

The Route of the Exodus, the Location of Mount Sinai, and Related Topics

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Introduction

For himself the Christian might consider investigating the locations at which Old Testament events occurred an interesting recreational study, but would hardly deem the subject a major concern. Believing in the verbal inspiration of all Scripture, we accept on faith that what God says in the Bible is true and we need no verification other than the Bible itself. We might not know where all the recorded events took place, but we know that they did truly happen, for Scripture says they did. God does not lie.

Furthermore, with regard to the specific locations with which this paper deals, while we are certainly to be impressed with the glory of God shown through his record of the events of the Exodus and Mount Sinai, we are far more concerned with the greater glory of God shown on Calvary. Even with Calvary, what is significant is not precisely where it happened but the fact that it did happen. The God-man Christ, after living a perfect life to our credit died an innocent death in our place, as our substitute, to fulfill God's law for mankind completely both actively and passively. For the sake of Christ's life and death, God declared the world justified by raising Jesus from the dead and sent his Holy Spirit by Word and Sacrament to invite and move people by faith to receive justification and its blessings of forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation.

This does not mean that Christians consider what happened at Sinai unimportant. The Law of God, summarized by the Ten Commandments, reflects an essential reality in our relationship to God. It flows naturally from the truth expressed in the very first verse of the Bible. God is our Creator; we are his creatures; he has every right to command and we have the duty to obey. While that Creator/creature relationship was once perfect and unspoiled, the commandments reveal that we have destroyed that holy relationship and need God to provide a Savior. So, the commandments are very important, yes necessary, to prepare us to contemplate Christ. Once we realize by faith that Christ has redeemed us from the curse the Law, the Law continues to be of value as a beloved guide showing us how to glorify and thank God. We happily note that even on Mount Sinai, when the Law was given with an awesome demonstration of power, it was introduced not with a reminder of God's authority as Creator, but with reference to his grace and mercy to deliver undeserving people from slavery.

But the significance of the Law and Sinai pales by comparison with the Gospel. Note the way in which the Apostle Paul contrasts Sinai and Christ in 2 Corinthians 3 and Galatians 4. Therefore, while not dismissing the importance of Sinai, orthodox Christian leaders have not been preoccupied with it, let alone with its location on the globe. For most it has been acceptable simply to accept the traditional conclusion with the mind set that, since we cannot determine for certain where the places referred to in connection with Sinai are anyway, there's not much point in spending a lot of time on the matter. Until something more verifiable is identified, the traditional view is as good as any other. For themselves Christians will have no problem with this conclusion.

The Bible, however, was not written for Christians only. It was written for the world. It is the means by which the Holy Spirit touches the hearts of unbelievers to turn them from sin and unbelief to faith, whether it is read from the printed page or carried on the winds of the voices of Christians sharing the Gospel. Moreover, unbelievers don't begin their consideration of the Bible with the conviction that it is the holy inspired Word of God. The Bible itself produces that conviction, and one of the ways it breaks down the skepticism and doubt of an unbelieving heart is by presenting much that can be put to the test even by unbelievers.

To be sure, the more important truths of the Bible are beyond human testing and must be accepted on faith alone. But Christian faith is not some purely esoteric concept. It is, as many have aptly described it, an historical faith. What we learn about God through the Scriptures is learned very much through the Bible's record of history. Creation, the fall into sin, the promise of a Savior, the fulfillment of that promise, the life,

death, and resurrection of Christ—all are historical events that teach us about God and his nature and about our relationship to him. One of the things that makes the Bible unique among the religious and sacred writings that exist in the world is that many of its references can be compared with extra-Biblical evidence. The Bible is full of names, dates, and places that are a part of real world history and geography. When the unbeliever sees in those aspects of the Bible which can be tested the consistent correlation between the record of Scripture and the reality of the world in which we live, he is less likely to dismiss the Bible as unworthy of consideration and more likely to consider it with at least a neutral mind, humanly speaking. Once he is into the Scripture, even if only on such a rudimentary level, the power of the Word can then begin to work on his heart.

This is not to say that such a rationalistic approach to Scripture is necessary to break down any unbeliever's resistance to considering the Scriptures. The Scriptures remain the powerful Word of God that works on a plane far above human reason. Faith in God and his Word is not dependent on any external verification or proof, and the Holy Spirit is certainly capable of doing the whole job of turning one from unbelief to faith without any demonstration of the Bible's consistency with the observable facts of the world or the fallible human records of history. Indeed, to make faith in any way dependent on the Bible's agreement with any external evidence destroys the concept of faith itself. The purpose, however, of using external evidence is not to create faith—not even faith in the reliability of Scripture—but simply to encourage people to consider the Word. Since the Word itself provides this limited tool, it is appropriate to make use of it, provided we remain aware of its limitations.

Sadly, we live in a time when multiple generations of worldly scholars, even many who bear the name of Christian, have rejected the doctrine of verbal inspiration and have spent lifetimes and written volumes in the effort to discredit the Biblical record. Scientists with an atheistic bias have openly called the Biblical record into question and repeatedly asserted that the Bible does not correspond to reality. While one with strong faith can easily dismiss such worldly objections with the conviction of faith (as did Luther when he said that even if his own eyes would tell him something opposite of what the Scripture said, he would believe the Scripture), not only are those without faith moved to reject the Bible before ever looking at it seriously, but also those with weak faith are tempted by these claims and their own sinful natures to lose faith in the reliability of Scripture.

It can be of great value, therefore, to examine our world scientifically with a mind that is not biased against the record of Scripture and compare it with what the Scripture says. On doing so one does indeed find a consistent correlation between the record of Scripture and the bare evidence in the observable world. Recent work in archaeology on the part of scientists who are not biased against the record of Scripture has in numerous cases discovered evidence that corresponds with the Bible record in the very areas where Modernist archaeology once claimed such evidence was totally lacking. Studies in the field of physics measuring the speed of light have reopened the discussion of whether the speed of light is a constant as Einstein asserted and have shown that popularly held conclusions about radioactive decay rates and dating (which are based on the assumed constancy of the speed of light) should be called into question.¹

A difficulty in examining the evidence in the world with regard to history and geography is that much of the evidence has been erased over time. The locations of many ancient cities and landmarks are unknown today. People have moved on. Climates have changed. Species of animals have become extinct. Historical documents no longer exist. Consider, for example, the loss of historical documents that came with the burning of the ancient library in Alexandria. In many cases it is no longer possible to prove conclusively an agreement between Scripture and ancient reality, but only to establish that a conflict does not necessarily exist. But that really is all that is necessary to refute the claims of Modernists.

Part I: Arguments for the True Mount Sinai and the route of the Exodus

For all the Exodus route proposals of which I am aware, the location of Mount Sinai is the anchor point. Both traditionalists and alternativists find some reason to establish the location of this mountain, and adjust their

¹ Dolphin, Lambert - Implications of a Non-constant Velocity of Light, (See Internet references.)

conclusions regarding the route accordingly. Given the difficulty in trying to determine the location of the route purely from the itinerary given in Scripture, this is understandable. Unfortunately, it seems every one fails to conform totally with the Scripture record.²

The first identification of the traditional site of Mount Sinai dates to the time of Constantine, shortly after he declared himself a Christian. While both Moses and Elijah knew of its location, having been on it, there is no Jewish record or tradition regarding its location.³ Nor is there any truly Muslim tradition, since Mohammed first came four centuries after Constantine. Present day Arab names for Old Testament sites (like Jebel Musa, “the Mountain of Moses” and the Rock of Moses in the Wadi Ferain) must be traced to their prior identification by Christians.⁴

Constantine did not use modern archaeological methods to locate any of the holy sites he “found”. Nor did he always ask local people as to ancient traditions and names. He and his mother, so they claimed, had visions. As part of an atonement for murdering his wife and son, he and/or his mother, Helena, traveled to the holy lands to locate and dedicate the holy places where significant Biblical events took place. As was the place of the holy sepulcher and the place of the nativity, so in time was the Mountain of God “located”. Following inquiries about popular pagan sites and a little “help” from local Jews (who saw no reason pass up the opportunity for a little extra income) Constantine or his mother had a vision: this is the place! Helena had a small chapel built at the site.⁵ In A.D. 527 a group of Byzantine monks established a monastery there. The monastery has been there ever since. It is where one of the oldest extant copies of the Bible, Codex Sinaialicus, was housed.

We can understand how such a selection was so universally accepted. Constantine was the Emperor who had just become the new champion of Christianity. Even though the Scriptures were complete, visions and dreams were accepted by many as a valid means of revelation, bearing even the approval of the church just as many a sighting of “the blessed Virgin” has since then. Monasticism was already infecting the church and the early monks were looking for places to which they and others could make meritorious pilgrimages. In keeping with a tradition that had already begun and continued through the ages, many believed that once the church accepted it, it just had to be true. Besides, many of these holy sites had the added advantage of taking over what had been pagan sites and temples.

Especially since the dawn of modern archaeology when scientists began to examine the traditional site of Mount Sinai, a host of alternative sites have been proposed as “the true Mount Sinai”. There is good reason to reject the traditional site, not only because the way it was first identified as Mount Sinai is at best highly questionable, but also because the geography of the area simply does not fit with what the Bible says happened there. (Plate 11) To continue to refer to the traditional site as the Biblical mount in spite of the real world evidence against it doesn’t help non-Christians see the Bible’s consistency with reality. Finding a verifiable alternative, however, has yet to happen, in spite of the conflicting claims of various researchers that they have found the true Mount Sinai.

From the 5th Century on, the Coptic Christians of Egypt identified Mount Serbal, about 25 miles west of the traditional site, as Mount Sinai (perhaps reflecting a rivalry with the Byzantine monks). This identification was adopted by Ebers⁶ and J.L.Burkhardt.⁷ Palmer⁸ and Edward Robinson⁹ accepted the traditional site. T.

² Examining every suggested site is a task beyond my resources and available time. This paper is therefore limited to consideration of the traditionally accepted site for Mount Sinai and what appear to be the three most popular alternatives at the time of this writing.

³ Keyser, John, “Is Jebel Musa the Correct Mt. Sinai”, Hope of Israel Ministries web-page, citing the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14, p. 1599

⁴ The reader will notice that Arab names are transliterated into English with a variety of spellings. Since I don’t know Arabic, I am dependent on how others have accomplished this task; but those others do not all agree. Some variants retain obvious similarities (Gebel/Jebel, Negev/Negeb, BishrBisherBishar). In others the similarities are there but are not as obvious (Yutm/Ithm, Uyun/Ayun/Ain/Ein).

⁵ One report says that local Jews pointed out to her what they considered to be the burning bush. One wonders, however, how reliable a report of a nearly 2,000 year old bush could be.

⁶ *Durch Gosen zum Sinai*

⁷ *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, 1822

Wiegend¹⁰ and C. S. Jarvis¹¹ both proposed sites in the northern Sinai: Gebel Yfallaq and Gebel Halal, respectively. Jewish archaeologist Har-El¹² settled on Gebel Sin Bisher in the northwest Sinai, and is supported by David Faiman and Gordon Franz. C.T.Beke¹³ places Sinai at Gebel Baggir and D. Nielsen¹⁴ at Petra, both locations east of the Arabah. A.Musil¹⁵ places it at Se'ib al harob and J. Koenig¹⁶ at Hala'l Bedr in Saudi Arabia. E. Anati¹⁷ concludes it is Har Karkom in the Negev of Israel. Moreover, as David Faiman notes in the article from which most of this list is gained, "...the above selection of examples is by no means complete."¹⁸

At present three alternative sites seem to be discussed more than the others. With Internet searches on the phrase "true Mount Sinai" links to sites advocating one or another of these three are most common. One, Har Karkom in southern Israel, can be dismissed as a viable candidate for any believer in verbal inspiration. The advocates of this site seem to adopt the Modernist view that the Sinai stories are merely reflections of ancient traditions connected with a sacred mountain. Because, in their view, Har Karkom has more evidence of being a significant sacred mountain than any other in the Sinai peninsula and because their discovery of a cave with evidence of solitary residence fits with the idea of a hermit Moses living on the mountain for an extended period of time, they postulate that Har Karkom is the most likely candidate for the mountain that lies behind the stories.¹⁹

The second of these popular alternatives is probably the best known of the three. Apparently first proposed as an alternative site by H. Philby in his book *The Land of Midian* (1957), this site has been promoted especially by Ron Wyatt, Bob Cornuke, and Larry Williams, all self-styled archaeologists and treasure hunters. Larry Williams' book, *The Mountain of Moses*, (later retitled as *The Mount Sinai Myth*) appeared in 1990, and chronicled his and Bob Cornuke's clandestine visit to Jebel al Lawz in Saudi Arabia in 1988. The book, *The Gold of Exodus* by Howard Blum (1998) chronicled the same "expedition." Written in a sensational style (on reading both books, one often wonders if they are, in fact, about the same event) and aggressively marketed, the book became rather popular. Over 80% of Internet search results for "true Mount Sinai" are related to this book or to Ron Wyatt. Recently, a new web-site appeared, produced by Jim and Penny Caldwell (www.jimandpenny.com), which further supports the conclusion that Jebel al Lawz in Saudi Arabia should be recognized as the true Mount Sinai.

Once one gets used to the confused arrangement in both of these books (Williams' and Blum's), one learns of much that at first glance seems ably to support their thesis. There is a huge split rock that could well be the rock of Horeb from which God provided water while the people complained at Rephidim. There are petroglyphs of sacred bulls on altar-like rock formations. There is a blackened top that may have been blackened by the smoky presence of God. There is a cave into which Elijah could have gone. On the way to the proposed site of the Red Sea crossing there are both an oasis that seems to fit the Biblical description of Elim and not too far beyond that some bitter water springs that could correspond to Marah. Most of all—ad this is the core of the argument—the mountain is in Midian.

The logic of the argument is: Moses was in Midian, not Egypt, when he first went to Sinai. Midian is in what is now Saudi Arabia and the Sinai Peninsula was part of Egypt. Therefore, Mount Sinai is in what is now Saudi Arabia. Since Jebel al Lawz is the most prominent mountain in that region and because it fits with certain

⁸ *The Desert of the Exodus*

⁹ *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai, and Arabia Petraea*, 1841

¹⁰ *Sinai*, 1920

¹¹ *Yesterday and Today in Sinai*, 1938

¹² *Sinai Journeys: The Route of the Exodus*, 1983

¹³ *Discovery of Sinai in Arabia*, 1873

¹⁴ *The Site of the Biblical Mount Sinai*, 1928

¹⁵ *The Northern Hegaz*, 1926

¹⁶ *Le Site de al-Jaw land l'Ancien Pays de Malian*, 1971

¹⁷ *The Mountain of God*, 1986

¹⁸ "Where Was the Mountain of God", appearing in *Dor Le Dor, the Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 17.4, 1989, pp. 211-221

¹⁹ See the Internet web-site: wryv.harharkom.com.

other Scriptural criteria (it is on the “back side” of a desert, there is a plain nearby large enough for the battle with the Amalekites, etc.), al Lawz must be the mountain of God.

The argument has been accepted by many Christians. Unlike so many archeological findings, here is one that accepts the Scripture record as true! The problem is: not only are both the major and minor premises unproven, it does not fit all the Scripture record. While Moses went to Midian upon fleeing Egypt, there is significant evidence both in and outside the Bible that Sinai was not in Midian. Secondly, significant evidence can be cited that shows not only that the Sinai Peninsula was not then considered a part of Egypt but also that the land of Midian could well have included the eastern portion of the Sinai Peninsula.

These and other objections to the Jebel al Lawz site are ably presented by Gordon Franz, a writer for *Bible and Spade*, the journal of the Associates for Biblical Research, a Christian archaeological group.²⁰ While he does not dispute locating Midian exclusively in Saudi Arabia, he does cite significant evidence to show that Sinai and Midian were distinct locations. Moreover, he presents Scriptural criteria that Wyatt and others ignore. Two Scriptural factors are totally incompatible with a crossing of the Gulf of Aqaba (which the Wyatt group claims): the Israelites touched on the same geographic region (Etham/Shur) both before and after crossing the Red Sea and they camped again at the Red Sea after leaving Ellin (which the Wyatt group equates with Al Bad).²¹ Conclusion: Jebel al Lawz is not Mount Sinai.

The third currently prominent candidate as the probable site of Mt. Sinai was advanced by M. Har-EL²². Gordon Franz and David Faiman accept his conclusion that Jebel Sin Bisher in northwestern Sinai Peninsula is the best candidate for the true Mount Sinai. I have not been able to examine the book by Har-El, but have been given copies of three articles by David Faiman that appeared in “*Dor le Dor* (The Jewish Bible Quarterly)” and an article by him that appeared in *Bible and Spade* magazine (see References).

Faiman’s approach and attitude are a refreshing exception to much of what passes for scholarship in the modern world. First, he recognizes that, because local knowledge about place names has largely been lost due to the sparse population over history and because there is some ambiguity allowed by the record of Scripture, “any attempt to draw a route map of the Exodus can never be any more than mere speculation.” Secondly, he attempts to hold to what he calls a “totally self-consistent” approach, by which term he means that conclusions must “not contradict *any* statement that appears in the Bible or any fact, geographical, botanical, etc., that modern knowledge of the region may reveal” (emphasis his). Thirdly, he recognizes that “‘modern knowledge’ has a long history of change as each so-called scientific fact crumbles” so that there is danger that theories tied to such “facts” will also fall. Finally, he clearly asserts that even, “Should a totally self-consistent route emerge, it would still retain the status of mere speculation.”²³

Unfortunately, while Faiman’s argument is probably the closest of the better known proposals to being “totally self-consistent” it is not, in fact, totally self-consistent. Furthermore, while he at first says even a totally self-consistent route would still retain the status of mere speculation, he concludes his article “Where Was the Mountain of God” with, “Indeed, of all the candidate peaks that have been proposed in the literature as being the ‘true’ mountain of God, only one may be considered as being tolerably consistent with all of the biblical specifications discussed above, namely, Gebel Sinn Bishr.”²⁴ He freely admits that some other yet unclaimed peak might prove to be a better candidate, but the words seem rather strong for “mere speculation.”

While the starting point for Faiman’s argument is a comparison of Exodus 4:19 & 27, leading him to conclude that Sinai was on pretty much a direct route between Midian and Egypt, the true foundation of his argument is the Scripture reference in Exodus 3:18 and 5:3 indicating God’s instruction and Moses’ obedience

²⁰ His arguments are presented primarily in two documents: “Mount Sinai is Not At Jebel al Lawz in Saudi Arabia”, written for the Near Eastern Archaeological Society Meeting in Colorado Springs, CO, on November 15, 2001, and his “Bible and Spade” article “Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia?” (13.4, 2000, pp. 101-113) At the time of this writing his paper (slightly revised) was posted on the Internet (see References).

²¹ Franz, Gordon - “Mt. Sinai is Not at Jebel-el-Lawz in Saudi Arabia”, ETS/NEAS meeting, p. 16

²² Faiman, David - “Digging Mount Sinai From the Bible”, *Bible and Spade*, 13.4 (2000). p. 116

²³ Faiman, David - “The Route of the Exodus”, *Dor le Dor*, 14.4 (1986) pp. 210 & 211

²⁴ Faiman, David - “Where Was the Mountain of God”, *Dor le Dor*, 17.4 (1989), p. 219

to ask Pharaoh, “Let us take a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.” This divinely instructed request he joins with God’s instruction in 3:12, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” He therefore concludes that Mt. Sinai must have been reachable within three days of leaving Egypt.

The next layer of his argument is supplied by Deuteronomy 1:2 where we read (Faiman’s translation), “It is eleven days (distance) from Horeb, Via the road to the Seir highlands, to Kadesh Barnea.” He takes this to mean that it took the Israelites eleven days travel (and eleven camps) to go from Sinai to Kadesh.

The final significant support for his argument comes from Numbers 2:34, where after the pattern of the camp is described it says, “As they camped, according to their standards, so too did they march.” He presents a graphic illustrating a checkerboard type layout of the camp, showing the progressive movements of each of the individual camps as he understands them from Numbers 2, and concludes, “of the Bible’s 4 cardinal directions only eastward complies with Num. 2:34.” An accompanying diagram maps what could be considered “east”, even to the point of showing the probable direction of the sun at sunrise for that time of year.

It all seems to fit so well together. Since Midian was in what is now Saudi Arabia, the most direct line between there and Egypt would be close to a straight line connecting the northern extremes of the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba. Three day’s journey from Egypt would be about 30 to 45 miles. A generally eastward journey for eleven days would bring one to the region of Kadesh Barnea, and the whole way is relatively flat. Add a few minor considerations like the availability of pasturage and water, a pass easily negotiated by people on foot, and the fact that Sinn Bishr is the only mountain on the peninsula that preserves the sound “sin” in its name and translates from Arabic to “reporting of law” or “laws of man”, and *voila*: Jebel Sinn Bishr or another mountain in that vicinity must be the true Mount Sinai!

But to reprise the oft used quote employed by Gordon Franz in his refutation of Jebel al Lawz’s viability as the true Mt. Sinai, “The devil is always in the details.” It is not that his work is to be despised. His “self-consistent” approach (a term adopted by a number of others) is a positive contribution to the modern study of archaeology. It is just that there is reason in amicable discussion to question some of his conclusions.

First, not all historians agree that Midian was limited to lands east of the Gulf of Aqaba. J.P. Lange in his commentary on Exodus (page 6) observes, “The Midianites had made a settlement not only beyond the Elanitic Gulf near Moab, but also, a nomadic branch of them, on the peninsula of Sinai.” (emphasis his) The modernist David Daiches, in his book *Moses*, says²⁵, “The ‘land of Midian’ to which Moses fled was probably in the south-eastern part of the Sinai Peninsula, although the main home of the Midianites is more likely to have been on the eastern side of the Gulf of Aqaba.”²⁶ From the Scripture references to Midianites involved in the caravan that took Joseph to Egypt, Midianites in connection with Moab in the attempts to curse Israel through the employment of Balaam and God’s retribution against Midian for that intrigue, and Midianites afflicting northern Israel at the time of Gideon, it should be evident that the Midianites, while they were probably based east of the gulf, were a wide ranging people. While one can agree that Exodus 4:19 & 27 combine to tell us that Horeb was on the way between Midian and Egypt, a Midian that ranges from southern Sinai to Moab doesn’t narrow down the choices much.

Secondly, the Bible does not actually say that Sinai is a three day journey from Egypt. The request to Pharaoh is not that they may travel three days to worship God on a *mountain*, but three days to worship God in the *desert*. While some might argue that God could not be so deceptive, since he is the God of truth, we cannot really know the purpose God had in so wording the request. It is certainly possible that the Israelites did, in fact, pause after the third day of their journey to worship God in thanksgiving for the beginning of their deliverance. God clearly knew what Pharaoh would permit and when. Given his repeated refusal to allow just a three-day journey, he would hardly have ever permitted a permanent departure. But by getting the Children of Israel three days out of Egypt, the stage was set for the rest of God’s plans for Egypt. Once Pharaoh realized they were not coming back after three days, he changed his mind about them and chased after them, only to catch up with

²⁵ Daiches, David -*Moses, The Man and his Vision*, pp. 41-42

²⁶ See also the references to this issue in an article posted on the Internet, “Problems with Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia” by Brad Sparks, under his section, Problem #20. (See Internet references.)

them at the very time and place where God executed his final judgment on Pharaoh and his army. Besides, Jebel Sinn Bishr is not a reasonable three-day journey from Egypt, unless Egypt is measured from the head of the Gulf of Suez. It is about a hundred miles (as the crow flies) from Rameses, where the people were, to Sinn Bishr.

Thirdly, the reference in Deut. 1:2 does not say it took the Israelites eleven days to make the journey from Sinai to Kadesh. The clause in Hebrew doesn't even have a verb. It is simply: "one ten day from Horeb (by) way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea." The most natural translation simply supplies the present tense of the copula, rendering a general statement of fact. Such a fact would have been of interest to the people at that time, for only those who had been children at the time of the journey would have remembered it. Besides, Faiman forgets to consider the phrase, "by way of (or by the road to) Mount Seir." While the location of Mount Seir is not conclusively known today, none of the mountains suggested as Mount Seir is anywhere close to the route proposed by Faiman.

Furthermore, in order to get his set of camps for eleven days, he is forced to hypothesize (supported by an old Jewish tradition) that the first few camps listed in Numbers 33 were reached in a foolish attempt to return to Egypt and that Kadesh is represented not only by its inclusion in the Numbers 33 list after Ezion Geber, but also by another name in the list. While the latter conclusion is warranted by a comparison of Scripture passages, his choice seems rather arbitrary, having its greatest support simply in the fact that it completes a listing of the required number of camps from the place he guesses is the true base measuring point of the trip after the hiatus toward Egypt. He concludes that Rithmah is that site, somewhere very close to Sinai, even an alternate name for Sinai, citing as possible confirmation the existence of an oasis called Ein Ratama only ten miles from Jebel Sinn Bishr.

It is clear from Scripture that the Israelites took more than a total of eleven days to go from Sinai to Kadesh. It is clear from Numbers 11:19,20,33,34 that they remained at Kibroth Hattaavah a whole month. There were an additional three days of travel from Sinai to Taberah (Ex. 10:33) and at least seven days at Hazeroth (Ex. 12:15,16) While one can still have only eleven days of actual travel associated with such extended stays, it still seems a bit of a contrived application of Deut. 1:2. His association of Rithmah with Sinai, furthermore, runs counter to what others have written. Edersheim notes, "There are just seventeen of them (place names) after leaving Rithmah - a name derived from *retem*, a broom brush, and which therefore may signify the valley of the broom brushes. If we rightly understand it, this was the original place of the encampment of Israel near Kadesh. In point of fact, there is a plain close to 'Ain Gadis or Kadesh which to this day bears the name of Abu Retemet."²⁷ *Unger's Bible Dictionary* observes with regard to Kadesh, "Its original name would seem to have been Rithmah, becoming Kadesh when the tabernacle rested there."²⁸ P. E. Kretzmann observes that Rithmah is also known as Kadesh.²⁹

Finally, his assertion that the Israelites could only travel east is contradicted not only by his hypothesis of an attempted return to Egypt (an event of which the Scriptures give no hint whatsoever, his claim that Numbers 11:22 & 31 hint that they were once again near the Gulf of Suez notwithstanding) but also by the topography of the land directly east of Jebel Sinn Bishr. While most of the journey from Sinn Bishr to what is accepted as the location of Kadesh could have been easterly, the first few miles would have to have been almost due north to avoid some rather rugged terrain (See Plate 12). (Perhaps this may be another reason he seeks to locate Rithmah = Sinai a few miles from the actual mount.) As for Numbers 11:22 & 33 hinting that they were near the sea, what requires that this nearby sea be the Gulf of Suez? They could just as well have been somewhere near the Gulf of Aqaba.

Faiman also reads into Numbers 2:34, "As they camped, according to their standards, so too did they march," more than the words actually say. It does not require that we understand that the square layout of the camp was preserved as they marched. A much simpler understanding is: as they camped according to their standards, so to did they march according to their standards. To have the whole camp of Israel preserve the

²⁷ Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*, p. 172

²⁸ p. 265

²⁹ Kretzmann, P.E., *Popular Commentary, Old Testament, Vol 1*, p. 298

camp arrangement while marching would require a highway nearly two miles wide!³⁰ Consider the numbers in each camp. Note, too, that each of the four cardinal camps was not arranged in one combined square, but was composed of three sub-sections of one tribe each. Finally, Faiman's diagram contradicts the text of the Scripture. While his diagram shows the combined camp of Dan moving along the north flank, the Scriptures say the camp of Dan was to take up the rear guard position (Numbers 10:25).

A far more natural understanding would be that the tribe of Judah, being the leader of the three tribes that made up the east camp, would start out first, with each of the other three tribes following under their standards. Judah's position in the camp would make it easy for them to lead out in any direction from east to north, as well as toward compass points slightly beyond that range. (A general direction toward the northeast would be expected from any Sinai location in the peninsula.) Then the Gershonites and Merarites would fall in line with the tabernacle. In very logical order the three tribes of the camp of Reuben would each fall into line, followed by the Kohathites. Then the tribes of the camp of Ephraim could easily follow, probably marching one after the other just to the south of the camp of Dan. Finally the tribes of the camp of Dan would bring up the rear. Once in motion, the whole assembly could head in any direction. They could funnel through narrow passes, each according to their standards. On arriving at their next camp, they could easily march into their assigned positions.

Part II: What would truly satisfy all the Scriptural requirements for the location of Mount Sinai and the route of the Exodus?

The record of Scripture gives us few landmarks that are currently conclusively identifiable. Egypt, the Red Sea, the wilderness of Paran, and the plains of Moab are all identifiable, but are all also rather large areas. Ezion Geber is the one place on the list in Numbers 33 that is firmly established. The Brook Amon mentioned in Numbers 21:14 is also identifiable. Fairly certain are the locations of Rameses and Succoth in Egypt, and Kadesh Barnea. George Barton notes the explorers Woolley and Lawrence "adduced strong evidence against the identification of Ain Kades with Kadesh-Barnea, and think that Kossima, which lies nearer to the Egyptian road and is surrounded by much more verdure, may have been Kadesh-Barnea."³¹ Faiman notes however, "Kadesh Barnea is an excellent example where the Bible and modern knowledge come together so as to leave little room for doubt as to its general location."³² K.A. Kitchen locates Rameses in the area of Khataana/Qantar, and Succoth at Tell el-Maskhuta.³³

Unless new evidence comes to light which would require rejection of the current conclusions for Rameses, Succoth, and Kadesh, they may serve as anchor points for determining the rest of the journey. Plotting from these points, however, is not easy. First, the Bible does not describe the Exodus in terms of direction and distance. It merely gives place names and, in some cases, time (either as a number of days of travel or the total time since the start of the journey). It does not tell us how long they stayed at each place. It does not even say there was always exactly one day between named places. Exodus 13:21 indicates that sometimes they traveled at night, which means they could have traveled much farther between camps than what might normally be called a day's journey. Concluding even what should be considered a normal day's journey is dependent on assumptions as to how quickly such a large group could travel and on which days they might be traveling "in haste" and which days they might be taking it easy or struggling with difficult topography.

Secondly, while the Bible makes references not only to specific camp sites but also to larger general areas, and it might be thought that the location of these general areas might serve in indicating the general direction, not even these names are conclusively identified. It seems that such areas as the Desert/Wilderness of

³⁰ It must be granted that, except for the first few miles from Sin Bishr, the route proposed by Faiman would permit travel by a group two miles wide.

³¹ Barton, George - *Archaeology and the Bible*, 1916, p. 95

³² Faiman, David - "The Route of the Exodus", *Dor le Dor*, 14.4 (1986), p. 212

³³ Kitchen, K. - *Punt and How to Get There*, 1971, as cited in Franz, Gordon - "Mount Sinai is Not At Jebel al-Lawz in Saudi Arabia," NEAS meeting paper, p. 13

Shur, of Sin, of Sinai, and Zin were identified according to one's conclusions regarding the route of the Exodus. Even sites having present day names have been placed differently on maps. For example, while most maps place the feature known as Ayun Musa ("wells of Moses") close to the northern limit of the Gulf of Suez, at least one places it close to Abu Zenima, about half way down the peninsula.³⁴

Finally, while the Bible includes in some cases (perhaps just in the translation of the place name) descriptions of the places, there is no guarantee that now, some 3,500 years later, that those descriptions still apply to the actual locations. There is substantial evidence that the climate of the holy lands has changed significantly from the times of Abraham and Moses. Secular studies, too, have determined, for example, that the northern coast of Africa was once much more forested than it is at present and that Ephesus was once a good seaport instead of the marshland it is today. (One theory is that once the forests of northern Africa were clear cut, the dust from the region blew across the Mediterranean and filled in the coast of Ephesus.) The absence of reeds, vegetation, or sufficient water in a place today does not prove their absence at the time of the Exodus. While there are clear Scriptural references to a recurring lack of drinking water, there are also many hints that the whole region from Egypt to Moab to Lebanon could have been much more verdant than it is today.

We must therefore recognize that any conclusions that may be drawn with regard to the route of the Exodus and the location of Mount Sinai can at best be only a guess based on assumptions. Drawing some conclusions, however, is still an enjoyable exercise and can show again that the Biblical record can fit very well with the reality of the world in which the history of God's interaction with people is set.

The first three locations after leaving Rameses mentioned by the Scripture are Succoth, Etham, and Pi Hahiroth, after which comes the crossing of the Red Sea. The mention of three locations has led some to conclude there were three days of travel. Others have hypothesized that they may have taken seven days to reach the Red Sea, a period which would correspond to the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. It does seem logical from the material included between Exodus 12:37 and 13:20 that Moses spent a day instructing the people at Succoth.

The next named stop on the Exodus was Etham. A comparison of Ex. 13:20; 15:22; and Numbers 33:7,8 reveals that Etham and Shur are at least to a degree equivalent. It also shows that the Israelites were in the region of Etham both before and after crossing the Red Sea, a fact that helps one propose a tentative location for both Etham and the Red Sea. It must be possible to go from Etham to the pre-crossing Red Sea camp without

³⁴ A word about maps. Maps are wonderful tools and can put geographic truths into a perspective that is impossible with words alone. The trouble is: maps are not unretouched photographs. They are the product of human interpretation and conclusions. They are subject to error. On facing pages of a spread in the Holman Bible Atlas, for example, Ain Qedeis is located southwest of Ain el Qudeirat on one map and southeast of Ain el-Qudeirat on the other (*Holman Bible Atlas*, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1998, pp. 70 & 71). Maps often include deliberate misrepresentation of the facts. Some misrepresentation is inconsequential; such as the deliberate minor errors some publishers use to be able to detect illegal copies. Some, however, is designed to prove a point that may be lacking sufficient evidence, or at least to fit with a specific point of view.

This limitation of maps should be well known, but interestingly there seems to be a certain aura of veracity in many people's perception of maps. If it's on the map it must be true. The western hemisphere is known today as America only because a German cartographer so named it, after a relatively unimportant explorer named Amerigo Vespucci.

A frustration with maps is met also when the names used to identify a particular place vary from map to map. For example, the map used as the main reference this study is a page from the *Times World Atlas* at a scale of one inch to twenty miles. Many of the names used by the authors cited here, however, refer to places with names that simply do not appear on the map at all, not even in a near cognate form.

While a serious cartographer would not put anything on the map that could not be verified by real earth observation and measurement, many of the maps used in works presenting history, especially Bible history, are prepared by those who are more artists than cartographers, and by people who have never seen or measured the areas they are mapping. It is interesting to compare the radically different interpretations of the land forms presented in the various maps of just one particular area, and to see how some maps show the route of the Exodus portrayed as going ways that are topographically impossible.

One cannot judge the artist/cartographers too harshly, given how difficult it is to get hard data of the region, especially given the current political realities of the region. One needs, however, to keep these facts in mind when looking at a map. Even though I have never been to the Middle East, I have access to satellite imagery of the entire region. A number of the conclusions I make in this paper are based on that imagery.

crossing the Red Sea and the crossing must be close enough to the end of the Red Sea to be able go into Etham immediately after making the crossing. At least some part of Etham must adjoin the Red Sea.

While the meaning of Etham is unclear (perhaps relating to an Egyptian word meaning the boundary of the sea), the word Shur translates to “a wall”. As Gordon Franz notes in his paper, a reasonable association can be made between this name and an impressive wall-like escarpment about ten to fifteen miles east of the northern end of the Gulf of Suez. (p. 11) Locating the wilderness of Shur here, close to Egypt in the northern Sinai, corresponds also with other Scriptural references to Shur in Genesis 16:7; 20:1; 25:18; and 1 Samuel 15:7.

The Bible does not say how long it took to go from Succoth to Etham. It is about 40 to 50 miles from what is recognized as Succoth to the region where the above-mentioned escarpment would be visible. A group traveling “in haste” (Deut. 16:3) could make that distance in three days. Perhaps, this would correspond to the three days of travel requested from Pharaoh so they could worship in the desert. At the edge of Etham, the Israelites might have spent a day in worship, even, perhaps, a Sabbath, for even though the Sabbath law was not encoded until Sinai, the regulations regarding manna given before reaching Sinai reflect a significance to the Sabbath Day before their coming to Sinai.

The next named location is Pi Hahiroth. A number of things combine to help tentatively to identify this place. First, there is the oft-missed change in the direction of travel. Exodus 14:2 and Numbers 33:7 both show that they changed direction to go toward Pi Hahiroth. The verb could be translated either “turn back” or “reverse”. When one recalls that in the Hebrew mind “backwards” also corresponds to “westward” (Gesenius *achar/achur*), the instruction of God could have been either “turn back the way you came” or “turn west”.

Additionally, Pi Hahiroth is accompanied by the names of Migdol and Baal Zephon. In his paper Gordon Franz argues for identifying Pi Hahiroth with the mouth of an ancient canal on the north shore of the Gulf of Suez, Migdol with a fortress that may have been that location, and Baal Zephon with a temple on one of the high peaks of the mountains just to the west of the northern terminus of the gulf, perhaps Gebel Ataqa (pp 10, 11).

Thirdly, Pi Hahiroth was on the shore of the Red Sea. The debate as to which body of water should be called the Red Sea has gone on for many years. The majority of today’s archaeologists come at the question with a bias against the possibility of the miraculous and has therefore sought to find a “Red Sea” where some natural happening might be expanded through folklore into the story found in Scripture. To confirm their conclusions, the Hebrew words *Yam Suph* are translated “sea of reeds”. Rejecting both the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba as being impossible sites and lacking reeds, they have identified various of the smaller marshy and reedy bodies of water between the Gulf of Suez and the Mediterranean, including the bar bounded bay of the Mediterranean called Lake Sirbonis or Lake Bardawil. They conclude that a low tide, or an earthquake, or even a strong but natural wind could have temporarily removed the water from these shallow bodies to permit a crossing.

None of these other bodies of water, however, fit with the Scripture record. *Yam Suph* is still a *Yam*, a sea, not a minor lake. None of these shallow bodies fit with Exodus 15:5, which refers to the deep waters that covered the Egyptians. A crossing over the gap in the bar around Lake Sirbonis conflicts with Exodus 13:17-18, which makes a clear contrast between the Way of the Philistines (along the Mediterranean) and the Red Sea. In Numbers 33 the Red Sea is included twice in the list of camps, once at the crossing, once after Elim, arguing strongly against identifying the “Red Sea” with any of the small bodies of water close to Egypt. Clinching the argument that the “Red Sea” must be one of the arms of the sea still called by that name is the fact that the Bible, including the Book of Numbers, one of the Exodus books, uses the same name to refer to what can only be the Gulf of Aqaba. Since Etham/Shur cannot be identified with a region at the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba without going against the clear meaning of other Biblical references to Shur, the Gulf of Suez must be what is referred to in Exodus as the Red Sea.

Finally, the Scriptures associate Pi Hahiroth with a conclusion made by Pharaoh and anticipated by God. “Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’” (Exodus 14:3) There is a geographic feature at the northwest limit of the Gulf of Suez that warrants such a

conclusion and that is lacking in every other proposed site of the crossing in this general area. The range of mountains of which Jebel Ataqa is a part, extends to the very shore of the gulf just south of a broad open plain.

The arguments offered by Gordon Franz and the evidence gained from satellite imagery combine with the Scriptures to confirm a conclusion I came to many years ago. The Israelites crossed the Gulf of Suez portion of the Red Sea from west to east, in the vicinity of a line from the point called Adabiya to the point called Ras Misalla (Nisalla). A possible chain of events: In the middle of the night the people leave Rameses and other locations and gather at Succoth (to be considered part of Egypt), where they stay during the light portion of the day for Moses' instructions. Then come three day's travel to Etham at the edge of the desert, followed by a day of worship at Etham. A day of travel from Etham to Pi Hahiroth could be followed by a day there, completing the first seven days of the Exodus. In the two days since leaving Etham, Pharaoh's spies, having concluded when the Israelites turned that they were not returning to Egypt after the permitted three days, make their report (see Ex. 14:5), so Pharaoh musters his army and chases after Israel, concluding just as God knew he would that they were wandering around aimlessly and were boxed in by the wilderness. He arrives with his chariots toward the end of the day, and it appears there is no escape—Pharaoh's army coming at them from the north, a barrier of mountains to the west and south, and eat the sea to the east. But that night God shows his mighty power. The next day found the Israelites again in the desert of Shur/Etham. No doubt they would spend a day of rejoicing. The waters of a spring or oasis known as Ayun Musa are within a couple miles and might have been available then, too, to provide water before the next step of their journey. The farther one gets into the journey, however, the harder it is to pin its locations down. Increasingly conclusions must be based on assumptions rather than evidence.

It is at this point of the Exodus that my conclusions differ from those of Gordon Franz. He postulates that the first three days in Shur found the people wandering somewhat north, where he identifies a possible candidate for the site of Marah. Then, he concludes, they came south again to Ayun Musa, which he identifies with Elim. He identifies the post-Elim Red Sea campsite referred to in Numbers 33 with the vicinity of Sudr, and traces the route from there to Faiman's choice for Sinai, Jebel Sinn Bishr.

While his assertion is true that the Israelites would no longer feel any need to hurry, and while it is also true that God's pillar could have led the people in any direction at all, I don't see how his conclusions fit with the total record of Scripture. First, the Scriptures declare God to be a God of order, not confusion. While there was a clear purpose for the appearance of confusion before crossing the Red Sea, there was no purpose for it after. The Scriptural references to wandering are to the time after refusing to enter the promised land after the spies came back with their report. Until that time, from the crossing to the sending out of the spies, there were definite destinations—first Mount Sinai and then the promised land.

Secondly, the words are that they "traveled", not that they "wandered" for three days. On leaving the Desert of Sin they went from "place to place," not "here and there." It is a subjective opinion, to be sure, but the choice of words seems to fit better with traveling toward a destination, from one destination to another, not wandering.

Based, then, on the assumption that God was leading them toward Sinai and that the route would be as close to a straight line as geography (topography, water, and pasturage) would allow, which way did they go? Traveling north is ruled out by both the fact that the way of the Philistines was rejected in favor of a Red Sea route and the fact that after Elim they again camped at the Red Sea. Given that they were probably already at the northern end of the Red Sea, going north and then camping again at the Red Sea requires a loop back to the beginning.

A possible route that could take them in a fairly straight line to another Red Sea camp would be directly across the peninsula to somewhere along the Gulf of Aqaba. This would, however, hardly require three days travel in the Desert of Shur, unless the desert of Shur extended far beyond the escarpment from which it may have derived its name. Such a route would hardly be directly toward Sinai, if Sinai was anywhere on the Sinai Peninsula. It would fit with a Saudi Arabian or Jordanian Mount Sinai, but it would also mean a Saudi or Jordanian encounter with the Amalekites at Rephidim, which came after this Red Sea encampment. All the Scriptural evidence places Amalek west of the Arabah. An attack by Amalek would more likely come at some

point between the Red Sea crossing (Gulf of Suez) and a Red Sea camp on the Gulf of Aqaba. Furthermore, the advocates of a Saudi Arabian or Jordanian Sinai should at least offer some places that would correspond to Marah and Elim, but no place across the central Sinai Peninsula has ever been so nominated.

That leaves a southerly direction, paralleling the coast of the Red Sea. Not only does this make the most sense, it also has landmarks along the way that fit with the Scriptural account. The first portion of the journey would take them three days without water in the Desert of Shur (Ex. 15:22). How far “three days” would take them depends on their speed. Since they no longer needed to flee from the Egyptians, a pace of about ten miles per day does not seem unreasonable. This would bring them close to present day Ras Matarma. If they were traveling both day and night (as they might without finding water) a rate of 15 miles per day would not be unreasonable and would bring them close to modern Hawwarah, forty-seven miles south of Ayun Musa.³⁵ Both Edersheim and Unger’s Bible Dictionary associate the Biblical Marah with Hawwarah. Edersheim notes, “The spring of Hawwarah is still considered the worst on the whole road to Sinai, and no means have ever been suggested to make its waters drinkable.”³⁶

The next camp was Elim, described in the Bible as having 12 springs and 70 palms. (Ex. 15:27) Edersheim says, “From Hawwarah, or Marah, a short march would bring Israel to a sweet and fertile spot, now known as Wady Gharandal...”³⁷ “Even now this valley, watered by a perennial stream, has rich pasturage for cattle, and many shrubs and trees.”³⁸ Unger’s Dictionary concurs with this identification. Elim could easily have been somewhat south of Gharandal, if the Israelites traveled more than one day between Marah and Elim. Some have placed it as far south as the Wadi Feiran.

The topography of the region south of Gharandal is distinctly different from that which is to the north. (See Plate 13) To the north is a broad even plain between the coast and the escarpment of Gebel el Tih, or simply, the Tih.³⁹ To the south a rugged highland shoulders against the coast, making travel immediately along the coast difficult, if not impossible for a group of about 2 million people with their herds. The plain between the coast and the Tih escarpment also becomes more uneven and is interrupted by numerous rugged outcroppings. This could correspond to the Bible’s record that on leaving Elim they came to the Desert of Sin, a new region.

The Bible notes that they did not leave Elim and enter the Desert of Sin until the “fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt” (Ex. 16:1, NIV) This phrase in English most naturally would be understood to mean that two months (30 days each)⁴⁰ and fifteen days after leaving Egypt they entered the Desert of Sin. It might also be understood to mean on the fifteenth day of the second month of the year, considering the references to the month of departure being set as their first month in Exodus 12:2. Since Passover was on the 14th day of the first month, this could mean that they were now one month and one day into their journey, a logical point to have this reference to time. If we also conclude there were seven days from leaving Egypt to the Red Sea crossing, one day of rejoicing, three days travel in the Desert of Shur, and one day between Marah and Elim, that would leave eighteen days as the length of their stay at Elim. If they were, however, 75 days into their journey, that would leave 63 days to stay at Elim, or very many days of travel with

³⁵ Note that in either case, a three-day journey would take them past the Wadi Sudr and its access to Jebel Sinn Bishr. Since it is hard to conceive that the named camps would be reached at a rate of more than one new camp per day, and since seven places are named between Marah and Sinai, one should expect there to be ten days of travel between the crossing of the Red Sea and Sinai. If Jebel Sinn Bishr were Sinai, that would mean either an average day’s distance of only 3 miles or 270 miles of wandering at ten miles per day, since Sinn Bishr is but about 30 miles from what was concluded to be the eastern end of the crossing. To identify Sinn Bishr with Sinai would also require the locating three distinct wilderness regions, Shur, Sin, and Sinai, as well as Dophkah, Alush, and Rephidim all within the 30 miles between the Red Sea and Sin Bishr.

³⁶ Alfred Edersheim, Bible History Old Testament, p. 93

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 94

³⁹ “The Tih” refers not only to the escarpment, but also to the whole highland region behind it. North of the Wadi Sudr, the escarpment is quite straight, like a wall. South of the Wadi Sudr it is more irregular.

⁴⁰ I am aware of no evidence to suggest the ancients had a mixture of 28, 30, and 31 day months. Rather, they seem to have had consistent 30 day months with an annual period of adjustment to realign the months with the year.

no camp between Marah and Elim. Since the Bible mentions the three days between the Red Sea and Marah, it seems reasonable to assume that if there were any other such extended travels between named camps, they, too, would be similarly noted. That remains, however, an assumption.⁴¹

The next such reference to time comes when the Israelites enter the Wilderness of Sinai in Exodus 19:1. “In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai.” (NIV) The translation, “on the very day” is somewhat interpretive. Literally: “on the day, the that (one).” It seems to refer to the first day of the month. As with the reference in Ex. 16:1, this could point to the third month of travel or to the third month of the year. In either case, if one remains consistent in his understanding, this tells us there were a total of 15 days from the time they left Elim to the time they came to Sinai. That would set the maximum number of days of travel from Elim at 15 days. If one would hope that information could narrow down the candidates for Mount Sinai, he would be disappointed. In 15 days at ten miles per day, almost any mountain in the entire Sinai could be reached from an Elim located along the Gulf of Suez anywhere from Gharandal to El Tur.

With the record of the journey from Rameses to Elim, Exodus and Numbers 33 are in complete agreement. However, while the Exodus record of the journey from Elim to Rephidim mentions only the Desert of Sin between them, Numbers 33 includes three other camps: a final Red Sea camp, Dophkah, and Alush. The Numbers list provides what can be considered the minimum number of days between Elim and Sinai; namely, five or six days.

Since the Israelites were headed for a mountain, they would have to leave the coast at some point. The post-Elim Red Sea camp was probably their last coastal camp before heading inland. It is my opinion that identifying Elim with the Wadi Feiran does not fit with the Numbers list. Feiran is the last significant wadi giving access to the interior before a massive highland abuts the coast all the way to El Tur. A Red Sea camp after reaching Feiran would have to be either where Feiran meets the coast at Ras Sharatib or some 40 miles south at El Tur. To enter the mountain region from El Tur would make it next to impossible to proceed north from any peak in that range to head for Kadesh. To go inland via the Wadi Feiran would mean leaving a Feiran/Blim camp to camp at the sea only to return again through Feiran. If, as many advocates of the traditional Mount Sinai accept, Wadi Feiran is the route taken into the interior, the Red Sea camp could have been at its junction with the sea, but Ellin would then logically have to be located north of there. The rugged topography that meets the coast north of Feiran further suggests that the Israelites would have turned inland before getting that far south. (See Plate 15) The topography suggests that the Wadi Sidri would be the southernmost possible Red Sea camp, and there are a number of places from there north that would give good access to the interior, but I am not sufficiently familiar with the geography between Gharandal and there to identify a viable candidate for an alternate location of Ellin.

For the present, it seems best to accept the identification of Ellin with the Wadi Gharandal as the best conclusion given the data available. From there south, a one or two day trek would bring the Israelites to the mouth of the Wadi el Homur just north of present day Abu Zenima. This and another wadi (unnamed in my references) give access to a broad sandy plain separating the Tih highland on the north and the granite peaks of the southern Sinai. The mouth of the Wadi Homur could be where the Red Sea camp was located.

The record in Numbers 33 says they did not enter the Desert of Sin until after leaving the Red Sea, and then left it before reaching Dophkah. The Exodus record puts everything between Elim and Rephidim in the Desert of Sin. Both are correct, perhaps with Numbers referring to what was the Desert of Sin proper and Exodus to what was all in the vicinity of the Desert of Sin. If instead of the southern coastal plain (which some have identified as Sin) the rugged granite mountains are to be identified with the Desert of Sin, it would all fit. A camp at the mouth of Wadi Homur would be in the vicinity of these mountains, a day’s travel inland would put them at the extreme northwest tip of the mountains proper, and an additional day’s trek would take them out of the mountains proper into the sandy plain in the shadow of these mountains. With this scenario, a likely spot

⁴¹ If they had traveled every day at a rate of ten miles per day for 30 days, they could have traveled 300 miles - for 75 days, 750 miles. Since the straight line distance from Succoth to the extreme southern tip of the peninsula is only about 230 miles, either of these is very unlikely.

for the beginning of the manna miracle would be one of those passes where the wadis cross the mountains between the coastal region and the interior.

A route up Homur and connecting with Wadi el Garf a little to the southeast could also explain the reason for the name Dophkah, which means “knocking”. It could derive from the sounds made in the process of mining copper and turquoise at the site of Serabit el Khadim, past which this route would take them. This is the view offered by the *Westminster Historical Atlas* (p.39), among others. There are those, however, especially among the advocates of a Saudi Arabian Sinai, who claim that Moses would never have led God’s people so close to an Egyptian mining site, given the soldiers that would be posted there. Gordon Franz counters by noting that the explorer Petrie (1906:viii, 169) pointed out that Egyptian mining in the area was seasonal, from January to April, while this portion of the Exodus was in May. Franz quotes Petrie further, “The Egyptians never occupied that mining district with a garrison, but only sent expeditions; at the most these were in alternate years...”⁴²

Without actually going there, one can only imagine what it might have been like traveling up the Wadi el Garfa. To the south lay the granite peaks of the southern Sinai. To the north was the southern edge of the extensive Tih plateau. If the “wall” escarpment at Shur was impressive, this could be only more so. While the sandy plain was relatively flat, it could still have been difficult to negotiate. A Sinai travelogue on one Internet site noted that the sand was so soft that normal tires would not hold up a vehicle. Perhaps, they would have used some of the wadis through the narrow canyons of the granite mountains.

The next named site is Alush, a translation of which is not found in the sources available to me. Nor has any of the writers I am aware of proposed a location for Alush. For the present its location must remain a mystery.

In attempting to locate Rephidim one needs to combine a number of different Scriptural factors for both Rephidim and Sinai. The two sites were apparently fairly near to each other, for when the people complained for lack of water, Moses took some of the elders ahead to Horeb, where at God’s instruction he struck the rock to provide water for the people. (Ex. 17:5-7) This suggests further that Rephidim was downstream from Sinai, such that the water from the rock at Horeb would reach them at Rephidim. In spite of their nearness to each other, the fact that on leaving Rephidim they entered the Desert of Sinai (Ex. 19:1,2) suggests that the place at which they camped before the mountain was in what could be seen as a different geographical region. Since the Amalekites attacked the slower rear guard of the Israelites at Rephidim (Dt. 25:17-18), one should attempt to find a logical compatibility between the topography and this attack. There should be a large enough place where the battle could take place and a site from which Moses could view the battle. (Ex. 17:10,11) Finally, the translation of Rephidim (“resting places”) might reflect they recently traversed an especially difficult area (although a number of days of searching in vain for water could warrant the name, as well).

Sinai itself has a number of characteristics that should be satisfied by any tentative identification. First, as has already been seen above, it must lie along a logical and geographically possible route from whatever one concludes is Midian or the home of Jethro to Egypt. Secondly, it should be far enough from Egypt that Aaron (who was already on his way when God talked with Moses at the burning bush, Ex. 4:14) and Moses (who after then went back to Jethro to take leave of the family, Ex. 4:18) would still meet at Horeb (v. 27). Third, Sinai must be in a location that can be described as “on the back (or far) side of the desert” or “on the west side of the desert” (Ex. 3:1). It does not have to be the highest mountain in the area, for Scripture nowhere says it was; but one should note that Josephus says it was the highest in its region.⁴³ Fourth, there must be a reasonable passageway or route leading toward Kadesh that would allow one to travel from Sinai to Kadesh by way of (or by the road of) Mount Seir in eleven days. (Dt. 1:2) Fifth, there should be a cave into which Elijah could go. (1 Kings 19:8-9)

Within a two or three day journey from Sarabit el Khadim (Dophkah?) there are at least two mountains that seem to be viable candidates. From satellite imagery both appear to be impressive peaks. They are Gebel

⁴² Franz, “Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia?”, *Bible and Spade* 13.4 (2000), p. 104

⁴³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II, Chapter XII, § 1 and Book III, Chapter V, § 1

Ras (Pas?) el Gineina, the southernmost portion of the escarpment of the Igma plateau (an elevated portion of the Tih highlands), and Gebel Dalal, about ten or eleven miles south of Gineina, at what could be called the southernmost point of the Tih escarpment. (See Plate 14)

Assuming Dophkah was in the vicinity of Serabit el Khadim, the Israelites could have continued ESE to reach the Wadi Seib. (They might have followed Wadi Seib all the way from a Red Sea camp at its mouth.) The one place where they could ascend the Tih escarpment to the north is at the head of Wadi Seib. There, to the west of Gineina is a broad open region that could be Rephidim. The Igma escarpment wraps around this area from Gineina, forming an east-west wall on the north, then turns north again at another peak (unnamed in my sources). A rock at Gineina could supply water that would flow into the camp at such a Rephidim. Immediately to the northwest, at the base of the unnamed peak, is a pass that leads to the head of Wadi el Arish. That wadi would form a natural highway for the Amalekites who, most scholars agree, were based somewhere near its terminus at the Mediterranean Sea. They may have considered the entire Tih highlands their territory, prompting an attack on the Israelites who had just ascended the Tih⁴⁴. After resting at Rephidim (and conferring with Jethro), they could have moved to the south and east of Gineina, crossing the low divide to the Aqaba drainage basin (the Desert of Sinai?). From there, they could easily have traveled down Wadi el Biyar to its intersection with Wadi Watir, which they could take north right past Gebel Sha'irai, which some have identified with Mount Seir. (If they did travel this general path, they might also have avoided the narrow canyons of the Biyar/Watir confluence by going around to the west of the rugged rocky area that surrounds that junction.)

Alternatively, instead of turning north to ascend the Tih toward Gineina; they could have encamped "at Rephidim" in the sandy basin at the head region of Wadi Sieh. The Amalekites could have come over the same pass referred to above and attacked the rear portion of the Israelites as they came to camp. There are plenty of low hills to provide a vantage point for Moses. A rock at Gebel Dalal, what appears to be an impressive peak at the south end of the escarpment, could provide water to flow down to the camp at this Rephidim. Leaving the smooth valley floor they could come into a new and more rugged geographical region, and encamp almost three quarters of the way around the mountain. To the east is a broad open wadi (Zelega) that intersects with Wadi Biyar, mentioned above, from which point the journey to Kadesh would again pass close by Gebel Sha'irai.

To determine whether either of these mountains is a viable candidate for the true Mount Sinai would require closer inspection than is now possible for me (The presence of a cave cannot be determined from the images available.), but they both seem to fit all the Scriptural criteria. Reaching Kadesh in eleven days by way of a Mount Seir is possible from each. A four day journey⁴⁵ from each would bring one to the vicinity of the junction of wadis Zelega and Biyar or even as far as the junction of Biyar and Watir, both of which locations are again relatively close to the sea, from which the quail of Kibroth Hattaavah could easily come. (Numbers 11:31) The next stop on the way was Hazeroth ("villages"), which might have been at Bir el Saura, immediately to the west of which are the portion of the Igma highlands called El Hazim (a plural, as is Hazeroth). From here, moreover, it is only a two or three day journey to Gebel Sha'irai and the relatively flat head regions of both the el Arish and Paran watersheds, all of which has been called by some the Desert of Paran.

Both of these mountains (as well as others in the area) are also on a logical line from an area of the eastern Sinai Peninsula that could be Jethro's Midian, specifically the region between Gebel Ghlim and Gebel

⁴⁴ Mystery surrounds the Amalekites. They are not known outside the Bible. This is not surprising, since God said he would wipe their memory from under heaven. (Deut. 25:19) While like the Midianites, they too participated in events in central and even northern Palestine, the Scripture references support the conclusion that they were based southwest of the land of Judah. At least one person has suggested the Amalekites were the Hyksos, who invaded Egypt meeting no resistance and who set up an Egyptian rule based in Avaris. The comment in Numbers 24:20 could be a reference to Amalek being the primary political power of the time. It has also been suggested that it was not until the Amalekites were defeated under King Saul that the native Egyptians were able to expel the Hyksos and re-establish native Egyptian rule with the Third Kingdom. If they were a people on the move just after the Israelite's departure from Egypt, that would fit with their attacking Israel at this time. So identifying the Amalekites with the Hyksos invaders would also explain why they met no resistance on entering Egypt: Pharaoh and his army were at the bottom of the Red Sea. It would also explain why there was no significant Egyptian influence in the Sinai or Palestine during the time of the Exodus and of the Judges.

⁴⁵ Three days given in Nu. 10:33 plus at least a day between Taberah (11:1-3) and Kibroth Hattaavah (11:4-34), which are clearly distinguished in Dt. 9:22.

Barga, about twenty miles directly southwest of present day Neviot on the coast. Granted, locating Jethro's Midian here is done to fit the previous assumptions; but there is really no other way to determine that location. The point is that a consistent and geographically acceptable explanation can be offered that fits the Scripture record. It distinguishes between "Midian" and Sinai, it is close enough to make a visit by Jethro at Sinai reasonable, it is sufficiently off the track from Sinai to Kadesh that Hobab would have left from Sinai to go back home (Numbers 10:29), and it is in a direction that both translations of Exodus 3:1 ("far side" and "west side") fit.

An alternative route from the Gulf of Suez to Ras el Gineina (also called Igma by some) would also fit the Scripture record, though not quite as well. This alternative would have to understand the reference to the post-Elim Red Sea camp to mean it was the last camp from which they could see the Red Sea. It postulates that this camp might have been upstream from a Gharandal Elim. The Wadi Gharandal, better than most others, offers a fairly wide and easy route to the interior. In this scenario, the Desert of Sin proper would correspond to the rugged terrain through which the wadi winds to ascend to the Tih highlands. Dophkah and Alush would have to be located along the way, which would cross from the head of Gharandal to the Wadi Abu el Gain, perhaps in the vicinity of the springs (or wells) Ain el Geib, Ain Yarqa, and Bir Regim. A two to three day trek from the last of these up Abu el Gain would bring them to the pass that leads to the Rephidim site associated with Gineina, above. In this scenario the unnamed mountain to the northeast of the pass would also be a candidate for Mount Sinai. News of their entering the Tih highlands at Gharandal might have provoked the Amalekites to send their soldiers against Israel, catching up with them just as they were reaching Rephidim. Some have proposed this route as a way by which the Israelites reached the traditional Mt. Sinai, but most have favored a more southern passage to the interior.

Identifying places and routes of the Exodus after Sinai is for the most part impossible. Almost none of the place names are preserved. Besides, there are what seem at first to be contradictions in the Scriptural record that must be reconciled. While any reasonable reconciliation shows that there is not necessarily a contradiction, it might not be the harmonization that all the real facts made in ancient history.

There are twenty place names in the list of Numbers 33 between Sinai and Kadesh. While it has already been noted that the Israelites took more than a month to make the trip, Dt. 1:2 establishes that it was possible to make the trip in eleven days. Twenty separate campgrounds for a trip that could take only eleven days would mean either very short daily journeys or a lot of wandering before the sentence of wandering was given. Furthermore, Kadesh appears in the list only once, yet it is obvious from a comparison of Numbers 13:26 and Numbers 20:1 that they were in Kadesh at least twice.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Dr. S.T. Lowrie, translator of J.P. Lange's commentary on Exodus argues for only one stay at Kadesh, and that it lasted for the full time between the repulse at Hormah (Numbers 14:45) and the final portion of the Exodus going around Edom to the Plains of Moab. He asserts not only that all twenty locations named between Sinai and Kadesh were a part of a very slow paced and wide ranging journey before the return of the spies but also that this leg of the Exodus took at least fifteen months. (Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Exodus, pp. 78-80)

To fit the Scripture text to this understanding he says the word translated "tomorrow" in Numbers 14:25 is to be understood as "in the future someday". He says that Numbers 20:1-13 (waters of Meribah) refers not to the fortieth year, but to the first arrival at Kadesh, claiming that this passage is recorded after chapters 15-19 as a topical arrangement closely to associate Aaron's death with the reason for it. He seems to suggest that Arad's hearing that Israel came (or "had come") by way of the spies (Nu. 21:1) refers to the sending of the spies 38 years before; he says that the vow referred to in the next verse was made at the time of their defeat at that time; and concludes that after removing the women and children to Mount Hor on the last leg of their journey, they sent a retaliatory military raid to the site of their earlier defeat to destroy the cities in that immediate vicinity, giving the place the name Hormah (destruction) at that time.

To take the phrase in Numbers 20:1, "Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh," as referring to a time before the rebellion of Korah in a narrative that otherwise is presented chronologically seems a bit strained. Besides, it contradicts the conclusion of Exodus that they arrived in Kadesh in the fourth or fifth month of the Hebrew year, the time of the first ripe grapes (Numbers 13:20) Furthermore, there is no logic for wandering around the wilderness for fifteen months when the trip could be done in but eleven days. Having to wander was a consequence of rejecting God for the tenth time after the return of the spies. The complaint of the people in Numbers 20 fits just as well with a year of drought as with not yet knowing where the wells of Kadesh were, and in fact implies they had been in the area for sometime and still had not seen the seeds, figs, vines, and pomegranates they had been told were in the land of promise. While

Lange's translator suggests that Numbers 33 lists only the places where the people stayed long enough to set up the tabernacle—camps of more than one day in the same place. If they merely lay down to rest for the night, or if they traveled by night, no names were given those intermediate places. This conclusion would fit with the lack of a camp listed between Ezion Geber and Kadesh, for it would take more than a day to travel between the two. Between Hazeroth and the sending out of the spies who returned to Kadesh to report, there were no significant events and the people may well have traveled as quickly as possible, stopping only for brief periods of rest. That would mean that the next named site, Rithmah, would correspond to Kadesh, a correlation that has already been noted above.

David Faiman cites a suggestion made by Ibn Ezra that Barnea, a name closely associated with Kadesh, may be a shortened form of BeneJaakan (BeneYaakan, "the sons of Yaakan", becomes Bene Ya, or Beneya—it is *Βαναία* in the LXX).⁴⁷ If this is true, Kadesh was visited three times. This would agree perfectly with Dt. 2:1, which suggests a circular wandering around Mt. Seir.⁴⁸ (Compare also Deut. 10:6)

A wandering that would bring them repeatedly to the same places is further suggested by the Scriptural equating of Moserah in Dt. 10 with Mount Hor in Numbers 33 and 20:22-29, where Aaron died. The plural of Moserah, Moseroth, also appears in Numbers 33, and just as Kadesh and Hor are side by side later in the list and in Numbers 20:22, so Moseroth and BeneJaakan are side by side. That they are in reverse order indicates that the direction of travel was reversed.

This is about as much as one can conclude for the time period between the first and final stay at Kadesh. The name Rimmon Perez (pomegranates of the breach) might be a reference to the rebellion of Korah, but it still gives no hint of its location. Mount Shepher could be translated "beautiful mountain", but there are a number of mountains in the area that could be called "beautiful", and none today have a clear association with that name.⁴⁹ It has also been suggested that the tribes may have split up somewhat, wandering as new pasture was needed, and did not fully reassemble until the last stay at Kadesh.

After the last stay at Kadesh, it seems pretty clear that the next stop was Mount Hor (Hor Ha Hor—"mountain the mountain") A number of identifications for Mt Hor have been proposed, but none are conclusive. The traditional site for Mount Hor is Jebel Harun near Petra on the east side of the Arabah. Perhaps this is the result of the conclusion by many that the land of Edom was fully on the east of the Arabah. Since Mount Hor was at the edge of Edom (Numbers 33:37), it would seem that Mount Hor should be on the east of the Arabah.

A number of scholars, however, have noted that Edom was not limited to east of the Arabah, but included the Arabah itself and extended into the highlands of the Negev. Kadesh, too, was at the border of Edom (its extreme border) (Numbers 20:16). Edersheim points out, therefore, that Jebel Harun cannot be the

Numbers 33 is evidently a catalogue list of the places along the way, one is not required to conclude a single place cannot possibly be referred to by two different names.

⁴⁷ Faiman, *The Route of the Exodus*, p.213

⁴⁸ There are, in fact, two mountains whose current names are similar to Seir: Gebel Sha'irai, about 30 miles due west of the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, and Gebel Shaira, forty miles west-by-north of Sha'irai. Both are along a route that could go from Wadi Watir to Kadesh, but the latter is a relatively insignificant peak between branches of the Wadi el Arish. The possibility that Seir/Shai'irai was included in a repeated circular wandering would also explain why Numbers 12 says nothing more about the journey from Sinai to Kadesh than that "they left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran." (v. 16) Upon reaching the head of the Wadi Paran drainage basin, they had reached the area in which they would wander for thirty-eight years.

Note, too, that Kadesh is at times referred to as being in the Wilderness of Paran, at others as in the Wilderness of Zin. The Wilderness of Paran proper might refer to the watershed of the current Wadi Paran, draining into the Arabah; and Wilderness of Zin might refer to the watershed of the Wadi el Arish ("Zin" may be related to "Tih", which translates to "wandering".) North of the Wadi Khadakhid these basin are divided by the highlands of the Negev, but in the region of Sha'irai the divide between the watersheds is very flat, blending the one into the other. A wandering that would bring them all the way from Kadesh back to the region of Sha'irai also fits with Ezion Geber being a part of the list, for that is not far from Sha'irai.

⁴⁹ David Faiman notes, that a well, "Bir Abu Qurun, is located in the Gebel Yi'allaaq range of hills, close to Ras Abu Qurun - the highest peak in north Sinai. This is the only water source which would have required the Israelites to climb in order to quench their thirsts. Bir Abu Qurun would thus be a natural place with which to identify the camp Mount Shepher. Even more intriguing is the possibility that the Arabic name Qurun, meaning 'horns', might be the equivalent of the Hebrew Shopharot, which has the same root as Shepher." (Faiman, "From Horeb to Kadesh in Eleven Days", *Dor le Dor*, 22.2 (1994), p.99)

true site of Mount Hor, for that was central Edomite territory, the very territory through which they were denied passage.

“Hor Ha Hor” translates to “mountain the mountain” or; as Edersheim says, “the remarkable mountain,” or even “the mountain’s mountain.” The name suggests it is a significant peak. A number of the higher points of the Negev highlands have been proposed, but many of these are simply high points in high lands, the highest point on a wide table land or edge of an escarpment, and do not stand out like a MOUNTAIN. Edersheim refers to Mount Moderah, a “remarkable mountain” that “suddenly rises” a day’s journey eastward from Kadesh, noting that Professor Robinson likens it to a “lofty citadel.”⁵⁰ Edersheim, however, does not include any detailed maps. The *Holman Bible Atlas* locates Moderah not east of Kadesh, but northeast—right in the middle of what satellite imagery shows is a flat wadi bottom. If the *Times World Atlas* includes the mountain referred to, it does so under another name. Satellite imagery reveals a number of peaks in the area, but most are not named in my sources. There is one that appears to be a mountain on top of a mountain area, but the resolution is too coarse to be sure.

Following the lead of Ibn Ezra, David Faiman argues a case for identifying Mount Hor with Araif en Naqa, less than twenty miles east-by-south of Kadesh⁵¹. This is truly a significant mountain. Moreover, at its base is the Wadi Mizeria, which bears a phonetic similarity with Moserah, and it is on the way from Kadesh toward the Red Sea. (Numbers 21:4) Others, too, have offered that Moserah was the name of the valley or wadi in which the people encamped while Moses, Aaron, and Eliezer were on the mountain.

Faiman, however, also sees a conflict with this conclusion and the record of Numbers 21:1-3, for Arad’s place was far to the north in what eventually became the territory of Judah. While the exact location of Honnah is uncertain, it, too, is believed to have been fairly close to Arad and Beersheba. Faiman concludes that it simply does not make sense to think that the Israelites turned around to enter Canaan proper to destroy Arad and his cities only again to come south to go around Edom. Moses could not have entered the promised land that had already been denied to him. He therefore proposes (admitting that the argument is on shaky ground) that there was another “Arad” and another “Hormah” somewhere. He suggests that a mountain pass named Naqb Arod in Arabic could be what is referred to.

While the possibility must be granted, it would seem better to seek an explanation that does not require the introduction of sites named Arad and Hormah in addition to those commonly known to the Old Testament. This Edersheim does by proposing that between the time messengers were sent to Edom and their return, the Israelites began moving toward the passage they sought to use, stopping on the way at Mount Hor. This would take them east or northeast, up from the bottom lands of Kadesh onto the northern portion of the Negev highlands. Just such a motion would alarm the king of Arad when the news came to him (Numbers 21:1). To him it would appear that they were about to enter Canaan from the south, as they had tried once before. Edersheim suggests his forces came upon Israel just as they were beginning to go south after the death of Aaron and after hearing and seeing the response of the Edomites. He also suggests that the reference to destroying their cities is not to what they did at that time, but to what eventually was done under Joshua. Their taking a vow implies not immediate but future action.

A Mount Hor east or northeast of Kadesh, however, also has problems. If, as was concluded above, Mount Hor and Moserah were the same place, and Mount Hor were on the highlands, then the Israelites were on the highlands and heading into Edom at least once before. The Bible gives no hint of moving for Mount Hor before the response of the Edomites. The narrative naturally flows that once the armies of Edom were stationed along their border, they Israelites turned and left Kadesh by way of the Red Sea.

Most have tried to establish a route for the last portion of the Exodus by trying first to establish where Mount Hor was. There is another approach. Even though it might seem more logical to us that they would try to enter Canaan from the south, trusting in the promise that God would give them the land and drive the Canaanites out from that direction, there is no hint that they even considered that option. They would not have

⁵⁰ Edersheim, *Old Testament History*, p. 189

⁵¹ Faiman, “The Route of the Exodus,” *Dor le Dor*, 14.4 (1986), p. 213

needed to seek permission to travel through Edom if they had planned on entering Canaan again from the south. Some have opined that they chose another route because they feared the Canaanites who had beaten them forty years earlier; yet they had no trouble with them under Joshua's leadership. It is more likely that they did not consider going north into the promised land simply because they considered that route closed—not by their weakness or by the armies of the Canaanites, but by the command of God many years before.

To travel from Kadesh to the Plains of Moab, from which they entered Canaan, required that they not only go down into the Arabah, but also ascend the highlands on the other side, for there is no passageway along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. What is more, not only are there relatively few routes by which they could get down into the Arabah, there are only two that are really at all possible for getting up to the highlands on the other side.⁵²

The first possible route, one which would probably seem to them to be the better, being much shorter, would be a route over the northern Negev highlands, down what is now called the Wadi Zin⁵³ (or Ghuweir), directly across the Arabah, and partway up one of the smaller wadis there, transferring to a ridge route bearing to the southeast. (See Plate 9) Note I said this route up to the eastern highlands was possible; I did not say it would be easy or practical. (See Plate 17) There is no record that Moses ever traveled this far north before this time. He may not have had any knowledge at all about the lay of the land, but simply supposed that it would be possible to travel through Edom and Moab. The refusal of the Edomites to let them pass through may have been God's way of convincing the masses to go along with Moses, whom God told to go toward the Red Sea (Dt. 2:1), keeping them from entering the Arabah anywhere north of the only other possible route to the highlands. That other possible route leaves the Arabah only a couple miles north of Ezion Geber at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba.

There are also a limited number of choices for descending into the Arabah from the west. There is the Wadi Zin (Ghuweir or El Jeib?), but this is the king's highway route that was closed by the Edomites. Although there are a number of other wadis that enter the Arabah from the west, the Negev highlands lie between Kadesh and the heads of these wadis. While they are not so rugged as to make passage across them impossible, it would still be very difficult for such a large and mixed body. The logical course is to do just what they did: go by way of the road to the Red Sea. That would take them one more time to the headwaters of the Wadi Paran between Sha'irai and Ezion Geber. From there, the upper and lower portions of the Wadi Paran would make good routes into the Arabah, but the central portion is rough and narrow. Still, they could bypass this rough section by going east of Paran by way of Zenifim and Zihor. But all these routes would take them into the middle of Edomite territory.

There are only a couple of other ways for such a group to get through the mountainous edges of the Arabah into that depression in any kind of reasonable fashion. Even these are not easy, but the difficult portions are relatively short. One is a couple of miles north of Ezion Geber, the other a couple of miles north of that. (Plate 16)

The route from Kadesh, then, may have gone thus: With the refusal of Edom, they turned and departed Kadesh toward the south, toward the Red Sea. On arriving at Gebel Araif el Naqa (Mount Hor) they camped. Aaron died and they mourned him thirty days. On seeing that the Israelites were blocked by Edom, one of the king of Arad's spies may have thought they would come north as they had years before and went to tell his king. When the king of Arad heard they were coming he determined to attack to prevent it, but on actually reaching them found them already leaving and was able only to capture a few. The Israelites vowed vengeance

⁵² A number have suggested that one way to get up to the highlands from the Arabah is by way of the Brook Zerek (Wadi el Hasa). The canyon for this brook, however, is much too narrow and crooked to serve as a viable route for the Exodus. Certainly, one or a few can travel its length, but one needs to propose a route that is reasonable for two million people, including children and herds. Given the topography as revealed by satellite imagery, I can't consider a route up the Brook Zered viable.

⁵³ As Bruce Crew notes in his article supporting the conclusion that Edom was also west of the Arabah, this route would use the public highway through Edom. This highway would be called, as would all public roads, "the King's Highway" (Numbers 20:17) (Bruce R. Crew, "Did Edom's Original Territories Extend West of 'Wadi Arabah?'" appearing in *Bible and Spade*, 15.1 (2002) 2-10)

and a later insertion, by Joshua perhaps, noted the final outcome.⁵⁴ Since they had already been over this area before, Numbers doesn't list any of the locations, but perhaps Deut. 10 does with Gudgodah (Wadi Khadakhid?) and Jothbathan (a place on the western edge of the Arabah?). On arriving again near Sha'irai, where they may have remained for a while, God instructed them not again to go as before, but now to turn north toward the promised land. (Dt.2:3) On entering the Arabah they didn't go all the way to the coast (Ezion Geber) but crossed over to the Wadi el Yutm (Ithtn). Zalmonah ("shady") and Punon ("darkness") could refer to the dark soil and rock in the area or to the darkness they may have experienced going through those deep canyons⁵⁵. Here is a likely spot for the judgment of the firey snakes and salvation through looking at the bronze snake. From here another "Kings Highway" (still in use today) would take them north onto the highlands and along the eastern borders of Edom and Moab. Somewhere along this highway, or perhaps as early as before they entered the Arabah, could have come the instructions to buy food from the Edomites.(Dt. 2:4ff.)

Locations of the sites along the march north from the Red Sea are also uncertain. Lange notes that "BIBLE COM. regards the name Oboth as identical with the present pilgrim halting-place, El Ahsa. 'The name Oboth, denoting holes dug in the ground,' being the plural of **אֹבוֹת**. The term *hasy*, of which Ahsa is the plural, has the same meaning, and thus the modern station corresponds to the ancient both in name and place."⁵⁶ On my map; this would probably be Hasa, at the head of the Wadi el Hasa. While most have identified the Brook Zered with the Wadi el Hasa, a few have identified it with Wadi el Karak, about fifteen miles north of el Hasa. All seem to agree that the River Amon is to be identified with the modern Wadi el Mujib. Abarim means simply "the regions beyond" and could refer to any of a number of locations on the far side of Moab. Beer means simply, "well". Scholars debate the exact locations of Mattanah (Madaba?), Nahaliel, Barmoth, Dibon Gad (Dhiban?), and Diblathair, but generally locate them all in the northern portions of eastern Moab or in the territory of Sihon. Mount Nebo might be the one currently bearing the name, but it could refer to any of the mountains in the region. The Plains of Moab were not Moabite territory at the time, but are clearly located opposite Jericho.

Conclusion

This paper is not the "last word" on the subject. Certainly, it does not prove the Scripture record, for that stands on its own. Lord willing, it demonstrates that there is no real disharmony between the Scripture's record of the Exodus and the real world. I believe that it provides a reasonable suggestion that is totally in agreement with the Scripture record, and yet recognize that others may offer alternatives that are at least as much in agreement with the Bible. Perhaps it will also pique the interest of readers to investigate the matter further to see

⁵⁴ To postulate a later insertion of a brief portion of text does not contradict the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. The evidence suggests that Hebrew writing was then in an early stage. The books were not bound volumes, all in one piece, but rolled scrolls of early paper. The inspired writers did not have to produce an entire volume in one sitting, and their writings were probably later collected and arranged by others. On reading this portion of Moses' work, another inspired writer (like Joshua, Samuel, or David) could have penned the updated information, and having no other work with which it fit, put it with the document most closely associated with it, or perhaps included it in the process of copying the Scriptures so that the Word would be preserved while paper and ink deteriorated. While it is certainly possible for an inspired writer to write of events before they happened, and at times some did, it is not required that we conclude that Moses, for example, wrote the last chapter of Deuteronomy himself. Yet that book is still properly referred to as one of the books of Moses.

Further, while Lowrie's conclusion that all twenty locations named between Sinai and Kadesh were before the first and only reaching of Kadesh should probably be rejected (as noted in a previous footnote) what he suggests about the king of Arad in connection with this portion of the Exodus must be considered another possibility.

⁵⁵ *Unger's Bible Dictionary* notes that Jerome thought Punon was "a little village in the desert, where copper was dug up by condemned criminals, between Petra and Zoar." Unger also equates Punon with the Pinon of Genesis 36:41. Some atlases in my library place Punon north of Petra at the base of the eastern highlands, others at the crest. The location of Oboth has also been tentatively located in the northern portion of the Arabah by some. Given the fact, however, that the Israelites were not going through Edom, but around it, an Exodus route going north or south in this portion of the Arabah must be viewed as incompatible with the Scripture record. Punon, Oboth, and all later encampments must be located somewhere along the route, east of the irregular ridge formed by Sha'fat Ibn Jad, Esh Shara (another candidate for Mount Seir), and the crest of the Moab highlands.

⁵⁶ Lange, *Numbers*, p. 113

if any archaeological evidence can either support or argue against the route suggested. I, for one, would welcome the opportunity to do some on site research especially in the region around Jebel el Geneina and Gebel Dalal. I hope the reader enjoys reading as much as I enjoyed the research.

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NASA - Earth Sciences Applications Directorate (ESAD) - Landsat 7 Satellite Imagery

http://zulu.ssc.nasa.gov/mrsid/bin/show.pl?client=sid&image=N-36-25_loc.sid

http://zulu.ssc.nasa.gov/mrsid/bin/show.pl?client=sid&image=N-36-30_loc.sid For access to similar imagery for most of the globe see: **<http://zulu.ssc.nasa.gov/mrsid/mrsid.pl>**

Sparks, Brad - Problems with Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia

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Note Regarding the Satellite Imagery Plates

These grayscale images are converted from false color images. Therefore, some of the shades are slightly different than they would be if the originals were true color images. Satellite images are often produced in false color, taking information from invisible bands (usually infrared light) and converting it to visible hues. This is done because it reveals information about vegetation and soils that would not be evident from visible light. I decided to convert these images to grayscale for this paper because the false colors could too easily lead to unwarranted conclusions by those who do not commonly use false color images. The topography is clearly revealed by the grayscale images, and that is the purpose for including the images with this paper. At least for the present, any reader who wishes to examine these images in their original false color state can access them via the Internet at the sites listed in the Internet references above. N-36-25 includes the southern portion of the Sinai peninsula; N-36-30 includes the northern portion and all of the land of Canaan. They may be viewed at a variety of scales. 100% is at a scale of 30 meters per pixel; 50% is at a scale of 60 meters per pixel, and so on.

The originals for the images in this paper are the same that have been cited by advocates of Jebel el Lawz as proof for a trail from the Straits of Tiran to Jebel el-Lawz. None of those who cite this proof provide the images. I have examined the images of that area and, even though I have professional experience in interpreting aerial photography, I see no evidence of any ancient trails in the images.

Due to the location of the satellite when these images were recorded, images from the southern half of the peninsula are best viewed from the lower left. In all images the sunlight is coming from the southeast.

SDG