

The Exodus Mysteries

of Midian, Sinai & Jabal al-Lawz

Glen A. Fritz, PhD

Did the biblical Exodus from Egypt really happen?

Did its events unfold some 3400 years ago as supposedly recorded by a man named Moses?

If so, why the longstanding obscurity about Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were given and the Hebrews encamped for eleven months?

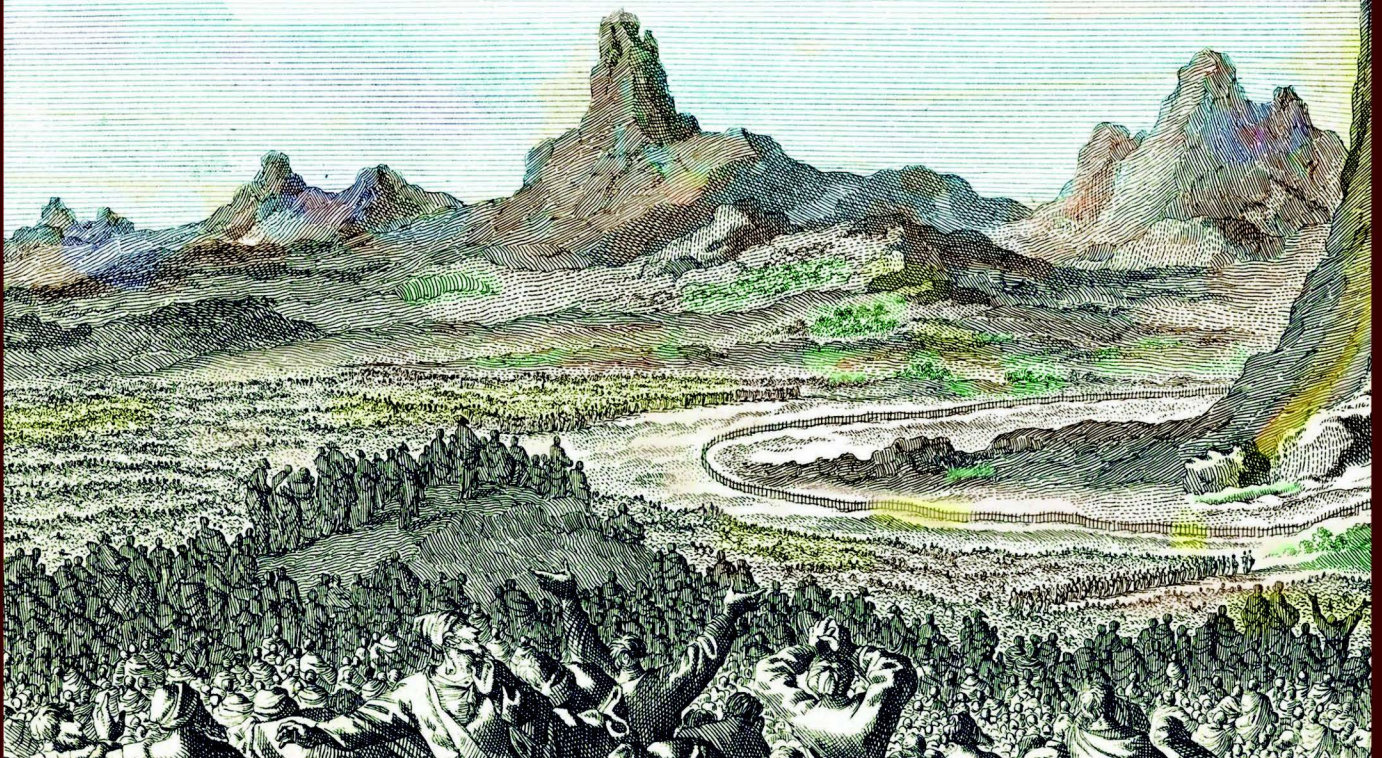
Many Exodus enigmas trace back to disagreement about the reality or the location of the miraculous "Red Sea" crossing on the way to the mountain.

Some Mount Sinai confusion stems from faulty traditions about the Land of Midian, where Moses was exiled for 40 years and traveled to the "Mountain of God." Ancient history puts Midian far from Egypt in northwest Arabia.

Egyptologists, theologians, archaeologists, and historians have tried to explain the Exodus, relying mainly on traditions, linguistics, and archaeology. But disappointing results have led many to conclude that the Exodus was a myth.

What if these scholars have erred by looking in the wrong places, or by using the wrong tools? Although the Exodus is clearly a geographical problem, few investigators have approached it using rigorous geographical methods.

This book attempts to break from the fold-by-apply a'd' passionate, evidence-based geographical analysis to the location of Mount Sinai and the Exodus route required to reach it.



The Exodus Mysteries:
of Midian, Sinai & *Jabal al-Lawz*

Glen A. Fritz, PhD

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Summary:

This work presents an in-depth geographical analysis and exposé of the route of the biblical Exodus between the “Red Sea” crossing and Mount Sinai. Based on the author’s previous research, the Hebrew Bible places *Yam Suph*, the Red Sea of the Exodus, at the Gulf of Aqaba. This finding negates the underpinnings for a Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula and pushes its likely locale into northwest Arabia.

In order to reconstruct the route to an Arabian Mount Sinai, the mountain’s position must be ascertained. This process requires an estimation of the domain of ancient *Midian* due to its historical geography links with the mountain, starting with Moses’ Exodus 3:1 excursion to it. The topography neighboring this *Midian* region can then be used as a framework for plotting pertinent historical and geographical data, including the proposed meanings of the *Horeb* and *Sinai* terms.

This systematic analysis does point to the *Jabal al-Lawz* range, which has been suspected as a potential Mount Sinai site for several decades. The proposition that *Jabal al-Maqla* within the *Lawz* range hosted the Exodus activity is evaluated relative to geography, historical travel patterns, topography, hydrology, and archaeology. The claim that the *Jabal al-Maqla* peak was blackened by supernatural heating during the Exodus is also assessed geologically and biblically.

This array of historical and geographical data is applied to the biblical Exodus itinerary to reconstruct the most feasible route between the sea and the projected Mount Sinai. The work concludes with an epilogue summarizing the travels beyond Mount Sinai, with an emphasis on the location of *Kadesh Barnea* at the southern border of Canaan.

Cover illustration: adapted from Marten Schagen, *De Wetgeving op den Berg Sinai*, 1732 (after Jan Luyken), Amsterdam (author’s collection)

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	III
LIST OF FIGURES	VIII
LIST OF TABLES	XV
FOREWORD.....	XVI
PREFACE.....	XVIII
EXPLAINING THE “HEBREW” TERM	XX
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIES.....	1
1.1 THE PARADOX.....	3
1.2 THREE UNDERLYING ELEMENTS.....	4
1.3 ROUTE OVERVIEW: FROM THE SEA TO THE MOUNTAIN.....	5
1.4 OUTLINE OF THE INVESTIGATION	6
1.5 SUMMARIZING THE CHALLENGE.....	7
CHAPTER 2: THE SEA PREMISE.....	8
2.1 THE IDENTITY OF <i>YAM SUPH</i>	9
2.2 THE CROSSING POINT.....	13
2.3 BOTANICAL MEANINGS FOR <i>YAM SUPH</i>	16
2.4 SUMMARIZING THE SEA PREMISE	19
CHAPTER 3: THE <i>MIDIAN</i> AND MOUNTAIN PREMISES	20
3.1 <i>MIDIAN</i>	20
3.2 THE TRADITIONAL MOUNT SINAI LOCATION.....	22
3.3 A MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA.....	23
3.4 THE RECENT HISTORY OF <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i>	26
3.5 THE SAUDI SIDE OF THE STORY.....	28
3.6 CRITICISM OF THE <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i> ACCOUNTS	30
3.7 BARRIERS TO INVESTIGATION	31
3.8 OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE.....	34
CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY AND <i>MIDIAN</i>	35
4.1 <i>MIDIAN</i> CONTROVERSY.....	35
4.2 <i>MIDIAN</i> IN THE EARLIEST SOURCES	39
4.3 <i>MIDIAN</i> ACCORDING TO EARLY CHURCH HISTORIANS.....	43
4.4 <i>MIDIAN</i> ACCORDING TO MEDIEVAL ARAB GEOGRAPHERS.....	46
4.5 <i>MIDIAN</i> ACCORDING TO WESTERN EXPLORERS.....	48
4.6 SUMMARY: HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY AND <i>MIDIAN</i>	51
CHAPTER 5: THE ENVIRONMENT AND <i>MIDIAN</i>	52
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	52
5.2 A CITY OR A LAND OF CITIES?	52
5.3 OASIS URBANISM IN <i>MIDIAN</i> ?	53
5.4 USING SETTLEMENT PATTERNS TO DEFINE <i>MIDIAN</i>	55
5.5 <i>AL-BAD</i> ’	57
5.7 <i>QIYAL (JIYAL)</i>	66
5.8 <i>AS-SILA</i>	66
5.9 <i>AYNUNAH</i>	66
5.10 <i>AL-KHURAYBAH</i>	70

CONTENTS

5.11 <i>ASH-SHARMA</i>	70
5.12 <i>AL-TIRYAM</i>	72
5.13 <i>AL-MUWAYLIH</i>	72
5.14 <i>QURAYYAH</i> AND “MIDIANITE POTTERY”	73
5.15 CONCLUSION: <i>MIDIAN</i> DEFINED BY ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	75
CHAPTER 6: THE MOUNTAINS NEAR <i>MIDIAN</i>	78
6.1 THE <i>HEJAZ</i> OF NORTHERN ARABIA	78
6.2 <i>MIDIAN</i> TOPOGRAPHY	78
6.3 MOUNTAINS IN THE ENVIRONS OF <i>MIDIAN</i>	84
6.4 APPRAISING MOUNT SINAI CANDIDATES	88
6.5 <i>JABAL AZ-ZUHD</i>	89
6.6 <i>JABAL HARB</i>	91
6.7 <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i>	94
6.8 <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i>	97
6.9 <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i> ’S SUITABILITY AS MOUNT SINAI	99
6.10 <i>JABAL UMM HAYFAH</i>	99
6.11 HISTORY OF THE <i>MAQLA</i> AND <i>LAWZ</i> NAMES	101
6.12 SUMMARY OF THE MOUNTAINS OF <i>MIDIAN</i>	102
CHAPTER 7: MORE MOUNT SINAI CLUES	104
7.1 MOUNT SINAI TO EUSEBIUS AND ST. JEROME	106
7.2 MOUNT SINAI AND THE APOSTLE PAUL	107
7.3 THE HOLY SEE OF JERUSALEM CIRCA AD 534	115
7.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOUNT SINAI AND <i>MIDIAN</i>	119
7.5 THE WEIGHT OF LOCAL TRADITIONS	120
7.6 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE MOUNT SINAI CLUES	124
CHAPTER 8: THE MEANING OF <i>SINAI</i> AND <i>HOREB</i>	125
8.1 INTRODUCTION	125
8.2 THE DERIVATION AND MEANING OF <i>SINAI</i>	125
8.3 THE DERIVATION AND MEANING OF <i>HOREB</i>	130
8.4 <i>SINAI-HOREB</i> NOMENCLATURE CONFUSION	131
8.5 CLARIFYING THE <i>SINAI-HOREB</i> RELATIONSHIP	135
8.6 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE MEANING OF <i>SINAI</i> AND <i>HOREB</i>	141
CHAPTER 9: MOSES IN <i>MIDIAN</i>	142
9.1 MOSES’ ESCAPE FROM EGYPT	142
9.3 CLIMATE AND ANCIENT <i>MIDIAN</i>	146
9.4 <i>MIDIAN</i> AGRICULTURE	151
9.5 MOSES’ EXCURSION TO THE MOUNTAIN	156
9.6 THE ROUTE OF MOSES’ EXCURSION	157
9.7 MOSES IN <i>MIDIAN</i> CONCLUSIONS	159
9.8 EPILOGUE OF MOSES IN <i>MIDIAN</i>	160
CHAPTER 10: GETTING TO THE MOUNTAIN	162
10.1 BARRIERS AND CORRIDORS	162
10.2 THE NORTH-SOUTH ROUTE DETAILS	163
10.3 THE EAST-WEST ROUTES	169
10.4 MAKING SENSE OF THE ROUTES	176
10.5 SUMMARY OF THE TRAVEL CORRIDORS NEAR <i>MIDIAN</i>	178
CHAPTER 11: THE ENVIRONS OF <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i>	179
11.1 <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i> TOPOGRAPHY	179
11.2 MODERN CULTURAL FEATURES AT <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i>	184
11.3 HYDROLOGY	187

CONTENTS

11.4 CLIMBING THE EASTERN FACE OF <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i>	191
11.5 THE HEADWATERS OF <i>WADI AL-ABYAD</i> AND <i>WADI AR-RAYT</i>	194
11.6 SUMMARY OF THE <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i> ENVIRONS	197
CHAPTER 12: <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> ARCHAEOLOGY	199
12.1 ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MOUNT SINAI CLAIMS	199
12.2 THE HISTORY OF <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> ARCHAEOLOGY	200
12.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> VICINITY	203
12.4 THE ANCIENT “CEMETERY”	205
12.5 THE “MODERN” CEMETERY	213
12.6 THE MASYOON SITE	215
12.7 THE UNKNOWN FENCED SITE	216
12.8 THE FENCED PETROGLYPH SITE	216
12.9 SUMMARY OF THE FENCED PETROGLYPH SITE	225
12.10 <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> ARCHAEOLOGY CONCLUSIONS	225
CHAPTER 13: <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i> ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES	227
13.1 THE PETROGLYPH PANEL	227
13.2 STONE CIRCLES AT THE <i>MAQLA</i> BASE	236
13.3 HYDROLOGY AND THE COLUMNS	242
13.4 STONE COLUMN CONCLUSIONS	245
13.5 THE “ALTAR”	246
13.6 SAUDI ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE “ALTAR” SITE	253
13.7 THE “ALTAR” CONCLUSIONS	257
CHAPTER 14: <i>MAQLA</i> MARBLE MYSTERY	258
14.1 THE REMNANT PILLARS	258
14.2 FINDING THE SOURCE OF THE MARBLE	263
14.3 THE MARBLE QUARRY DESCRIPTION IN THE <i>AL-BID</i> REPORT	267
14.4 REACHING THE QUARRY	270
14.5 THE EVIDENCES IN THE QUARRY	271
14.6 MARBLE PILLAR HYPOTHESES	277
14.7 THE COMMERCIAL VENTURE THEORY	277
14.8 PETRA MARBLE	279
14.9 <i>MAQLA</i> MARBLE VS <i>PETRA</i> MARBLE	280
14.10 THE MARBLE EDIFICE THEORY	280
14.11 THE <i>WHY</i> OF THE EDIFICE	283
14.12 THE <i>MAQLA</i> MARBLE MYSTERY CONCLUDED	288
CHAPTER 15: BURNT MOUNTAIN THEORY	290
15.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE BLACKENED PEAK THEORIES	291
15.2 THE BURNT MOUNTAIN VS. CHEMISTRY	292
15.3 THE BURNT MOUNTAIN THEORY VS. GEOLOGY	294
15.4 DESERT VARNISH THEORY	296
15.5 BURNT MOUNTAIN CONCLUSION	297
CHAPTER 16: GEOLOGY IN THE <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> REGION	299
16.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE ROCK TYPES	299
16.2 THE EARLY GEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF <i>MIDIAN</i>	304
16.3 SUMMARY OF THE <i>MIDIAN</i> GEOLOGICAL HISTORY	305
16.4 OVERVIEW IN THE <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> AREA GEOLOGY	306
16.5 LIGHT-COLORED ROCKS OF THE EASTERN <i>LAWZ</i> RANGE	309
16.6 LIGHT-COLORED ROCKS WEST OF THE <i>LAWZ</i> RANGE	309
16.7 THE DARK ROCK ON <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i>	314
16.8 SUMMARY OF THE <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> GEOLOGY	321
16.9 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> GEOLOGY	322

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 17: THEOPHANY AT MOUNT SINAI	324
17.1 IDENTIFYING THEOPHANIES	325
17.2 CONTRA GEOLOGICAL CHANGE	326
17.3 THEOPHANY CONCLUSION.....	330
CHAPTER 18: PREFACE TO AN ARABIAN EXODUS ROUTE	331
18.1 THE ROAD TRAVELED THUS FAR.....	331
18.2 REVIEW OF THE SEA CROSSING.....	332
18.3 EXODUS TRAVEL PARAMETERS.....	338
18.4 THE EXODUS CENSUS.....	339
18.5 PREFACE TO THE ROUTE CONCLUDED.....	348
CHAPTER 19: EXODUS ROUTE PART I—THE SEA TO MARAH	350
19.1 ON THE FAR SHORE	350
19.2 BLOCKED PASSAGES ALONG THE EASTERN GULF SHORE.....	354
19.3 INTRODUCING THE WILDERNESSES OF <i>SHUR</i> AND <i>ETHAM</i>	356
19.4 THE <i>WILDERNESS OF ETHAM</i>	357
19.5 THE <i>WILDERNESS OF SHUR</i>	360
19.6 MOSES’ USAGE OF THE WILDERNESSES OF <i>ETHAM</i> AND <i>SHUR</i>	362
19.7 THE ROUTE TO <i>MARAH</i>	367
19.8 SUMMARIZING: THE <i>SEA TO MARAH</i>	373
CHAPTER 20: EXODUS ROUTE PART II: MARAH TO THE SEA	374
20.1 TO <i>ELIM</i>	375
20.2 ALTERNATE <i>ELIM</i> IDEAS	379
20.3 TO <i>YAM SUPH</i>	384
20.4 THE FATE OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMY	385
20.5 SUMMARY: <i>MARAH TO YAM SUPH</i>	390
CHAPTER 21: EXODUS ROUTE PART III: YAM SUPH TO REPHIDIM	392
21.1 THE WILDERNESS OF SIN.....	393
21.2 THE EXODUS ROUTE AND THE <i>WILDERNESS OF SIN</i>	398
21.3 TO <i>DOPKHAH</i> AND <i>ALUSH</i>	401
21.4 TO REPHIDIM	406
21.5 <i>YAM SUPH TO REPHIDIM</i> SUMMARY	408
CHAPTER 22: EXODUS ROUTE PART IV: REPHIDIM	410
22.1 THE ARRIVAL IN <i>REPHIDIM</i>	410
22.2 DEFINING <i>REPHIDIM</i>	413
22.3 APPLYING THE DERIVATION OF <i>REPHIDIM</i>	413
CHAPTER 23: EXODUS ROUTE PART V: THE ROCK IN HOREB	418
23.1 THE BIBLICAL ROCK VOCABULARY	418
23.2 THE “ROCK IN HOREB” DETAILS.....	420
23.3 RATIONALE FOR THE SURMISED ROCK IN <i>HOREB</i> SITE	422
23.4 GEOLOGY AND THE ROCK IN <i>HOREB</i>	423
23.5 HYDROLOGY IN THE <i>AL-BATRA</i> AREA.....	426
23.6 LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS IN THE <i>HOREB</i> EVENT	429
23.7 THE ROCK IN <i>HOREB</i> CONCLUDED.....	434
CHAPTER 24: EXODUS ROUTE PART VI: TO MOUNT SINAI	437
24.1 THE BATTLE WITH THE AMALEKITES.....	437
24.2 EXITING <i>REPHIDIM</i>	443
24.3 THE WILDERNESS OF SINAI	444
24.4 THE TRAVEL TIME FROM EGYPT	448

CONTENTS

24.5 REACHING MOUNT SINAI.....	451
24.6 AT THE MOUNTAIN	452
24.7 SOME TABERNACLE DETAILS	460
CHAPTER 25: THE EXODUS MYSTERIES CONCLUDED	462
25.1 PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS	463
25.2 SETTING THE STAGE	464
25.3 THE GEOGRAPHICAL FOUNDATION	464
25.4 THE APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL GEOGRAPHY	465
25.5 <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i> GEOLOGY	466
25.6 <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i> ARCHAEOLOGY	467
25.7 THE JOURNEY SYNOPSIS	467
25.8 OVERALL TRAVEL OBSERVATIONS	470
25.9 A FAREWELL	471
EPILOGUE: TRAVELS BEYOND MOUNT SINAI	472
E.1 THE INITIAL EVENTS BEYOND MOUNT SINAI	472
E.2 REVISITING THE ROAD TO <i>KADESH</i>	475
E.3 THE LOCATION OF <i>KADESH</i>	477
E.4 OTHER <i>KADESH</i> THEORIES.....	490
E.5 THE FORTIETH YEAR	496
E.6 MOSES' FINAL DAYS	498
E.7 MOSES' FINAL WORDS.....	499
APPENDIX 1: NEOM.....	501
A1.1 THE PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	501
A1.2 THE INFRASTRUCTURE.....	501
A1.3 THE <i>NEOM</i> PHILOSOPHY	504
A1.4 THE IRONY OF THE <i>NEOM</i> PROJECT	506
APPENDIX 2: THE “SPLIT ROCK” LOCATION.....	507
APPENDIX 3: THE AMAZING GEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF <i>MIDIAN</i>.....	509
APPENDIX 4: WAS MOUNT SINAI A VOLCANO?	515
A4.1 HISTORY OF THE VOLCANO THEORY	515
A4.2 THE VOLCANIC THEORY IN THE 21 ST CENTURY.....	518
A4.3 SUMMARY OF THE VOLCANIC IDEA	519
A4.4 THE VOLCANIC HAZARDS.....	520
A4.5 THE BIBLICAL CONDITIONS.....	520
A4.6 THE VOLCANIC THEORIES CONCLUDED	522
REFERENCES	523
INDEX.....	544

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 0.1 At <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	xvi
Figure 0.2 Overlooking <i>Mada'in Saleh</i> in Northwest Saudi Arabia.	xvii
Figure 0.3 The Surmised <i>Yam Suph</i> of the Exodus	xviii
Figure 0.4 The Exodus Red Sea Crossing ca. 1816.....	xix
Figure 0.5 U.S.-Saudi Arabia Size Comparison.....	xxi
Figure 1.1 The Region of the Exodus.....	xxii
Figure 1.2 An Exodus Route ca. AD 1562	2
Figure 2.1 Passage through the Red Sea.....	8
Figure 2.2 The Red Sea ca. 1690.....	10
Figure 2.3 <i>Yam Suph</i> : Landmark of the Promised Land.....	12
Figure 2.4 Modern Border Mirroring Exo. 23:31	13
Figure 2.5 The Gulf of Aqaba Structure.....	14
Figure 2.6 The Seafloor East of <i>Nuweiba</i>	15
Figure 2.7 A Comparison of Gulf of Aqaba Sea Floor Profiles	17
Figure 3.1 Moses on Mount Sinai.	20
Figure 3.2 <i>Midian</i> in the Arabian Peninsula.....	21
Figure 3.3 <i>Midian</i> Prior to the Gulf of Aqaba Mapping.....	22
Figure 3.4 Beke's Exodus Route in Arabia	24
Figure 3.5 The Position of <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> in Northwest Saudi Arabia.....	26
Figure 3.6 The <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Range.....	27
Figure 3.7 Western Travelers in <i>Midian</i> ca. 2003	32
Figure 3.8 Typical Warning at Kingdom Archaeological Sites.....	33
Figure 4.1 Map of the <i>Midian</i> Region.	36
Figure 4.2 Confusion about <i>Midian's</i> Location.....	38
Figure 4.3 A Renaissance-era Version of Ptolemy's Asia IV Map.....	41
Figure 4.4 Sanson's 1654 Map of Arabia.....	42
Figure 4.5 <i>Midian</i> Towns in Ptolemy's Mapping.....	43
Figure 4.6 <i>Madian</i> as "Megar-el Shuaib" ca. 1765	47
Figure 4.7 <i>Midian</i> as a Province of Egypt.....	49
Figure 4.8 Northwest Saudi Arabia Map.....	50
Figure 5.1 Trade Routes Near Ancient <i>Midian</i>	54
Figure 5.2 False Color Infrared Satellite Image of <i>Midian</i>	56
Figure 5.3 Infrared Satellite Image of the <i>Al-Bad'</i> Oasis	58
Figure 5.4 The <i>Al-Bad'</i> Area ca. 1910	59
Figure 5.5 <i>Makna</i> Viewed from the Gulf of Aqaba in 1874.....	60
Figure 5.6 Infrared Satellite Image of <i>Wadi al-Hamd</i>	61
Figure 5.7 Beke's 1878 Map of <i>Makna</i>	62
Figure 5.8 Infrared Satellite Image of <i>Makna</i>	63
Figure 5.9 A Satellite Image of <i>Makna</i>	64
Figure 5.10 "Mosque of Moses" at <i>Makna</i>	65
Figure 5.11 Outline of the Byzantine Church Plan at <i>Madaba</i>	65
Figure 5.12 Musil's Map of <i>Midian</i> ca. 1910.....	67
Figure 5.13 Infrared Satellite Image of the Aynunah Oasis and Al-Khuraybah.....	68
Figure 5.14 Aynunah Area Viewed from the Gulf ca. 1874	69
Figure 5.15 Infrared Satellite Image of <i>Ash-Sharma</i>	71
Figure 5.16 <i>Qurayyah</i> Painted Ware Motifs	74
Figure 5.17 The Projected Domain for the Land of <i>Midian</i>	76
Figure 5.18 <i>Madyan</i> on a Tactical Pilotage Chart ca. 1988.....	77
Figure 6.1 The <i>Hijaz</i> Range in Northwest Arabia	79
Figure 6.2 Schematic Cross-Section of the <i>Midian</i> Topography.....	80
Figure 6.3 The "Lip" of the <i>Hisma</i>	81
Figure 6.4 <i>Al-Hisma</i> Location.	82
Figure 6.5 The <i>Hisma</i> Sandstone Formations	83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 6.6 The Mountainous Triangle Above <i>Midian</i>	85
Figure 6.7 The Major Mountains in the Greater <i>Midian</i> Region.....	86
Figure 6.8 <i>Jabal az-Zuhd</i> : Aerial View from the East.....	90
Figure 6.9 <i>Jabal Ḥarb</i> : Aerial View from the Southeast.....	91
Figure 6.10 <i>Jabal Ḥarb</i> Viewed from the West	92
Figure 6.11 Diagram of the <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Range.....	95
Figure 6.12 <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Range Viewed from the Southeast	96
Figure 6.13 The “Radar Peak.”.....	98
Figure 6.14 The Name of <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> ca. 1765	100
Figure 6.15 <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> as “Jibbel Tybut Issum” ca. 1833	102
Figure 6.16 Burton’s 1878 Map Showing <i>Jebel El Lauz</i>	103
Figure 7.1 The Sinai Peninsula Labeled as <i>Arabia Petraea</i>	105
Figure 7.2 Ptolemaic Map of Northern Arabia.....	109
Figure 7.3 Arabia ca. 1719	111
Figure 7.4 The Longitude of Old Jerusalem.....	113
Figure 7.5 The Jerusalem Meridian within <i>Midian</i>	114
Figure 7.6 Mapping the AD-534 Arch-Bishopric #22.....	116
Figure 7.7 The Rock that Moses Struck for Water	121
Figure 7.8 <i>Ayun Musa</i> ca. 1938	122
Figure 8.1 Mapping the Meaning of <i>Sinai</i>	129
Figure 8.2 Mapping <i>Horeb</i>	132
Figure 8.3 Sinai and Horeb as Separate Mountains.....	133
Figure 8.4 The 1869 British Ordnance Map of Mount Sinai.....	134
Figure 8.5 Venn Diagram of the <i>Sinai-Horeb</i> Relationship.....	135
Figure 8.6 Distribution of the <i>Sinai</i> and <i>Horeb</i> Terms in the Torah.....	139
Figure 8.7 Moses’ Mental Mapping Involving <i>Sinai</i> and <i>Horeb</i>	140
Figure 9.1 Moses at the Well in <i>Midian</i> with Jethro’s Daughters	143
Figure 9.2 Archaeological Sites near <i>Aynunah</i>	145
Figure 9.3 Proxy Data Show a Wetter Climate During the Exodus	147
Figure 9.4 Desert Pavement in the <i>Hisma</i> Near <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i>	149
Figure 9.5 <i>Raza</i> or <i>Ghada</i> (<i>Haloxylon persicum</i>)	150
Figure 9.6 A Sheep Huddle Near <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i>	152
Figure 9.7 Black Bedouin Goats on the Slopes of <i>Jabal Maqla</i>	153
Figure 9.8 Moses Tending Sheep in <i>Midian</i>	154
Figure 9.9 The <i>Arfaj</i> Plant.....	155
Figure 9.10 Cross-Section Diagram of the <i>Midian</i> Region Topography.....	156
Figure 9.11 Moses’ Journey to the Mountain of God.....	158
Figure 9.12 Moses’ Mental Map of the <i>Midian</i> Region	159
Figure 9.13 Moses at the Burning Bush	161
Figure 10.1 Roads Near <i>Midian</i> in the 19th-Century	164
Figure 10.2 The Egyptian Hajj Route in <i>Midian</i>	166
Figure 10.3 Travel Corridors Near Ancient <i>Midian</i>	167
Figure 10.4 The Rawwafah Temple Location	170
Figure 10.5 The “Southern Route” Viewed from the East	173
Figure 10.6 The “South Route” as Mapped in 1959.....	174
Figure 10.7 Routes to the Eastern <i>Jabal al-Lawz Range</i>	177
Figure 11.1 The Two <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Peaks	180
Figure 11.2 The Eastern Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	181
Figure 11.3 The Eastern Slopes of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	182
Figure 11.4 <i>Wadi al-Abyad</i> at <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	183
Figure 11.5 The Expanse East of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	184
Figure 11.6 Activity at the Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	185
Figure 11.7 Gas Station at the Foot of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	186
Figure 11.8 Hydrology at the Eastern Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	188
Figure 11.9 Aerial View of the Potential Lakebed.....	189
Figure 11.10 Aerial View of the Outflow Area.....	190

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 11.11 The Ravine on the East Face of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	191
Figure 11.12 Aerial View of the East Face of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	192
Figure 11.13 Steep, Rough Slopes North of the <i>Maqla</i> Ravine	193
Figure 11.14 Almond Trees in the Upper <i>Maqla</i> Ravine	194
Figure 11.15 A View from the Upper <i>Maqla</i> Ravine.....	195
Figure 11.16 The “Headwaters” of <i>Wadi al-Abyad</i>	196
Figure 11.17 A 2003 Campsite at Philby’s 1953 Stopping Point.....	198
Figure 12.1 A Typical Burial Cairn.....	201
Figure 12.2 Results of the 1984 Epigraphic Survey	202
Figure 12.3 Archaeology Sites in the <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Vicinity	204
Figure 12.4 The “Cemetery” Site	206
Figure 12.5 The Gate at the Northeast Corner of the “Cemetery.”.....	207
Figure 12.6 Cairns in the “Cemetery.”	208
Figure 12.7 “Cemetery” Boulder Scatter from Human Activity	208
Figure 12.8 A Large <i>Standing Stone</i>	209
Figure 12.9 A Field of Standing Stones	210
Figure 12.10 The “Cemetery” Landscape	210
Figure 12.11 Standing Stones in the Periphery of the “Cemetery.”	211
Figure 12.12 Satellite Image Analysis of the Cemetery Site.....	212
Figure 12.13 Aerial View of the “Modern” Cemetery	213
Figure 12.14 The “Modern” Cemetery.....	214
Figure 12.15 The Masyoon Site	215
Figure 12.16 Satellite Image of the Petroglyph Site.....	217
Figure 12.17 The Petroglyph Site.....	218
Figure 12.18 Petroglyph Site Viewed from the South.....	218
Figure 12.19 Bovine Images within the Petroglyph Fence.....	219
Figure 12.20 David Fasold’s Map to <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i>	220
Figure 12.21 The Golden Calf Idolatry	221
Figure 12.22 Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs Picturing Cattle.....	222
Figure 13.1 The North End of the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Fence	228
Figure 13.2 The Rock Art Panel Location at <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	229
Figure 13.3 Rock Art Panel at the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Base.....	230
Figure 13.4 Bovine Rock Art Styles in Northwest Arabia	231
Figure 13.5 The Bovine-Human Petroglyph	234
Figure 13.6 The Goddess Nut Depicted as the “Celestial Cow.”	234
Figure 13.7 A Projection of the Stone Column Locations.....	237
Figure 13.8 Oblique Aerial View of the Circular Stone Columns.....	239
Figure 13.9 The Circular Stone Column Site	240
Figure 13.10 Overhead View of the Stone Column Site	241
Figure 13.11 The Proposed Structure of the Below-Ground Stone Circles.....	242
Figure 13.12 The Column Excavated by Wyatt and Fasold.....	243
Figure 13.13 Column Excavated by the Saudis.....	244
Figure 13.14 The North End of the Column Excavated by the Saudis.....	244
Figure 13.15 Infrared Satellite Image of the “Altar.”	246
Figure 13.16 “Altar” Structure Schematic.....	247
Figure 13.17 The “Altar” Prior to the Saudi Excavation.....	248
Figure 13.18 Pre-excavation View of the “Altar” from the South.	249
Figure 13.19 Pre-excavation View of the “Altar” from the Northwest.	249
Figure 13.20 The “Altar” Chutes after Excavation	250
Figure 13.21 Northeastern Aspect of the “Altar.”	251
Figure 13.22 The “Altar” Viewed from the Northwest	252
Figure 13.23 The Stratigraphy of Section 2	255
Figure 13.24 Excavation Cross Section of the Altar “Chutes.”	255
Figure 14.1 Marble Remnants at the Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> ca 1994	259
Figure 14.2 Marble Pillar Sections Near the “Altar”.....	259
Figure 14.3 Pillar Remnants at the Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	260

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 14.4 An Unfinished Pillar in the Quarry	261
Figure 14.5 The Pillar Diameters	262
Figure 14.6 An Incomplete Pillar in the Quarry	263
Figure 14.7 White Outcroppings on <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	264
Figure 14.8 The Spectral Plot for White Marble	265
Figure 14.9 The Marble Deposits at <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	266
Figure 14.10 The Quarry Area on <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	268
Figure 14.11 The West End of the Quarry	268
Figure 14.12 In the Marble Quarry.....	269
Figure 14.13 The Quarry Site Relative to the <i>Maqla</i> Peak and Ravine.....	270
Figure 14.14 The Trenching Technique in the Quarry	271
Figure 14.15 Simultaneous Trenching and Wedge Pocket Use.....	272
Figure 14.16 Metal Wedge Pockets.....	273
Figure 14.17 Uniform Furrows on the Worked Marble	274
Figure 14.18 Vertical Furrows Left by a Claw Chisel.....	275
Figure 14.19 Iron Claw Chisel Design	276
Figure 14.20 Diagonal and Vertical Claw Chisel Furrows.....	276
Figure 14.21 X-Ray Wavelength Pattern of a <i>Maqla</i> Marble Sample.....	281
Figure 14.22 Texas A&M Electron Micro Probe Analyzer (EMPA).....	281
Figure 14.23 Texas A&M Geology Department EMPA Lab.....	282
Figure 14.24 <i>Rawwafah</i> Temple Ruins and Plan.....	285
Figure 14.25 A <i>Maqla</i> Quarry Inscription.....	289
Figure 15.1 The Dark Peak of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	290
Figure 15.2 Granite from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	293
Figure 15.3 A Granite <i>Gneiss</i> Boulder	294
Figure 15.4 Granite Gneiss from Upper <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	295
Figure 15.5 An Example of Desert Varnish	297
Figure 15.6 Dikes, Margins, and Marble on <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	298
Figure 16.1 The Basic Rock Types on Upper <i>Jabal-al-Maqla</i>	299
Figure 16.2 Convergence of Rock Types on <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	300
Figure 16.3 Basalt Covered with Iron Oxide at <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	302
Figure 16.4 The Barrovian Metamorphism Model.....	303
Figure 16.5 Diagram of the Island-Arc Process	304
Figure 16.6 Geological Map of the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Area	307
Figure 16.7 Distribution of Dark Rock Near <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	308
Figure 16.8 Granite with a Jadeite Veneer	310
Figure 16.9 The “Split Rock” <i>Hoodoo</i> Viewed from the Southwest.....	311
Figure 16.10 Geological Map of the “Split Rock” Area	312
Figure 16.11 <i>Hornblende Monzonite</i> from the “Split Rock” Area.....	313
Figure 16.12 Exfoliation Weathering on the “Split Rock” <i>Hoodoo</i>	314
Figure 16.13 “Greenstone” (Metamorphic Basalt) from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	315
Figure 16.14 Diabase from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	316
Figure 16.15 Basalt from upper <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	317
Figure 16.16 Reverse Side of the Figure 16.15 Basalt	318
Figure 16.17 A Unique Basalt Sample from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	319
Figure 16.18 The Above Basalt Under Magnification	319
Figure 16.19 Typical Basalt from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	320
Figure 16.20 The Upper Peak of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	321
Figure 16.21 Basalt from the Upper <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Peak.....	322
Figure 16.22 Interior of the Basalt from the Upper <i>Maqla</i>	323
Figure 17.1 Moses Receiving the Law	324
Figure 17.2 The First Tables of Stone	327
Figure 17.3 The Giving of the Law at Mount Sinai	329
Figure 18.1 A Diagrammatic Approach to Mapping the Exodus	331
Figure 18.2 The Proposed Exodus Route Between Egypt and the Sea	334
Figure 18.3 Aerial View Looking Towards the Arabian Shore.....	335

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 18.4 Moses Extended His Hand Over the Sea	336
Figure 18.5 Pharaoh Pursues the Israelites Across the Red Sea.....	337
Figure 18.6 Jacob Departing for Egypt	340
Figure 18.7 The Twelve Tribes of Israel Camped Around the Tabernacle	343
Figure 18.8 Moses Brings Water out of the Rock at <i>Kadesh</i>	349
Figure 19.1 The Projected Route from <i>Yam Suph</i> to <i>Marah</i>	351
Figure 19.2 The Arabian Beachhead.....	351
Figure 19.3 On the Beach Looking East into <i>Wadi al-Hashā</i>	352
Figure 19.4 Within <i>Wadi al-Hashā</i>	352
Figure 19.5 Topographical Map of <i>Wadi al-Hashā</i>	353
Figure 19.6 Saudi Coastal Road Construction Phases.....	355
Figure 19.7 The <i>Etham</i> Enigma.....	357
Figure 19.8 An Egyptology <i>Etham</i> Theory ca. 1883.....	358
Figure 19.9 The Location of <i>Shur</i> According to Gen. 25:18.....	361
Figure 19.10 A Supposed <i>Havilah</i> Location ca. 1765.....	363
Figure 19.11 <i>Shur</i> and its Southern Wilderness	364
Figure 19.12 A View of <i>Shur</i> from the West	365
Figure 19.13 The Overlap of <i>Etham</i> and the Wilderness of <i>Shur</i>	366
Figure 19.14 The Proposed Exodus Route between <i>Yam Suph</i> and <i>Marah</i>	368
Figure 19.15 <i>Wadi al-'Ifal</i>	369
Figure 19.16 The Proposed <i>Marah</i> Area.....	370
Figure 19.17 Hydrology in the <i>Marah</i> Area.....	371
Figure 19.18 Musil's 1910 Map Showing <i>Mrāḥ</i>	372
Figure 20.1 The Route from <i>Marah</i>	375
Figure 20.2 The Exodus Route from <i>Marah</i> to the Sea.....	376
Figure 20.3 Infrared Satellite Image of the <i>Elim</i> Region.....	377
Figure 20.4 Evidence of Water Resources in <i>Wadi al-Hamd</i>	378
Figure 20.5 Har-El's Exodus Route	379
Figure 20.6 Satellite Image of the <i>Tayyib al-Isim</i> Oasis.....	381
Figure 20.7 Routes to the <i>Tayyib al-Isim</i> Oasis.....	382
Figure 20.8 The Mouth of the <i>Tayyib al-Isim</i> Gorge.....	383
Figure 20.9 The Fate of Pharaoh and His Army.....	386
Figure 20.10 Gulf of Aqaba Depth-Temperature Graph	387
Figure 20.11 The Fate of Pharaoh's Drowned Army	389
Figure 20.12 The Coast of the Egyptian Army Wreckage	390
Figure 21.1 The Estimated Route between <i>Yam Suph</i> and <i>Rephidim</i>	393
Figure 21.2 The Israelites Gather Manna in the Wilderness	394
Figure 21.3 Spring Bird Migration Patterns from Africa	396
Figure 21.4 The Position of the <i>Wilderness of Sin</i>	397
Figure 21.5 The 'Ifal Triangle Landscape South of <i>Al-Bad</i> '	398
Figure 21.6 The Author in the Proposed <i>Wilderness of Sin</i>	399
Figure 21.7 The Red Sea Coast East of <i>Wadi al-'Ifal</i>	400
Figure 21.8 The Exodus Route to <i>Rephidim</i>	402
Figure 21.9 The Plain West of <i>Jabal Harb</i>	403
Figure 21.10 Looking East (Uphill) in <i>Wadi Tiryam</i> near <i>Jabal Harb</i>	403
Figure 21.11 The <i>Dophkah</i> District Near <i>Jabal Harb</i>	404
Figure 21.12 The <i>Alush</i> District within <i>Wadi Sadr</i>	405
Figure 21.13 Looking Southeast Up <i>Wadi Sadr</i>	406
Figure 21.14 Looking Northwest (downhill) within <i>Wadi Sadr</i>	407
Figure 21.15 Highway 80 Near the Old <i>Khuraitah</i> Pass	408
Figure 21.16 The Red Sands of the <i>Hisma</i>	409
Figure 22.1 The Exodus Track from the Sea to Sinai.....	411
Figure 22.2 The Southern <i>Hisma</i> Plateau Near the <i>Khuraitah</i> Pass	412
Figure 22.3 <i>Rephidim</i> and the <i>Wilderness of Sinai</i> in <i>Horeb</i>	414
Figure 22.4 Typical <i>Hisma</i> Rock Formations	415
Figure 22.5 The Northern <i>Hisma</i> is Characterized by Large Jebels	416

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 22.6 Illustrating the <i>Hisma</i> Jebel Sizes and Distribution	416
Figure 22.7 A Place of Rest in the Wilderness	417
Figure 22.8 The Shade of a <i>Jebel</i> in the <i>Hisma</i>	417
Figure 23.1 The Estimated Position of the Rock in <i>Horeb</i>	419
Figure 23.2 The Rock in <i>Horeb</i> ?	421
Figure 23.3 The <i>Al-Batra</i> Volcanic Cone	421
Figure 23.4 <i>Al-Batra</i> Viewed from the West-Northwest	422
Figure 23.5 Geology in the Rock in <i>Horeb</i>	424
Figure 23.6 <i>Scoria</i> Basalt from the <i>Al-Batra</i> Cinder Cone	425
Figure 23.7 Quartz Pebbles from the <i>Sabkha</i> West of <i>Al-Batra</i>	425
Figure 23.8 Geology in the Rock in <i>Horeb</i> Area	427
Figure 23.9 The <i>Sabkha</i> West of the Projected Rock in <i>Horeb</i>	428
Figure 23.10 Raphael's Depiction of the Rock in <i>Horeb</i>	431
Figure 23.11 The Problematic <i>Tsur</i> Vowels in Exo. 17:6	433
Figure 23.12 The <i>Direct Object Marker</i> Use with <i>Sela</i>	434
Figure 23.13 <i>Al-Batra</i> Cinder Cone Viewed from the West	435
Figure 24.1 The Proposed Route From <i>Rephidim</i> to <i>Mount Sinai</i>	438
Figure 24.2 Amalek Defeated	440
Figure 24.3 A Sandstone Jebel in the <i>Hisma</i> Plateau	441
Figure 24.4 Moses, Aaron, and Hur in the Amalekite Battle	442
Figure 24.5 The Highway 8784 Interchange Near <i>Wadi ar-Rayt</i>	443
Figure 24.6 Looking North Near the Left Turn into <i>Wadi ar-Rayt</i>	444
Figure 24.7 The Proposed Route From <i>Rephidim</i> to <i>Mount Sinai</i>	446
Figure 24.8 Entering <i>Wadi ar-Rayt</i>	447
Figure 24.9 Stone Circles in <i>Wadi ar-Rayt</i>	447
Figure 24.10 Satellite Image of the Stone Circles in <i>Wadi ar-Rayt</i>	448
Figure 24.11 Looking North in <i>Wadi ar-Rayt</i> to the Open Plain.	449
Figure 24.12 The Open Plain of Upper <i>Wadi ar-Rayt</i>	450
Figure 24.13 Topographical Map of the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Area	453
Figure 24.14 The Dark Lesser Peak of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	454
Figure 24.15 Promulgation of the Law	455
Figure 24.16 Moses with the 10 Commandments	457
Figure 24.17 Moses Discovers the Golden Calf Idolatry	458
Figure 24.18 The Tabernacle Built at <i>Mount Sinai</i>	460
Figure 24.19 The Israelites' Encampment	461
Figure 25.1 Exodus Journey Synopsis	468
Figure 25.2 Seen on the Slopes of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	471
Figure E.1 Geography Related to <i>Kadesh</i>	473
Figure E.2 The <i>Aravah</i> Travels	474
Figure E.3 Sending Messengers from <i>Kadesh</i>	476
Figure E.4 Watersheds of the Wildernesses	480
Figure E.5 The Theorized <i>Zin</i> or <i>Mount Hor</i>	481
Figure E.6 Topographical Map of <i>Har Zin</i>	482
Figure E.7 <i>Kadesh, Zin, Mount Hor</i> ca. 1863	483
Figure E.8 <i>Zin Valley</i> or <i>Biq'at Zin</i>	485
Figure E.9 <i>Kadesh</i> and the Border of Judah	486
Figure E.10 The Spies' Journey from <i>Kadesh</i> to <i>Hebron</i>	488
Figure E.11 Robinson's ' <i>Ain el-Weibah Kadesh</i>	492
Figure E.12 The ' <i>Ain el-Qudeirat</i> Location for <i>Kadesh-barnea</i>	492
Figure E.13 ' <i>Ain Qadeis</i> ca. 1900	493
Figure E.14 The Position of <i>Kadesh Barnea</i> ca. 1720	495
Figure E.15 The <i>Kadesh</i> Location ca. 1841	495
Figure E.16 The 40 th -Year Journeys Between <i>Kadesh</i> and <i>Jericho</i>	497
Figure E.17 Moses with the Stone Tablets	500
Figure A1.1 Boundaries of the <i>Neom</i> Region	502
Figure A1.2 The <i>Madyan</i> Gas Wellfield	503

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure A1.3 The Gas Processing Plant at the <i>Madyan</i> Wellfield	504
Figure A1.4 Coastal Palace/Hotel Complex near <i>Sharma</i>	505
Figure A2.1 The “Split Rock” Position Relative to <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	507
Figure A2.2 Reaching the “Split Rock.”	508
Figure A3.1 The Ancient Supercontinent of Gondwana	509
Figure A3.2 <i>Midian</i> Covered by the Sea 510 Mya.....	510
Figure A3.3 The Terranes of the <i>Arabian-Nubian Shield (ANS)</i>	511
Figure A3.4 Diagram of the Island-Arc Process	512
Figure A4.1. Locations of <i>Hala-l-Bedr</i> , <i>G. Baghir</i> , and <i>‘Ain Qadeis</i>	516
Figure A4.2 <i>Hala-l-Bedr</i> Viewed from the South	517
Figure A4.3 The 1872 Eruption of Mount Vesuvius.....	521

LIST OF TABLES

1.1 Exodus Itinerary between the Sea and Mount Sinai	5
6.1 Notable Mountains in the <i>Midian</i> Region	87
6.2 Musil's Transliteration Key	93
7.1 Ancient and Modern Longitudes of Jerusalem and <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i>	112
8.1 The Exodus Itinerary between the Sea and Mount Sinai	136
8.2 <i>Horeb</i> and <i>Sinai</i> Occurrences in the <i>Torah</i>	139
14.1 Elemental Comparison of <i>Maqla</i> Marble and White Petra Marbles.....	280
19.1 The Sea to the Mountain Itinerary	350
20.1 The Sea to the Mountain Itinerary	374
21.1 The Sea to the Mountain Itinerary	392
22.1 The Sea to the Mountain Itinerary	410
23.1 <i>Tsur</i> Phrases Pertinent to the Rock in <i>Horeb</i>	430
24.1 The Sea to the Mountain Itinerary	437
24.2 Moses' Excursions on Mount Sinai	459

FOREWORD

There is an unhappy tendency in the present day to consider science and modern discovery as antagonistic to Scripture truth; and against this pernicious notion I would now protest, for truth was never known to suffer from honest inquiry. Something there must always be that requires more than material proof, that can be grasped by faith alone; but he who investigates fearlessly and reverently will be thankful for the light which science sheds, and not despair if she leaves something unrevealed.

--Orientalist E. H. Palmer, *The Desert of the Exodus* (1871, 530)

The enigmas of the Exodus unexpectedly overtook my thoughts during my first visit to the Near East in 1996, when fellow travelers expressed dismay about the confusion surrounding the location of Mount Sinai. It seemed to me that there had to be an explanation and, by the year 2000, I had begun serious study of the Exodus. I soon discovered that cartographic and satellite imagery analysis skills would be helpful in my quest to retrace the route, which propelled me into graduate-level geography studies at Texas State University. Although I had not set out to earn a degree, I did receive a PhD in 2006.

Over the last two decades, some passionate rhetoric has been launched by pundits who favor a Sinai Peninsula location for Mount Sinai over an Arabian Peninsula location such as the *Jabal al-Lawz* mountain range. However, this polemic really boils down to a disagreement about the location of the sea of the Exodus, the Hebrew *Yam Suph* that was miraculously parted. Was it near Egypt, or was it on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula at the Gulf of Aqaba? Unfortunately, the “Red Sea” term used in Bible translations is too generic to differentiate between its two gulfs and, by itself, cannot answer this question.

My 2006 PhD dissertation, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus*, demonstrated that *Yam Suph* coincides with the Gulf of Aqaba. But that determination is controversial because it negates the traditional rationale for a Mount Sinai within the Sinai Peninsula, and predicts a location farther east in Arabia--perhaps in the vicinity of ancient *Midian*.

Having studied the history and geography of this region, and also having visited *Jabal al-Lawz* and the area ascribed to *Midian*, I am sensitive to the various Exodus claims made about this district. It does not require much internet searching to find



Figure 0.1 At *Jabal al-Maqla*.

FOREWORD

problematic notions and arguments, both pro and con, concerning Exodus activity in this part of northwest Arabia.

In reality, much of the confusion is due to incomplete or second-hand knowledge of the area, which has been infrequently visited and poorly studied, leaving many questions unanswered. The obvious solution is to provide more factual information about the *Midian* region and *Jabal al-Lawz*. Given my training and experiences, I feel a certain duty to utilize the available data to advance reasoned discourse about the potential Exodus activity in northwest Arabia.

The case for a *Mount Sinai* in Arabia cannot be effectively argued without first ascertaining the realm of ancient *Midian* and its relationship with the regional mountains. Laying that foundation paves the way to address the geographical, archaeological, and geological data that may favor a Mount Sinai site within the *Jabal al-Lawz* range. Having a logical Mount Sinai candidate is the prerequisite for estimating the Exodus route beyond the sea crossing, which is the ultimate goal of this work.

This book deliberately provides many detailed arguments with the hope of assisting other investigators. I do not consider myself to be the final authority on these topics—my desire is to share what I have discovered to add depth to the biblical account, and to give others a chance to question and build upon these ideas.

Glen A. Fritz
Vero Beach, Florida
August 2019



Figure 0.2 Overlooking *Mada'in Saleh* in Northwest Saudi Arabia.

PREFACE

Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.

Albert Einstein

“Genius” has been defined as having the ability to make the complex simple. Unfortunately, this book is not simple—mainly because the Exodus was a complex event covering a wide area, and much of its biblical information is arcane and obscure. What can now be said about the event is also greatly expanded and enriched by the plethora of available historical and geographical data.

To do justice to this story requires the definition of numerous terms involving people, places, and things. The key geographical definitions include *Yam Suph* and the biblical land of *Midian*, which has historical associations with the Mount Sinai region. Some understanding of the history, topography, geology, and geography of northwest



Figure 0.3 The Surmised *Yam Suph* of the Exodus. The northern Gulf of Aqaba viewed from the International Space Station. The beachhead in the lower left is suspected as the sea crossing point. (adapted from NASA ISS006-E-41915)

PREFACE

Arabia is also needed to appreciate the rationale for the Mount Sinai location and the associated Exodus route.

This investigation begins in Arabia on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba (**Figure 0.3**), building a case for a Mount Sinai location and the Exodus route needed to reach it. A detailed map showing the position of this mountain and the route could be given now, but without explanation, it would raise many more questions than it would answer. But for those who may be impatient, the overview map can be found in **Chapter 25**.

Two preceding works laid the groundwork for this investigation. *The Lost Sea of the Exodus: A Modern Geographical Analysis, Second Edition* (Fritz 2016a) and *Fire on the Mountain: Geography, Geology & Theophany at Jabal al-Lawz* (Fritz 2016b).

The *Lost Sea* research sought to identify the location of *Yam Suph*, the so-called “Red Sea” that miraculously parted in the Exodus. For most of history, this sea was relegated to the Gulf of Suez near Egypt, as shown in **Figure 0.4**. However, the ancient Hebrew descriptions place it at the Gulf of Aqaba near the biblical “Promised Land.” This realization necessitated an examination of the reasons for the “lost” identity of *Yam Suph*.

The *Fire on the Mountain* book gave an overview of the theory that Mount Sinai was *Jabal al-Maqla* in northwest Saudi Arabia, and reviewed the associated geography, archaeology, and geology. Addressing these topics was warranted because some critics have seized upon various ill-advised archaeological and geological arguments made about *Jabal al-Maqla* to rebut the whole premise of a Mount Sinai in Arabia. In essence, throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Fire on the Mountain also went to great lengths to analyze the geology of *Jabal al-Maqla* because some investigators have claimed that the black rock on its peak was “scorched” by the supernatural heat of God’s presence during the Exodus.



Figure 0.4 The Exodus Red Sea Crossing ca. 1816. The event is pictured at the head of the Gulf of Suez near Egypt. (from Arrowsmith, London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge)

PREFACE

Due to the importance of the *Fire on the Mountain* content, much of its material has been melded into this current work. The advantage for the reader is that it will eliminate the need to refer between two books.

The various Exodus routes that have been postulated over the last 500 years exhibit a pattern of flawed assumptions leading to faulty conclusions. The works preceding the 19th century were clearly hampered by the lack of accurate mapping and ignorance of the physical and historical geography of the region. Works written since the mid-19th century cannot blame the lack of mapping; however, they frequently exhibit other shortcomings including:

1. dismissal of the supernatural component described in the Bible
2. selective use of the biblical geographical data
3. reliance on scholarly and historical traditions over the biblical record
4. inappropriately applying non-geographical tools to geographical problems
5. underestimation of the size and scope of the event

The dominance of such shortcomings, combined with the emergence of more definitive geographical and historical data, have largely relegated the corpus of Exodus route commentaries and atlases to the dustbin of history. My humble aspiration is that this work will avoid a similar fate by relying on sound assumptions, relevant and accurate data, and by avoiding hasty and sensational conclusions.

Explaining the “Hebrew” Term

For the sake of consistency, this work generally uses “Hebrews” to refer to the Israelites, the descendants of *Israel*, the name divinely given to the patriarch *Jacob* (Gen. 32:28). Jacob was the grandson of Abraham, the first person in the Bible to be called a “Hebrew,” which occurred when he dwelt in Hebron in Canaan (Gen. 14:13).

“Hebrew,” pronounced *ivray* in the Hebrew language, means “one from beyond” (Strong 1990, H5680). A modern equivalent might be *alien*. More specifically, the word referred to one from beyond the Euphrates river, “a stranger come from the other side of the Euphrates” (Gesenius 1979, 5680). Such was Abraham’s history before he relocated to the land of Canaan.

The Egyptians uniformly called the Israelites “Hebrews” (e.g., Gen. 39:14, 17; 41:12; Exo. 1:15, 16, 19; 2:7, 11). Summarizing the biblical usage of the term--

The writers of the Old Testament only call the Israelites *Hebrews* when foreigners are introduced as speaking...or when the Israelites speak of themselves to foreigners...or when used in opposition to other nations... (Gesenius 1979, 5680).



Figure 0.5 U.S.-Saudi Arabia Size Comparison. The area of interest in this book is the tiny marked portion of northwest Saudi Arabia. This area includes the *Jabal al-Lawz* mountain range and the domain of ancient *Midian*. The western edge of this area abuts the Gulf of Aqaba. (attribution CIA: *The World Factbook* 2015)

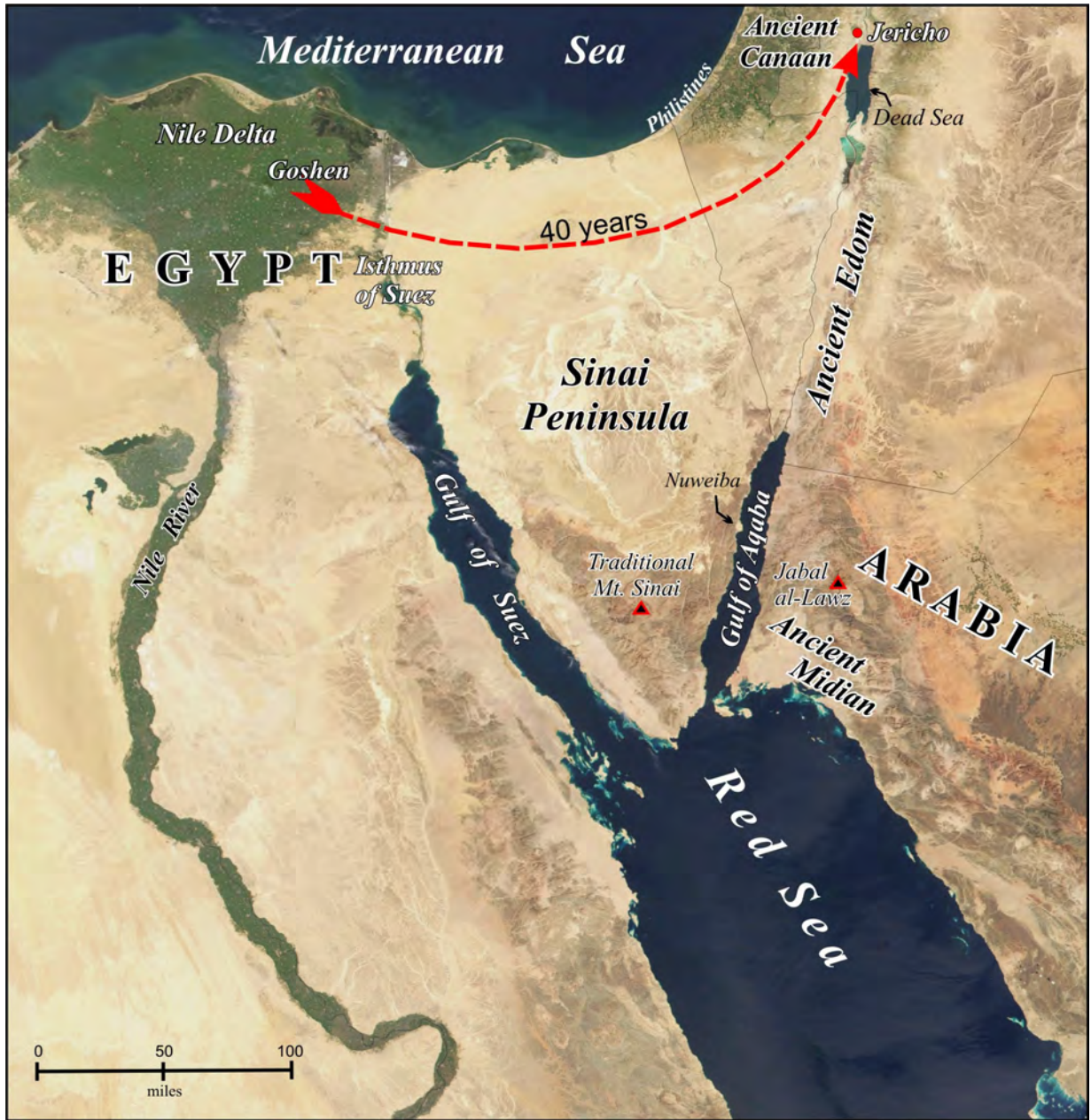


Figure 1.1 The Region of the Exodus.

The triangular Sinai Peninsula is outlined by the Gulf of Suez on the west and the Gulf of Aqaba on the east. The Exodus began in Egypt in *Goshen* and ended 40 years later in *Jericho*. Key Exodus events include the passage through a sea, the encampment at Mount Sinai, and the failed attempt to invade southern *Canaan* from *Kadesh*.

The text explains that *Yam Suph*, the Hebrew name for the Exodus sea, referred to the Gulf of Aqaba. The likely crossing route began at the *Nuweiba* delta. This circumstance suggests a Mount Sinai location farther east in Arabia, such as the *Jabal al-Lawz* range near *Midian*.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIES

If during the course of eighteen centuries, the interpreters have misunderstood and mistranslated the geographical notions contained in Holy Scripture, the error is certainly not due to the sacred history, but to those who, without the knowledge of the history and geography of ancient times, have attempted the task of reconstructing the Exodus of the Hebrews, at any cost, on the level of their own imperfect comprehension.

--Alexander Wheelock Thayer (1883, 46)

The biblical Exodus stands as a premier epic among literature from all ages: a whole people, called Hebrews, rescued from slavery and steered to a new land by Moses, a reluctant leader appointed by God. The Exodus began in *Goshen* in northeast Egypt (Exo. 47:27) ca. 1446 BC (based on the biblical dating). It ended 40 years later when the Promised Land was entered near *Jericho* at the north end of the Dead Sea (**Figure 1.1**). Although there were many intriguing events in this journey, two that have garnered great attention are the miraculous passage through a sea and the 11-month stay at Mount Sinai, where God met with Moses and made His covenant with the Hebrew people.

The ultimate goal of this book is to reconstruct the Exodus journey between the Hebrews' emergence from the sea and their arrival at Mount Sinai. However, in order to do so, a logical location for Mount Sinai must be ascertained, which will require much geographical and historical groundwork. In the process, this investigation will evaluate the more recent claim that Mount Sinai is to be found in the *Jabal al-Lawz* range (**Figure 1.1**) in the northwestern part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The suspected site is a peak called *Jabal al-Maqla*, situated 7.25 km (4.5 mi.) southeast of the main *Jabal al-Lawz* peak.

One difficulty facing this idea is that proponents have yet to publish a credible Exodus route between the suspected Gulf of Aqaba sea crossing and this mountain. The “published” routes have been problematic, traversing impassible terrain, ignoring historical travel patterns, and/or failing to include all of the biblical details. Acceptable routes must account for the conditions and encampments described by Moses, as well as the natural barriers and corridors in the region. Without a definitive, passable route that correlates with the journey’s itinerary and chronology, the hypothesis for a Mount Sinai at *Jabal al-Maqla* becomes more difficult to sustain.

Many Exodus route maps have been published over the centuries, but they are all similar in that they are based on tradition, and lack explanation and geographical reality. The picturesque map in **Figure 1.2** is a 16th-century example. But, to do justice to the biblical account and to offer a defensible rationale, reconstruction of the route between the sea and the mountain will require more than just lines connecting points on a map.

Hence, what will unfold in the coming pages is a meticulous investigation involving historical and physical geography, dealing with real places and real things, latitudes, elevations, and landmarks. There are also some longstanding mysteries to explain, some controversies to settle and, likely, some adventure-minded readers to satisfy.



Figure 1.2 An Exodus Route ca. AD 1562. The map collar reads: " This mappe properly appertaineth to the 33 Chap. of Nombres." Adapted from Richard Harrison, London, 1562. (courtesy of the National Library of Israel)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIES

1.1 The Paradox

The supernatural motif of the Exodus adds controversy and causes the event to be perceived and treated in divergent ways. Although it has been a perennial topic of wonder and fascination, it has also been regarded as a legend and, in the sphere of academia, has mostly been derided or ignored. Especially the miraculous escape of the Hebrews through an opening in a sea, and the destruction of the entire Egyptian army that followed. For example, historian Gösta Ahlström in *The Ancient History of Palestine* declared:

The Exodus legend with its motif of a people saved through the splitting of the sea also belongs to the same category of mythological fiction [as the creation narrative in Genesis] (1993, 27).

Similarly, Egyptologist William Ward observed that "...the Exodus remains a mystery. All except the most ardent defenders of a divine dictation of the narrative agree that it could not have happened the way it is set down" (1997, 110).

To balance these statements, the first commandment of the Ten Commandments, long-revered by Judaism, Christianity, and Western Culture, unabashedly declared that the Exodus happened: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exo. 20:2 NASB).

Beside the sea crossing, a great succession of miracles occurred in the forty years of the Exodus. Even the circumstances leading to the need for an Exodus were miraculous: the unlikely reunification of a long-lost son, Joseph, with his eleven brothers and his father, Jacob, in a foreign land, Egypt. But, this heartwarming state of affairs eventually produced enslavement for their offspring, which required an even greater miracle 215 years later.

The divine plot to deliver this people was laid out for Moses, an improbable leader who "was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). The plan commenced with a series of ten plagues, supernaturally meted out on an entire nation: "I [the LORD] will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go" (Exo. 3:20).

The divine intervention continued as the Hebrews journeyed: "the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night" (Exo. 13:21). The projected size of the Exodus multitude, estimated at perhaps 2.5 million, and the food and water requirements, are difficult to comprehend. The Exodus census is discussed in **Section 18.4**.

Upon arriving at Mount Sinai, the LORD declared to Moses: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Exo. 19:4). Many centuries later, the prophet Nehemiah (9:15) summarized:

[The LORD] gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, and brought forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promised them that they should go in to possess the land which thou had sworn to give them.

But this fantastic record of the miraculous must be balanced by the reality that Moses' account of the Exodus does convey a purposeful and tangible geographical quality. The *Torah*, the five books of Moses, listed over one hundred place names, including nine mountains, nine wildernesses, eight towns, six rivers or valleys, and three seas. In general, the Bible was the most geographical document in the ancient world prior to the works of the ancient Greeks.

Yet, in his chronicle of the Exodus, Moses clearly did not attempt to preserve every particular, and his account was not devised as a geographical treatise. As a practical matter,

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIES

it would have seemed unnecessary to record details that thousands of eyewitnesses beheld. Even so, Num. 33:2 informs us that Moses' writings were not a personal journal, rather: "Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD...." In other words, what has been left for us to investigate here was ultimately determined by God over 3400 years ago. But, is there really enough valid data in Moses' record to find Mount Sinai and reconstruct the journey from the sea to this mountain?

The authenticity of Moses' geography, and the analysis presented in this book, hinge on the reality of what would be the most spectacular and miraculous event in recorded history. But, if these miracles were merely legend or myth, can the biblical geography be trusted? Is it even worth the time required to investigate it?

1.2 Three Underlying Elements

There are three elements or premises that set the stage for reconstructing an Exodus route in Arabia: (1) the identity of the Sea of the Exodus, (2) the location of the Land of *Midian*, and (3) the historical and geographical arguments that suggest an Arabian Mount Sinai location.

1.2.1 The Sea of the Exodus

...Since the *yam suf*, or 'Sea of Reeds,' of the Old Testament in all really historical passages is the Gulf of Aqaba, there is strong reason to insist that it means that in the Exodus story.

--Emil G. Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas* (1956, 108)

The first premise concerns the location of the sea of the Exodus, the sea that parted, which is called *Yam Suph* in the Hebrew Bible. A previous work, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus* (Fritz 2016a), identified it solely as the Gulf of Aqaba. The *Yam Suph* topic will be reviewed in the next chapter.

The Gulf of Aqaba separates the Sinai Peninsula from the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (**Figure 1.1**). An Exodus sea crossing at the eastern edge of the Sinai Peninsula would negate the traditional rationale for a Mount Sinai within the Sinai Peninsula and shift the mountain's likely position into northwest Arabia. Hence, the Exodus journey from the sea to the mountain would begin on the Arabian (eastern) shore of the Gulf of Aqaba.

1.2.2 The Land of Midian

But strong reasons can also be adduced for supposing that the Israelites went to Arabia. We have already seen that the real land of Midian lay there (Kraeling 1956, 108).

The second element is the location of the ancient "Land of Midian," which is linked to geographical clues pertaining to the whereabouts of Mount Sinai. *Midian* was first described as a "land" by the Bible in conjunction with Moses' 40-year exile there from Egypt (Exo. 2:15). It has classically been situated in northwest Arabia along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba and the head of the Red Sea. However, atlases and Exodus investigators have given confusing descriptions of its location and/or minimize its geographical importance relative to Mount Sinai.

A clear estimation of the ancient domain of *Midian* is needed to be able to evaluate the potential relationship between *Midian* and Mount Sinai. There are ancient writings that

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIES

Table 1.1 Exodus Itinerary between the Sea and Mount Sinai

Place	Activity	Reference
Yam Suph (sea)	sea crossing	Exo. 14:22, Num. 33:8
Wilderness of Shur / Etham	3 days' travel	Exo. 15:22, Num. 33:8
Marah	encampment	Exo. 14:23, Num. 33:8
Elim	encampment	Exo. 15:27, Num. 33:9
Yam Suph (sea)	encampment	Num. 33:10
Wilderness of Sin	encampment	Exo. 16:1
Dophkah	encampment	Num. 33:12
Alush	encampment	Num. 33:13
Rephidim	encampment	Exo. 17:1, Num. 33:14
Wilderness of Sinai	encampment	Exo. 19:1, Num. 33:15

situate Mount Sinai in the vicinity of *Midian*, but their clues are ambiguous unless their idea of *Midian* is translated into our modern geographical understanding.

The Bible does not say that Mount Sinai was in *Midian*, but the account of Moses' excursion to the mountain in Exo. 3:1 puts it somewhere in the vicinity. Being able to estimate the place of Moses' *Midian* residence creates a starting point that adds geographical perspective to his description of his journey to the mountain.

1.2.3 An Arabian Mount Sinai

Since the Hebrews got to Aqabah at some point, the idea that the Holy Mount lay somewhere east or south of there has had its attraction. The idea gains its greatest force from the fact that the area is the true 'land of Midian.' Both Josephus and Eusebius did not waiver on this, but imagined Moses as having gone there (Kraeling 1956, 110).

The third element involves the historical and geographical basis to consider an Arabian location for Mount Sinai. To this point, little attention has been given to an Exodus route or a Mount Sinai in Arabia due to the strong tradition for a Mount Sinai in the southern Sinai Peninsula. But this idea was a byproduct of the longstanding ignorance of the Gulf of Aqaba, which limited the Exodus sea-crossing to places near Egypt.

Within northwest Arabia, recent interest has been directed at the *Jabal al-Lawz* mountain range due to its presumed proximity to *Midian* and the fact that it hosts the tallest peak in the region. Within this range, a mount called *Jabal al-Maqla* has received the most scrutiny, mainly due to speculation about archaeological finds and its unusual appearance.

The history of the interest in *Jabal al-Maqla* will be presented in **Chapter 3**. The relationship between *Jabal al-Lawz* and the "Land of Midian" is addressed in later chapters.

1.3 Route Overview: From the Sea to the Mountain

The Exodus itinerary between the sea crossing and Mount Sinai is summarized in **Table 1.1**. The goal of this book is to put these places on a map.

It can be estimated that the Hebrews reached the crossing point at *Yam Suph* (the Gulf of Aqaba) after 18 days of travel from Egypt, at an average pace of 25 km (15.5 mi.)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIES

per day (Fritz 2016a, 234). The passage through the sea was completed overnight and the Egyptian army was destroyed in the early morning (Exo. 14:24).

After exiting the sea, three days were spent in the *wilderness of Shur* (Exo. 15:22), also called the *wilderness of Etham* (Num. 33:8), where the multitude found no water. The Hebrews subsequently encamped at:

- *Marah*, with bitter waters that were miraculously sweetened (Exo. 15:23-25; Num. 33:8)
- *Elim*, which had 12 wells and 70 palms (Exo. 15:27)
- *Yam Suph* (Num. 33:10-11), the same sea that was miraculously parted
- The *Wilderness of Sin* (Num. 33:11)

The *wilderness of Sin* was entered one month after leaving Egypt (Exo. 16:1), which would equate to about 10 travel days from the sea crossing. The provision of manna began at that time (Exo. 16:4 ff) and continued for the next 40 years. The Hebrews then made encampments at:

- *Dophkah* (Num. 33:12)
- *Alush* (Num. 33:13)
- *Rephidim*, where there was no water (Num. 33:14)

Upon entering *Rephidim*, water was miraculously provided from the “rock in Horeb” (Exo. 17:6). The Hebrews were subsequently attacked in *Rephidim* by Amalekites (Exo. 17:8 ff), whom they defeated.

After leaving *Rephidim*, the Hebrews entered the *Wilderness of Sinai*, where they encamped before the mountain (Exo. 18:5; 19:2). This arrival occurred two months after leaving Egypt (Exo. 19:1, discussed in **Section 24.4**). Thus, the journey between the sea and Mount Sinai involved about 40 days of travel and seven named encampments.

1.4 Outline of the Investigation

Reconstructing the Exodus journey between the sea and Mount Sinai presents two primary challenges. The first is to determine the likely location of Mount Sinai, which has been a major conundrum and curiosity for centuries. The second is to identify a route that realistically navigates the regional topography and, yet, fully agrees with the biblical itinerary.

At this point, some naysayers may ask, “How are you going to *prove* where Mount Sinai is located when no one has ever been able to do so?” This work will not be able to “prove” anything, short of discovering a dated inscription stating that “Moses was here.” Until then, we can only rely on a “preponderance of the evidence.” The preponderance of evidence is all that is required to win a civil lawsuit. It is based on the more convincing evidence and its probable truth or accuracy, and not on the amount of evidence.

The hypothesis of a Gulf of Aqaba sea crossing creates a bias for a northwest Arabia site for the mountain. Within this region, a credible estimation of the ancient domain of *Midian* is needed due to its historical relationships with Moses and Mount Sinai.

The geography in its vicinity must then be evaluated for locations physically suited to Mount Sinai. In particular, there must be evidence of historical travel routes that would be navigable by the Exodus multitude. Finally, the biblical Exodus itinerary must be tested on the feasible routes between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Mount Sinai candidate.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIES

The identification of *Yam Suph* as the Gulf of Aqaba and the potential sea crossing site is reviewed in **Chapter 2**. The premises pertaining to *Midian* and an Arabian Mount Sinai are given in **Chapter 3**.

Chapter 4 uses historical geography sources to clarify the ancient location of *Midian*. **Chapter 5** correlates these data with the environment of the region to derive an estimate for the *Midian* domain. **Chapter 6** presents the physical geography in the *Midian* region with an emphasis on the surrounding mountains to aid in the identification of Mount Sinai candidates.

Chapter 7 introduces important historical clues about the location of Mount Sinai. **Chapter 8** defines “Sinai” and “Horeb” and explains that they are not merely different names for the same mountain. *Horeb* was the name of the region in which Mount Sinai was located. The meaning of the word “Sinai” describes the relative position of Mount Sinai.

Chapter 9 focuses on the landscape and climate conditions in the *Midian* region at the time of Moses, and estimates the place of his habitation. This information is applied to his Exodus 3:1 excursion to the Mountain of God to illustrate the relationship between Mount Sinai and *Midian*. **Chapter 10** presents the routes that were theoretically available to Moses, and later to the Hebrews, to reach the Mountain of God.

The investigation then examines the topography of *Jabal al-Maqla* in **Chapter 11**; the archaeology of the *Jabal al-Lawz* range in **Chapter 12**; and the archaeology of *Jabal al-Maqla* in **Chapters 13-14**.

The theory that the *Jabal al-Maqla* peak is black because it was scorched by the heat of God’s presence is taken up in the geology discussions of **Chapters 15 and 16**. The origins and compositions of the rock types at *Jabal al-Makla* are explained using geological history, mapping, and the analysis of specimens taken from the mountain.

Chapter 17 explains why the “fire” seen on Mount Sinai during the Exodus was characteristic of a *theophany* (a visible manifestation of God to humans).

Chapter 18 summarizes the route that brought the Hebrews to the far side of the sea and reviews the parameters affecting their travel, including the census of the multitude.

The journey from the sea to the mountain unfolds in six sections. **Chapter 19** presents the route between the sea and *Marah*, with detailed explanations of the *Wildernesses* of *Shur* and *Etham*. **Chapter 20** describes the route from *Marah* to the *Yam Suph* encampment, as well as the ultimate fate of the Egyptian army on that shore. **Chapter 21** recounts the arrival in the *Wilderness of Sin*, the encampments at *Dophkah* and *Alush*, and the entry into *Rephidim*. **Chapter 22** defines *Rephidim*, while **Chapter 23** explains the water provision at the rock in *Horeb*. **Chapter 24** reviews the Amalekite battle, the entrance into the *Wilderness of Sinai*, and the arrival at Mount Sinai.

Chapter 25 concludes the *Exodus Mysteries of Midian, Sinai & Jabal al-Lawz*. The **Epilogue** summarizes the Exodus journeys beyond Mount Sinai.

1.5 Summarizing the Challenge

Reconstructing the “Arabian” Exodus route between the sea and the mountain is dependent on premises concerning the location of the sea, the location of *Midian*, and the location of Mount Sinai. It is also dependent on the degree of geographical reality contained in Moses’ account. Was the Exodus merely a legend? Is it possible that “Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD...” (Num. 33:2) with some degree of geographical accuracy? This adventure begins by applying modern geographical analysis to these ancient data. You, the reader, will be the final judge of the result.