure of a face with four characters,

two on the front and two on the back. The letters are from the southern Thamudic alphabet, used in the fourteenth century BC. The four characters form the tetragrammaton, or the name of God: YHWH. If the Yahweh stone is genuine, then it is a powerful validation that ancient Israelites were living in this region, perhaps during the period of the exodus.

Not surprisingly, the stone stirred quite a bit of controversy when it was first announced, and a few skeptics made efforts to discredit it.¹² In 2009, Dr. Michael Heiser, referred to the Yahweh stone as, “the latest archaeo-fiasco” in which the, “Jebel el-Lawz view is sullied once more by Christian archaeological amateurism and perhaps fakery.”¹³ While I am by no means an expert, in my assessment, however, all of the objections that have been brought forward have been answered quite satisfactorily.

On the back of the Yahweh stone are the two letters *YH*, or “Yah”—the common shorthand for the name of God, used throughout the Bible forty-nine times (cf., Ex. 15:2; 17:16; Ps. 68:4, 18; 89:8; 94:7, 12; 102:18). On the face side of the stone are the letters, *WH*, which completes the name of God: YHWH. The controversy arises because the letters on the back are written from right to left, but the letters on the front are written from left to right. Franz has thus claimed that the spelling is simply incorrect. The problem with this particular objection is that this characteristic is actually quite common of this kind of script from this period. Sometimes a word or phrase would be written from left to right. Other times it would be written in just the opposite direction, or even from top to bottom, or any combination of the above. Sometimes this is called “boustrophedon,” which comes from the Greek “as an ox plows,” referring to

the manner in which an ox plows a line of soil and then turns around and plows another row in the opposite direction. Thus, it is not uncommon for this kind of script to be written in a zig zag pattern down a page, with words changing direction after each line. It is particularly understandable that the inscriber would have reversed directions having attempted to write a four-letter word on two sides of the same stone. Franz's objection here is simply not valid.

It is important to note that critics of the stone do not deny that the letters on the stone are in fact Y-H-W-H. Whereas some say the word on the stone is actually YH and HW or WH and HY, they're unable to offer any suggestion as to what this means. In other words, they claim the stone features a word that doesn't even exist.

Michael C. A. Macdonald, a research associate of the Khalili Research Centre at the University of Oxford University, also a vocal critic of the Yahweh stone, made another rather embarrassing objection. According to Macdonald, because the letter *H* on the stone has a dot under it, this changes the meaning. As Dr. Miles Jones points out, however, the dot is merely a natural pit in the stone, having nothing to do with the carved letters. Jones's remarks:

Markings like the dot under the H were not used until more than a millennia later, long after these letters were no longer used. These characters are the oldest variety of the south Thamudic alphabet from the 14th century BC, no dots were used during that period.¹⁴

It should also be noted that whereas both Franz and Macdonald make their objections without having ever seen the stone, Dr. Jones did actually personally handle and examine it. While further tests might be in order, for now, there aren't any truly substantial reasons to doubt the potential legitimacy of this artifact.



Yahweh Stone (Photograph by Dr. Sung Hak Kim. Used by permission.)

THE MENORAH

Another potentially important find among the petroglyphs of the region is what certainly appears to be a menorah. The seven branched menorah lampstand is the most ancient symbol of Israel. This particular petroglyph of the menorah was found in 2006, by Dr. Sung Hak Kim, who as we previously mentioned, worked as a private physician to the governor of Mecca. Although the menorah was not found at the actual base of the mountain, it was found in the nearby Tabuk region, and its significance cannot be ignored. First, it seems clear that it is indeed a menorah. A comparison to the menorah in the Arch of Titus, which depicts the Roman soldiers carrying off the temple treasures from Jerusalem in AD 70, shows it to be a near perfect match. Macdonald has claimed, “The menorah is, in fact, nothing but the combination of the two Hismaic letters.”¹⁵ He specifically claims the menorah is comprised of the *W* and the *DH* of a first-century Arabian script known as Hismaic. The problem with Macdonald’s claim is that the *DH* letter in the Hismaic script has four or as many as five prongs, and most often has a curved tail. What is seen on the rock has seven very neatly defined branches with a very straight tail. If it is a Hismaic *DH*, it is most certainly an anomaly with multiple characteristics different from most other *DH*s. I contacted Mr. Macdonald and asked him about this discrepancy. His response was quite rude: “Mr. Richardson,” he said, “I am getting very tired of this constant disbelief in clear facts. So, I shall not be answering any more of these e-mails.” This was the first time I had ever e-mailed him. Personally, I receive a tremendous number of e-mails and questions. Because of time constraints, I am generally very brief, but I genuinely strive not to respond

in an impolite manner. Macdonald's obvious frustration with my simple question makes me genuinely suspect that he is aware that this image is not what he claims it to be.

In summary, the image certainly appears to be a menorah, and may very well be a clear archeological remnant of Israelites having lived in that region. Precisely when the letters were carved is another matter of debate among scholars. As we saw previously, although Macdonald dates the petroglyphs to sometime close to the first century, many other scholars, such as those who conducted the Al-Bid survey date them to the middle or late Bronze Age, the time of the exodus.



Menorah petroglyph (Photograph by Dr. Sung Hak Kim. Used by permission.)



Hismaic dhs

NOTES

1: THE TRADITIONAL SITE OF MOUNT SINAI

1. Robin Ngo, "Searching for Biblical Mt. Sinai: The case for Har Karkom in the Negev and the case for Saudi Arabia," *Bible History Daily*, March 18, 2018. Sharon Rusten with E. Michael, *The Complete Book of When & Where in the Bible and throughout History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 120.
2. Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1845), 139–151.
3. Daniel F. Caner, contributors Sebastian Brock, Richard M. Price, Kevin van Bladel, *History and Hagiography from Late Antique Sinai*, (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2010), 17 n67.
4. Lina Eckenstein, *A History of Sinai* (Ithica: Cornell University, 1891), 99.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Daniel F. Caner, contributors Sebastian Brock, Richard M. Price, Kevin van Bladel, *History and Hagiography from Late Antique Sinai*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 232.
8. *Ibid.*, 221–231.
9. Lina Eckenstein, *A History of Sinai* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1891), 101.

11. Daniel F. Caner, contributors Sebastian Brock, Richard M. Price, Kevin van Bladel, *History and Hagiography from Late Antique Sinai*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 17n68.
12. Edward Robinson and E. Smith, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, and in the Adjacent Regions: A Journal of Travels in the Year 1838*, vol. 1 (Boston; London: Crocker and Brewster; John Murray, 1856), 124–125.
13. Part I: “Israelite Origins,” *Bible Review* 8.4 (1992): 23–26, 28, 30–32, 61–62.
14. As quoted by Hershel Shanks, during a presentation at the Colloquium on Mount Sinai—Mount Karkoum, May 12, 2013, Mitzpe Ramon, Israel.
15. In his work, “Against Apion,” Josephus discusses the claims of an Egyptian named Apion. Apion was an Egyptian polemicist who argued against the biblical story of the Jews. Apion claimed that Mount Sinai, “lay between Egypt and Arabia.” Josephus however, brushes aside Apion’s claims, saying, “But then, how was it possible for them to tarry forty days in a desert place where there was no water, and at the same time to pass all over the country between that and Judea in the six days?” (Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 795. Apion had many strange ideas. For example, he claimed the Jews were actually Egyptians, and the reason for the Sabbath was due to some kind of disease or hernia which all of the Jewish men had “in their groins” that forced them to rest every several days. Josephus concludes his assessment of Apion’s claims by saying, “But why should we wonder at the lies he tells us about our forefathers, when he affirms them to be of Egyptian original, when he lies also about himself?” So while Apion does vaguely place Mount Sinai somewhere between Egypt and Arabia, and thus may have placed Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula, he has no specific mountain in mind, and thus cannot be cited as an early support of the tradition site.

2: THE MODERN SEARCH FOR THE REAL MOUNT SINAI

1. Some have charged that Williams and Cornuke never actually visited the mountain.
2. This is contradicted by the actual Saudi Arabian–published survey which discusses Cornuke and Williams visit to the mountain, their investigations there, and being expelled from the Kingdom. Al-Ansary, Abdul-Rahman and Majeed Khan et al., *Al-Bid’ : History and Archaeology* (Saudi Arabia Ministries of Education, Antiquities & Museums, 2002), 83. Bob Cornuke, *In Search of the The Mountain of God: The Discovery of the Real Mount Sinai* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000); Larry Williams, *The Mountain of Moses: The Discovery of Mount Sinai* (New York: Winwood Press, 1990).

3: LOSING THE YAMSUPH

1. Ralph L. Smith, "Red Sea (Reed Sea)," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1369.
2. Snaith, N. H. "רֹדַן: The Sea of Reeds: The Red Sea." *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1965, pp. 395–398. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1516788.
3. James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.
4. Summaries of the Reed Sea hypothesis may be found in: J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3 ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 122-23; J. Finegan, *Let My People Go* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 77-89; J. L. Mihelic, "Red Sea," IDB, 4.19-21; C. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 60-62; "Exodus, Route of," IDB, 2.197-99.
5. Despite abundant claims to the contrary, reeds do indeed grow along the edges of parts of the Gulf of Aqaba as well.
6. For a fairly extensive linguistic defense of the Reed Sea Hypothesis, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75-110.
7. For a linguistic refutation of the Reed Sea Hypothesis, see W. Ward, "The Semitic Biconsonantal Root SP and the Common Origin of Egyptian DWF and Hebrew SÛP 'Marsh-(Plant)," VT 24 (1974) 339-49; Glen A. Fritz, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus: A Modern Geographical Analysis*, second edition (San Antonio: GeoTech, 2016).
8. B. F. Batto, "The Reed Sea: Resquiescat in Pace," JBL 102 (1983): 27–35.
9. For the sake of brevity and in order not to lose the reader "amidst the reeds," we've sought to simplify the arguments here and as a result will no doubt become the target of more technical criticisms. I would direct those inclined to more thoroughly review the arguments to Fritz's excellent and very thorough volume, listed below.
10. Glen A. Fritz, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus: A Modern Geographical Analysis*, second edition (San Antonio: GeoTech, 2016), 183.
11. B. F. Batto, "The Reed Sea: Resquiescat in Pace," JBL 102 (1983): 27–35; Glen A. Fritz, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus*; See also the discussion in Ralph L. Smith, "Red Sea (Reed Sea)," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1369.
12. Glen A. Fritz, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus*, 164.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 184-185.
15. B. F. Batto, "The Reed Sea: Resquiescat in Pace," JBL 102 (1983): 31.

4: THE EXODUS SEA CROSSING

1. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, vol. 2, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 342.
2. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 78.
3. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: The New American Commentary, vol. 2* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 353.
4. Ibid.
5. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*, 79.
6. Reproduced from, "Or HaChaim, The Torah: With Or Hachaim's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated, Shemos / Exodus, Volume 3" by Or HaChaim, Editors, Rabbi Nosson Scheman, Rabbi Meir Zotowitz, (ArtScroll Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn 2016), 455, with permission of the copyright holders, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Ltd.
7. J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 166.
8. Hoffmeier seems to be aware that this verse causes a huge exegetical problem for his view. He states: "There is no doubt I Kings 9:26 is referring to the Gulf of Aqaba and that *yām sūp* is the name used for the northwestern branch of the Red Sea in the days of Solomon (or the DtrH). Why *yām sūp* is used is uncertain." James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2005), 134.
9. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*), 134.
10. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 412.
11. For other examples that place the *Yam Suph* at the Gulf of Aqaba, see Numbers 14:25; Deuteronomy 1:40; 2:1; and Judges 11:16.
12. Stuart, *Exodus*, 254.
13. Ibid.
14. Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1980), 75.
15. Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*,
16. 74. (*Antiquities of the Jews*, bk. 2, chapt. 15, sec. 1.) Josephus and Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*), 71. (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 12:264-267.)

17. “The limestone hills of Jebel Ataqa rise abruptly from the sea, trending north-west and reaching a height of 2,857 feet 10 miles west of Suez.” *Western Arabia and the Red Sea*, (London: Kegan Paul Limited Publishing, 2005), 85.
18. Traditionalists sometimes point out that Josephus also claimed that the journey out of Egypt to the *Yam Suph* only took three days so Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 74. (*Antiquities of the Jews*, bk. 2, chapt. 15, sec. 1.) Josephus makes this error by wrongly assuming that each of the Israelites encampments on their way to the sea, at Succoth and Ethan, equal two nights and three days of travel. This does not, however, do away with the fact that Josephus clearly placed the sea crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba and not the marshes north of the Suez. His description in *Antiquities of the Jews*, which speaks of impassably high mountains on both sides of the sea crossing, simply does not describe any place north of the Suez.
19. R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers: The New American Commentary*, vol. 3B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 536.
20. Faced with the glaring problem of a crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba, traditionalists are forced to choose select comments from the various Greco-Roman geographers to push the borders of Egypt drastically to the west. Gordon Franz goes so far as to claim, “The Land of Goshen was the eastern limits of Egypt.” (Gordon Franz, “Mt. Sinai is Not at Jebel al-Lawz in Saudi Arabia,” paper presented at the annual Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) & Near East Archaeology Society (NEAS) meeting, March 14, 2002.) Goshen was located on the eastern branch of the Nile Delta. As we have seen, however, such a claim collides with the testimony of Scripture. One may either accept the biblical definitions regarding Egypt’s ancient borders and recognize the crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba, or they must contradict the Bible. The Bible affords us no other option.

5: MOUNT SINAI IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN

1. Barry Beitzel, author and editor of *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*, for example, says, “One cannot assert that the nomadic Midianites, or their sub-tribe, the Kenites (Judg. 1:16; 4:11) were confined exclusively to only one region.” Again, Beitzel misses the point entirely. The argument is not that the Midianite people were confined only to one location throughout biblical history, rather it is that during the Exodus period there was a known, identifiable principal homeland of the Midianites that the Bible speaks of (e.g., Ex. 2:15,16; 4:19; Hab. 3:7; Acts 7:29).
2. Part I: Israelite Origins,” *Bible Review* 8.4 (1992): 23–26, 28, 30–32, 61–62.

3. See for example: Barry J. Beitzel, *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009), 111; John B. Currid, David P. Barret, *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 78, 85, 97, 141; Carl G. Rasmussen, *The Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 293; Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Baker's Bible Atlas*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1979), 306; Merrill F. Unger, ed. R. K. Harrison, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, updated edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 852; Adrian Curtis, ed., *Oxford Bible Atlas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 66, 79, 100; J. J. Bimson, J. P. Kane, J. H. Paterson, D. J. Wiseman, D. R. W. Wood, eds., *The New Bible Atlas*, (Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 31; *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, Third Edition, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 28, 29, 31; Joseph Rhymer, ed., *The New Illustrated Atlas of the Bible*, (New York: Chartwell Books, 1988), 11; Yohanan Aharoni, Michael Avi-Yonah, eds., *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 40, 67; James Pritchard, Nick Page, eds., *HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History* (New York HarperCollins, 2008), 59; John D. Barry et al., eds., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 34; James Orr, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2049.
4. Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus*, *UBS Handbook Series*
5. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 53–54. David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (Minneapolis: Thinking Man Media, 2015), 388.
6. R. Dennis Cole, Numbers, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 3B, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 176–177.
7. Frank Moore Cross—An Interview, “Part I: Israelite Origins,” *Bible Review* 8.4 (1992): 23–26, 28, 30–32, 61–62.
8. Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, (John Hopkins University press, 1998), 66.
9. H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary: Deuteronomy* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 535.
10. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1996), 1008.
11. Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid' History and Archeology* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Ministry of Education, 2002), 15.
12. *Bible Review* 8:4, August 1992 Frank Moore Cross—An Interview Part I: Israelite Origins.
13. Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, London, 1998), 46.

14. Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid' History and Archeology* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education, 2002), 17-18, 29.
15. *Ibid.*, 29.
16. A. R. Millard, "Nabataeans," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 796.
17. Although commonly called "Midianite" pottery, this is actually a general term for pottery from this period and this region. While we cannot necessarily prove it belonged to the Midianites specifically, it is proof of a much older civilization that far predated the Nabatean Arabs. See, Allen Kerkeslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, (Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 2015), 157; cf. Par, Harden, Dayton, et al., "Preliminary Survey in N.W. Arabia, 1968 [part 2]," 33; Ingraham, Johnson, et al., (1981): 74-75 See also Bible Review 8:4, August 1992, Frank Moore Cross—An Interview, Part I: Israelite Origins, where Cross states, "In recent years there have been intensive surveys of the archaeological remains of Midian
18. . . . Most striking, perhaps, is the discovery of a developed civilization in Midian at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. At Qurayyah, a major fortified citadel has been discovered—a walled village and extensive irrigation systems. Characteristic pottery called Midianite ware—usually called Hejaz ware in Saudi journals—radiates out from the northern Hejaz into southern Transjordan and sites near Eilat, notably Timna."Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid' History and Archeology* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education, 2002), 33.

6: MOUNT SINAI IN JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

1. D. W. Gooding, "Text and Versions," *The New Bible Dictionary*. 1974 ed.
2. Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (West Yorkshire, UK: Emerald House Group, 1988), 414.
3. Trans, Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Greek an English*
4. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2018) See also, Ex 3:1; 4:19; 18:1; Number 22:4, 7; 25:15. See Numbers 22:4, 7; 25:15.
5. Allen Kerkeslager, "Mt. Sinai—in Arabia?" *Bible Review* 16.2 (2000): 32–39, 52.
6. Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 475 (Philo, Moses 1.169).
7. *Ibid.*
8. Josephus and Whiston, *The Works of Josephus* (Antiquities of the Jews 2.257), 70.)
9. *Ibid.*, 71.

10. Ibid., 84.
11. Eusebius, *Preparation Evangelica*, (*Preparation for the Gospel*) trans. E. H. Gifford, bk. 9, chapt. 29:1-3.
12. Origen, *Selecta Genesim* (Select Comments on Genesis) PG 12.120, as referenced in Allen Kerkeslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Holy Space," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1998), paperback edition 2015, 196.
13. Eusebius of Caesaria, *The Onomastikon*, (*Concerning the Place Names in Sacred Scripture*), trans. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, ed. Joan E. Taylor (Carta Jerusalem 2003), 70 (Section M, Genesis).
14. The translation by C. Umhau Wolf is available online here: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_onomasticon_02_trans.htm.
15. Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Onomastikon*, 95. It should be noted that the English translation by C. Umhau Wolf which is available online actually contains a typo, mistranslating Madiam as "Moab."
16. Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Onomastikon*, 70 (Section M, Genesis).
17. Allen Kerkeslager, "Mt. Sinai—in Arabia?" *Bible Review* 16.2 (2000): 32–39, 52.
18. Allen Kerkeslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1998), 199.
19. M.H. Shakir translation.
20. Tafsir Ibn Kathir on Quran 7:85 This translation has been modified by this author in order to make it more readable to a popular western audience.
21. Al-Ya'qubi, 1988, 341 as quoted in Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid' History and Archeology* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education, 2002), 17.
22. Al-Idrisi quoted in Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid' History and Archeology* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education, 2002), 17-18.

7: PAUL'S JOURNEY TO MOUNT SINAI

1. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 96.
2. Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 592.
3. Wright, N. T. "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah (Galatians 1:17)." *Journal of Biblical Literature*
4. 115, no. 4 (1996): 686. "Sinai is a mountain in Arabia." Kerkeslager, Allen. "Mt. Sinai—in Arabia?" *Bible Review* 16.2 (2000): 32–39, 52.

5. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982).
6. Wright, N. T. "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah (Galatians 1:17)." *Journal of Biblical Literature*
7. 115, no. 4 (1996): 683-92. Wilfred L. Knox, "Galatians," in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture: Including the Apocrypha*, ed. Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, and Alfred Guillaume, vol. 3 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), 531-532.
8. As Briggs states: "he [Paul] found himself in much confusion and that this time was required for intellectual and theological readjustment before he would be equipped for his great career as an apostle." Briggs, C. W. "The Apostle Paul in Arabia." *The Biblical World*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1913, pp. 255-259. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3142110.
9. Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, *Spurgeon Commentary Series*
10. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Ga 1:17. D. D. Whedon, *I. Corinthians—II. Timothy, vol. IV, A Popular Commentary on the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 215.

8: PAUL LOCATED MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA

1. Timothy George, Galatians, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 341. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Nebaioth, Negajoth," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1533.
3. *Ibid.*, 1258.
4. *Ibid.*, 643.
5. *Ibid.*, 2041.
6. Hoffmeier attempts to cast those who see Paul as pointing to northwest Saudi Arabia as foolishly basing their understanding on modern national boundaries: "Those who appeal to Galatians 4:25 err by interpreting this verse through the lens of twentieth century international borders, and not from a first century AD geopolitical map, which would have included Sinai within Arabia." James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, (Oxford, New York, 2005), 130-140. While it's true that some modern ears may hear "Arabia" and simply assume Paul was referring the modern "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," it is very misleading to pretend as though everyone follows such an anachronistic line of thinking. Yet as wrong as it is to impose a modern meaning onto the ancient term *Arabia*, Hoffmeier makes an equally faulty assumption when he claims that Paul would have been referring to the Sinai Peninsula. Hoffmeier is guilty not only of ignoring the clear context of Paul's epistle but also the biblical framework and Jewish traditions that informed his understanding.

7. Among those who have written much on this subject are James K. Hoffmeier, G.
8. I. Davies, David Rohl, and Gordon Franz. James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, (Oxford, New York, 2005), 130-140; David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (Thinking Man Media, Saint Louis Park, MN, 2015), 383-385; G.I. Davies, *The Way of the Wilderness, A Geographical Study of the Wilderness Itineraries in the Old Testament*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979), 30; Gordon Franz, *Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia? Bible and Spade*, fall 2000, <https://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/06/10/Is-Mount-Sinai-in-Saudi-Arabia.aspx#Article1>. James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, (Oxford, New York, 2005), 130-140; David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (Thinking Man Media, Saint Louis Park, MN, 2015), 383-385.
9. *Ibid.*, 130-140; *Ibid.*, 383-385.
10. David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (Rohl Saint Louis Park, MN, 2015), 384.
11. Gordon Franz, "Is Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia?" *Bible and Spade*, Fall 2000.
12. Gordon Franz, "Where Is Mount Sinai in Arabia (Galatians 4:25)?" *Bible and Space*, December 19, 2013, [https://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/12/19/Where-is-Mount-Sinai-in-Arabia-\(Galatians-425\).aspx#](https://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/12/19/Where-is-Mount-Sinai-in-Arabia-(Galatians-425).aspx#).
13. G.I. Davies, *The Way of the Wilderness, A Geographical Study of the Wilderness Itineraries in the Old Testament*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979), 30.
14. For further study on this topic, see Glen Fritz, *The Lost Red Sea of the Exodus: A Modern Geographical Analysis*, second edition, (San Antonio, Texas: GeoTech, 2016), 35-52.

9: JEBEL AL-LAWZ

1. Shanks, Hershel. "Where Is Mount Sinai?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 40.2 (2014): 31-41, 66.
2. Eusebius of Caesaria, *The Onomastikon, (Concerning the Place Names in Sacred Scripture)*, Trans G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, Ed. Joan E. Taylor, (Carta Jerusalem 2003), 70 (Section M, Genesis), 95.
3. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 379.
4. Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*
5. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 84. (Antiquities of the Jews 3.76). James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2005), 134.

10: THE ROCKS CRY OUT

1. Al-Ansary, Abdul-Rahman and Majeed Khan et al., *Al-Bid: History and Archaeology*
2. (Saudi Arabia Ministries of Education, Antiquities, & Museums, 2002), 65. Critics have argued that these pillars cannot be of Israelite origin. For my brief discussion of this claim, see my comments in the appendix.
3. Peter Der Manuelian, translated by James P. Allen, *The ancient Egyptian pyramid texts*
4. (BRILL, 2005), 432. Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*
5. : Updated Edition (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998). Miles R. Jones PH.D., *The Writing of God: Secret of the Real Mount Sinai*, third edition, (Kerrville, TX: Institute for Accelerated Learning, 2016).
6. James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 57; Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998).

EPILOGUE: APPROACHING THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

1. From Franz's personal website, Life and Land Seminars, we read: "The Cracked Pot Archaeology category contains articles about popular, contemporary archaeological theories and ideas that, like cracked pots, hold no water! These articles are a review, scholarly analysis and critiques of theories and ideas that have been presented on the Internet or popular books, movies, DVD's and videos." Under this category, we find the article, "Where is Mount Sinai in Arabia (Galatians 4:25)?" By Gordon Franz (retrieved May 24, 2018), which seeks to debunk the idea that the Arabia referenced by Paul the Apostle in Galatians 4:25 might have anything to do with modern day Saudi Arabia: <https://www.lifeandland.org/2013/12/where-is-mount-sinai-in-arabia-galatians-425/>.
2. Gordon Franz, "Mt. Sinai is Not at Jebel al-Lawz in Saudi Arabia," March 14, 2002.
3. James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2005), 133.
4. Gordon Franz, Is Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia? March 14, 2002, <http://www.ldolphin.org/franz-sinai.html>.
5. Frank Moore Cross, quoted in Associated Press article, "Memo to Egypt-bound Pope: 'Real' Mount Sinai May Be in Saudi Arabia," by Richard N. Osting, *Alton Telegraph*, February 19, 2000, <https://newspaperarchive.com/alton-telegraph-feb-19-2000-p-17/>.

NOTES

6. Allen Kerkeslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, (Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1998, paperback, 2015).
7. "Santa Cruz Sentinel Explorer Searches out Real Bible Locations," February 6, 1999, 35.
8. Dr. Michael Heiser, "Debunking of "Yahweh Inscription" (Allegedly) from Jebel al-Lawz," October 16, 2009, drmsb.com, <http://drmsb.com/debunking-of-yahweh-inscription-allegedly-from-jebel-al-lawz/>.
9. Gordon Franz, "Is Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia?" March 14, 2002, <http://www.ldolphin.org/franz-sinai.html>.

APPENDIX: RESPONDING TO MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTIONS AGAINST JEBEL AL-LAWZ

1. Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*
2. : Updated Edition (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998). Frank Moore Cross, "An Interview Part I: Israelite Origins," *Bible Review* 8:4, August 1992.
3. Faulkner, R. O. "The Battle of Megiddo." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 28 (1942): 2-15.
4. Ibid.
5. James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2005), 135-136.
6. David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (Saint Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015), 396.
7. Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid' History and Archeology* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education, 2002), 29.
8. Gordon Franz, "Mt. Sinai is NOT at Jebel al-Lawz in Saudi Arabia," March 14, 2002. (Paper originally presented at the ETS / NEAS meeting on Thursday, November 15, 2001.)
9. Sela is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:7 and is likely the city which became Petra. Mark S. Krause, "Nabataea," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
10. As Franz says, "It is safe to say the style of those tombs is Nabatean and not earlier." Gordon Franz, "Mount Sinai is not Jebel al-Lawz in Saudi Arabia." Paper presented at the ETS / NEAS meeting, November 15, 2001.
11. Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid' History and Archeology* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education, 2002), 30.
12. <https://www.lifeandland.org/2009/10/yahweh-inscription-discovered-at-mount-sinai/>.

NOTES

13. Debunking of “Yahweh Inscription” (Allegedly) from Jebel al-Lawz, Oct 16, 2009 <http://drmsb.com/debunking-of-yahweh-inscription-allegedly-from-jebel-al-lawz/>.
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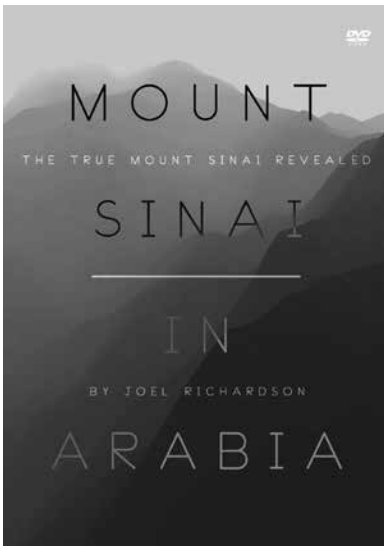
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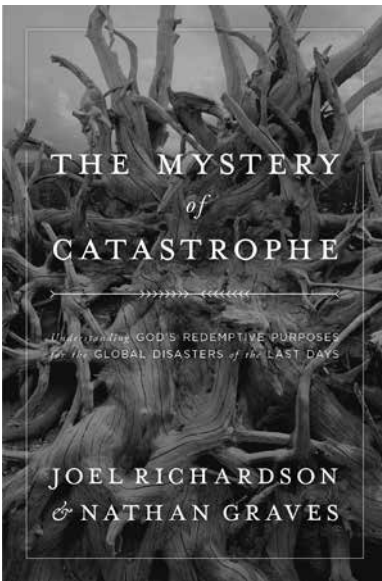


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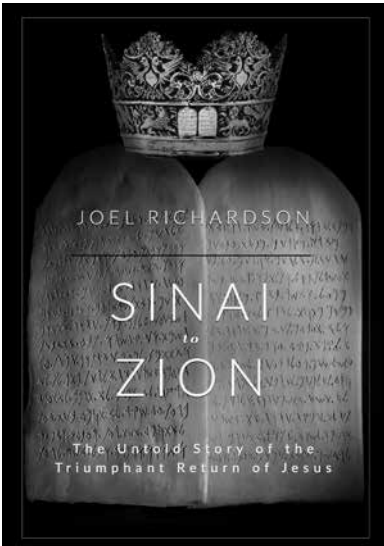


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