

MIDIAN AND MOUNT SINAI

Most Biblical scholars today regard the mountain in the Sinai Peninsula that is called Mount Sinai as the mountain on which Moses encountered God, first (before the Exodus) when he was commissioned by God to confront Pharaoh with the command to “Let my people go” and second (after the Exodus) when he received from God the Ten Commandments. ***I do not.*** The Biblical Mount Sinai lies outside Egypt, in Midian. It is undoubtedly Jabal al-Lawz in southwestern Saudi Arabia (ancient Midian)..

Exodus 2:15 states, “...Pharaoh...sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian...” (KJV), which indicates that Moses traveled ***out of*** Egypt and ***into*** Midian.

Exodus 14:2 states, God instructed Moses to “...encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon...” (KJV), which indicates that Pihahiroth lay in Egypt, on the western shore of the Red Sea waters and Baalzephon lay in Midian on the eastern shore of the Red Sea waters.

Like so many biblical issues, the identity of Midian has been a topic of debate among scholars for some time. Genesis 25:1-2 indicates that, after Sarah died, Abraham married Keturah, who bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Midian’s descendents were called the Midianites. They were referred to twenty-four times in the Bible as “the Midianites” and ten times in the Koran as “the Madyan.” They were a continual threat to the Hebrew tribes living on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, and they allied themselves with other Arab tribes like the Amalekites in attacks against Israel. The group of traders who pulled Joseph out of the pit, into which his brothers had thrown him, and sold him to Potiphar in Egypt were Midianites. Clearly, the Midianites were an Arab tribe which lived in western Arabia. Just as clearly, the land of the Midianites was located in Arabia, along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba – i.e. today’s southwestern Saudi Arabia.

The Strait of Tiran lies between the south-eastern tip of the Sinai Peninsula (part of ancient Egypt)¹ and the south-westernmost point of Saudi Arabia (ancient Midian). Its western landfall is the Egyptian town of Nabq (ancient Pihahiroth). Its eastern landfall is the Saudi Arabian town of Ra’s ash Shaykh Humayd (ancient Baalzephon). There, the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba to the north and the Red Sea to the south mingle. When Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt and into Midian, the waters of the Strait parted, giving them safe passage on dry land, and then reunited behind them, thereby drowning Pharaoh and his army in the resulting whirlpool at Pihahiroth.

¹ The Sinai Peninsula was a part of Egypt long before Moses’ time.