

A Brief Response to the Alternate View Placing Mount Horeb in Midian

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1. **Claim:** Mt. Sinai is in Arabia (Gal 4:25). **Response:**
 - a. “Already in classical times identifications [of the Hyksos] had begun to proliferate. Josephus records that ‘some call them Arabs,’ a statement not so inexplicable as once thought. This derives solely from the constant use of ‘Arabia’—that is, the ‘East’—in classical writers to designate the regions of Asia closest to the Suez frontier, regions that in pharaonic times would have been known collectively as ‘the northern countries,’ namely Palestine and Syria.” – Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 99. “One ethnic element that was to play an important role as an intermediary here was the enclave of the Arabs. Egypt until the end of the second millennium had maintained a working relationship with the early tribes of the ‘Arabah in an effort not only to mine the material resources of the region but also to control the incense trade” (349).
 - b. The ancient Greek geographer Strabo (64 B.C.-ca. A.D. 25) described the borders of Arabia as the Nile River in the west and the Persian Gulf at the east (*Geography* 16:4:2; 17:1:30-31). The translators of the Septuagint extended the borders of Arabia so far west that the land of Goshen in Egypt was included (καὶ κατοικήσεις ἐν γῆ Γεσεμ Ἀραβίας, *and you shall settle in the land of Gesem of Arabia*, Gen 45:10). It is obvious from this evidence that the apostle Paul was not excluding the Sinai Peninsula as the location of Mt. Sinai.
 - c. “The Arabians call Mount Sinai Agar. It may be that the similarity of these two names gave Paul his idea for this allegory.” – Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, 4th ed., trans. by Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing Co., n.d.), 184. – This is a questionable observation to which J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971 reprint), 180-81, has made an adequate response.
2. **Claim:** No Hebrew inscriptions have been found in the region of the traditional Mt. Sinai. **Response:** There are no Hebrew inscriptions in the region of Jebel al-Lawz either.
3. **Claim:** No material remains/artifacts giving evidence of the presence of the Israelites for a year have been found in the region of the traditional Mt. Sinai. **Response:** There are no such remains/artifacts in the region of Jebel al-Lawz either. However, exactly what could the reader of Scripture expect? According to Scripture the clothing and sandals of the Israelites did not wear out (Neh 9:21).

4. **Claim:** Egyptian presence in the Sinai was too heavy to allow Israel to stay for a year at the traditional mountain.
Response: The destruction of the Egyptian pharaoh and his army in the crossing of the Gulf of Suez would account for the lack of immediate pursuit. The Egyptians were confused, shocked, uncertain, and lacking seasoned leadership.
5. **Claim:** The city of Madyan was located near Mt. Sinai according to Josephus.
Response: This is pure conjecture and without independent verification. As far as the land of Midian is concerned, however, it appears that Mt. Horeb was outside Midian by the declaration in Exodus 18:27 that Jethro left Moses (who was at that time at Mt. Horeb/Sinai) and returned to his own land (Midian).
6. **Claim:** Jebel al-Lawz has a blackened summit.
Response: Such blackened summits are not unusual in the Sinai or in Arabia. It can be accounted for by either volcanism or desert patina. In addition, biblical evidence for physical effects from the fire of the divine presence is non-existent. This can be most readily observed in the burning bush incident where the fire did not consume the bush and apparently left no marks (Exod 3:2).
7. **Claim:** Flattened boulders at the foot of Jebel al-Lawz appear to be arranged into an altar that is manmade.
Response: From the video it is impossible to confirm the claim. The arrangement does not look any different than hundreds of such rock outcrops.
8. **Claim:** Petroglyphs of cattle and bulls in an Egyptian style could be associated with the golden calf worship.
Response: Such petroglyphs are Egyptian. They occur throughout the region of Sinai, Palestine, and Arabia. With the large number of Egyptian shrines to Hathor (the cow-headed goddess), such petroglyphs are to be expected. Specific examples can be seen at Serabit el-Khadem in the Sinai.
9. **Claim:** A towering rock pinnacle near Jebel al-Lawz is split and there are signs of water erosion at its foot. This could be related to the account of water brought from the rock to take care of Israel's lack of water to drink.
Response: This is extremely conjectural. The video showed none of the potential evidence at its foot that would allow one to make an informed judgment. The split itself appears to be due to wind erosion rather than water. If the split was how water was provided for Israel at Mt. Horeb, why did the makers of the video emphasize the presence of an ancient riverbed that could supply Israel with water?
10. **Claim:** The terraces on the shores of the lakes and the Suez Gulf are flat as opposed to the Gulf of Aqaba and the description of the point of the Israelites' crossing in Scripture.
Response: The claim that "the wilderness has shut them in" (Exod 14:3) refers to a maze of mountains and canyons is unsubstantiated in the text itself—such a conclusion is purely conjectural and evidence of a creative imagination in order to support a presupposition.
11. **Claim:** The Israelites had left the borders of Egypt before crossing the sea—see passages like Exodus 14:11 ("to bring us forth out of Egypt").
Response: The infinitive construct in Exodus 14:11 does not confirm that the Israelites were outside Egypt. Instead, it could more readily be understood as a reference to that which was yet to be done. A passage like Exodus 13:18 only

- indicates what the purpose of the Israelites was—and is consistent with leaving Egypt by means of the crossing of the sea.
12. **Claim:** *Yam suph* in 1 Kings 9:26 is applied to the Gulf of Aqaba.
Response: *Yam suph* is also applied to the Gulf of Suez in Exodus 10:19.
13. **Claim:** Coral formations on the floor of the Gulf of Aqaba near the proposed site of the crossing of the sea on the way to Jebel al-Lawz indicate encrustation of manmade objects such as chariot wheels from the Egyptian chariots.
Response: Nothing but conjecture was offered in the video. It did not show any actual finds with either the removal of the encrustation or an x-ray of what might be inside. In the video they used only special effects and artwork imposed on the photos. The shallowness of the Aqaba at this point is due to a large alluvial fan at the mouths of several large wadis. Cloudbursts and flash floods have washed huge quantities of sand into the Aqaba at this point. It is unreasonable to believe that such “artifacts” would still be on the surface after 3200 years. Isolated pillars of coral could have just as readily resulted from the breakup of the type of coral bed that exists elsewhere in the Aqaba. The breakup could be the result of the abrasive sands washed into the Aqaba from the wadis.
14. **Claim:** “Miracles properly understood, never break the laws of nature” (C. S. Lewis).
Response: The miracle of the crossing of the sea does not need a natural explanation for the very reason that it was miraculous.

The student is also referred to the following responses to the alternate Mt. Sinai theory:

Gordon Franz, “Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia?” *Bible and Spade* (Fall 2000).

Brad Sparks, “Problems with Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia” at

<http://www.ldolphin.org/sinai.html>

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