

Title:

The Exodus Route considering all Biblical Information, Part 1.0

Abstract:

All biblical information, geographic information mostly with Google Earth Pro and some archaeological evidence was investigated to determine the exodus routes of Israel as accurately as possible. The plural “routes” is sometimes used because of the distinctive phases of the 40-year journey. Evidence points strongly to the Red Sea crossing to be in the Gulf of Suez and the mountain of Horeb or Sinai to be in Saudi Arabia. Comparing the exodus route information in different books in the Bible and with some identified Google Earth Pro locations also indicates the disobedience of Israel in the last year before entering Canaan by wanting to go their own route. But God forced them by calamities to ask for rescue and to turn around and travel along the border between Edom and Moab eventually to the east of the Jordan river. This article is divided in two parts.

Introduction:

If one searches the Internet, and many Bibles containing maps, it is clear there is no set answer for the details of the exodus route. The bigger problem is not that certain smaller places cannot be located with certainty; the problem is that major aspects of the route e.g. the Red Sea crossing location, even the particular peninsula of Mount Horeb, the location(s?) of Kadesh and the last part of the route relative to Edom, are not agreed upon. The approach was to first investigate all the biblical information to ascertain whether these major aspects can be determined, keeping distances and geography in mind. Secondly, it was to determine if archaeological evidence could help in pinpointing at least some of the places, but only if consistent with the biblical information. Much was learned and discovered in the process.

In the end, Numbers 33 was used as the base for this article, and all the deemed relevant parts from other biblical parts were inserted in between the verses of Numbers 33, so that the whole history can be seen.¹ The aim was to show that this proposal was consistent with all biblical information, and the hope is that other proposals will also comply with this aim.

I changed my mind in the past few months regarding the location of the Red Sea crossing, with the reason being the location of the wilderness of Shur, which is mentioned 6 times in the Bible. Once the location of Shur is determined, the Red Sea crossing could only have been at one sea because the wilderness must be to the east of that sea. The problem of course is that even scholars don't agree on the borders of regions and countries at the time of the exodus, and therefore placings can still be done in different locations. Therefore, the answer lies in the most likely chance of being correct, and this is often not so easy to determine. However, I do believe my current proposal agrees with all Scripture, even better than my previous proposal, and is in broad terms the closest to the truth.

Notes regarding maps:

The maps (Figures 1, 3 and 4) given further on in this document show the main routes of Israel in red, the route of the 12 spies in green, Israel's travelling in the regions of Kadesh and the Seir mountains for about 38 years due to their disobedience in dark purple, and the routes Israel probably wanted to follow to the east of the Jordan river in the last part of the exodus route, in orange. The orange route through the middle of Edom is the guessed passage through Edom which Edom denied them, and the orange route to the south of Edom is one that many think they actually took, but it is argued in this paper that it was not the route as instructed by God, and they eventually followed the red route between Edom and Moab to the east, and then northwards to the east of the Jordan river. However, note that this last proposal of the crossover to the Trans-Jordan has no bearing on the location of the Red Sea crossing nor that of Mount Horeb. The so-called Kings' Highway is shown in light purple, but could not have been followed because God instructed Israel not to travel through Edom or Moab.

The names highlighted in yellow on the maps, are the names of places that could be found on Google Earth Pro² or elsewhere from other scholars, some with strong confirmation and others with weaker confirmation. The names that are not highlighted, could not be located, but their positions are reasonable guesses based on the names before and after them that could be located. It is important to indicate all given biblical locations because without doing so many published maps missed some important potential detours and insights in the route. An example of this is the possible disobedience of the Israelites after the events at Mount Hor causing them to first travel south and then turn around north before crossing to the east of Moab.

Figure 1 gives the bigger picture, but the details of the routes will only become clear in Figures 3 and 4. All the Google Earth maps are showing current situations in terms of modern countries' borders, water structures etc.

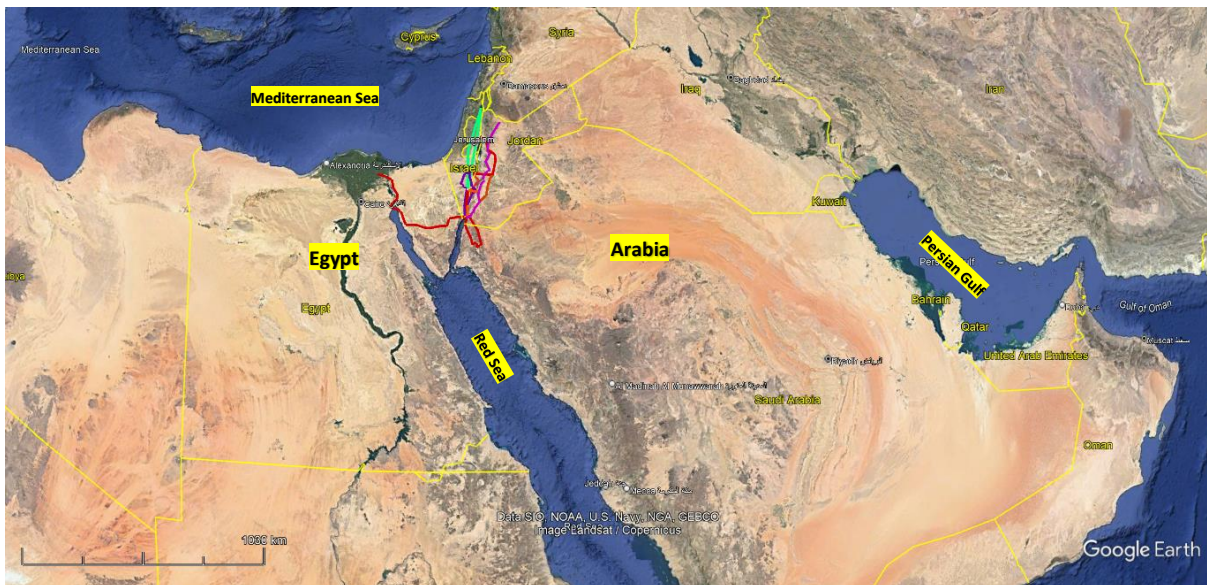


Figure 1: Where in the world

Important introductory findings:

Everywhere in the ESV Bible where the Red Sea is mentioned, the same Hebrew or Greek words are used as reference in the KJV+ as found on E-Sword.^{1,3} The Red Sea's extent is not small relative to the exodus distances travelled as can be seen in Figure 1, and the Israelites came to the Red Sea at different places at different times, but the Bible does not differentiate with another word for the Red Sea where the crossing took place. Those verses in the Bible referring to the Red Sea where the location is very clear, such as Exodus 23:31 and 1Kings 9:21, are very strongly pointing to the Gulf of Aqaba. Those where the location is not clear, are consistent with the possibility that they are referring to the Gulf of Suez or to the Gulf of Aqaba. According to Wikipedia and Encyclopaedia Britannica Egypt's eastern border at the time of the exodus was the Gulf of Aqaba.^{4,5} But the now-called Sinai Peninsula was very scarcely populated at that time, and had some Ishmaelites also living there, so the border of proper Egypt was closer to the Gulf of Suez and its associated lakes to the north. The Great Bitter Lake was mostly dry before the Suez Canal was dug from 1859 to 1869 according to internet info from NASA, and would very unlikely be considered part of the Red Sea during the exodus.⁶ Dr Glen Fritz confirmed this information regarding the area between the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez and the Mediterranean.⁷

The question is thus whether the Red Sea crossing was through the proper Gulf of Suez or the Gulf of Aqaba. The peninsula between the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba is today called the Sinai Peninsula, but this was a name given much later than the time of the writing of the Bible because of where more recent people thought the desert and mountain of Sinai should have been. Overall, strong archaeological evidence does not exist for this placement of Sinai. It is significant that older maps showed that the geographers of even as late as the 17th and 18th centuries did not even know of the body of water at the Gulf of Aqaba, therefore putting Mount Horeb to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba was not even considered.⁸

The matter of whether the sea should be called the Reed Sea as some Bibles do, is irrelevant regarding the location of the crossing because in those Bibles the Gulf of Aqaba is anyway always called the Reed Sea. If it is true that the sea was indeed called the Reed Sea rather than the Red Sea, it could simply have been that the marshes to the north of the sea, were filled with reeds, hence the name of the sea.

Because Etham is mentioned as a place the Israelites passed through before and after the Red Sea crossing, it can be assumed that Etham is the region surrounding the part of the Red Sea through which the crossing was. Or Etham could have been only on the eastern side of the Suez and its lakes' border, and their "turning back" (Num 33:7) took them back into proper Egypt so that after crossing the Red Sea, they entered the wilderness of Etham again. The map of Figure 4 shows this clearly and is another indication that the Red Sea crossing was indeed at the Gulf of Suez. This "turning back" would have been less logical at other candidates for the crossing location. Etham is a word from Egyptian derivation with the meaning of "boundary of the sea".^{8,9} Shur means "wall", therefore it has basically the same meaning as Etham.¹⁰ Comparing Exodus 15:22 and Numbers 33:8 gives strong indication that Etham and Shur are the same wilderness, or Etham is enclosed by Shur which I prefer.

The wilderness of Shur, as mentioned in Exodus 15:22, gives very strong indication of where the Red Sea crossing was. Israel went into the wilderness of Shur after crossing the Red Sea. Other verses in the Bible state the wilderness of Shur to be to the east of Egypt. If Shur can be located, east of proper Egypt, or east of the extended Egypt, then the crossing, basically at Suez or Aqaba, is settled.

Shur appears only 6 times in the Bible: Gen 16:7, 20:1, 25:18, Exo 15:22, 1Sam 15:7 and 1Sam 27:8. Scholars say no evidence can be found that any piece of land to the east of Aqaba was ever called Shur, but let's see what Scripture is revealing.

Gen 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.

Gen 16:3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.

Gen 16:6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

Gen 16:7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

Hagar was chased away by Sarai from where they dwelled in Canaan. The logical thing for her to do, would be to go back to Egypt, where she came from. Therefore, Shur cannot be east of Aqaba, it must be towards the populated areas of Egypt, therefore rather what I call proper Egypt.

Gen 20:1 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.

Gerar was a city close to the Philistines, its location is known, Kadesh's location is reasonably known, therefore Shur must be towards proper Egypt, it can't be southwards to east of Aqaba.

Gen 25:18 (KJV) And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that *is* before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: *and* he (*Ishmael*) died in the presence of all his brethren.

Gen 25:18 They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He (*Ishmael*) settled over against all his kinsmen.

This is describing the large and significant pieces of land, disregarding for example Canaan which consisted of several small kingdoms. So it is saying that the Ishmaelites lived in Havilah (Arabia) up to Shur in the west, and Shur was the region between proper Egypt and Assyria, ignoring Canaan in between.

Exo 15:22 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

They passed through the Gulf of Suez of the Red Sea, because there is no Shur to the East of the Gulf of Aqaba of the Red Sea, as far as we know. This is also described in the next verse, showing that Etham probably was a smaller area in Shur:

Num 33:8 And they set out from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and they went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah.

1Sam 15:7 And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt.

This does not make sense if Havilah is right against Shur in Arabia east of Aqaba. It does make sense if it is in the piece of land between southeast of Edom and the edge of Shur, somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula.

1Sam 27:8 Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt.

It is again confirmed that Shur was right next to Egypt.

Therefore, Shur was against proper Egypt, therefore next to Suez. And the consequence is that the Red Sea crossing must have been through the Gulf of Suez, it could not have been through the Gulf of Aqaba.

The desert or wilderness Paran is a bit tricky to locate – it was probably adjacent to the desert Zin. Kadesh and Kadesh Barnea in the Bible were the same place, because the 12 spies were sent out only once, but from Kadesh also called Kadesh Barnea according to Numbers 13:26 and Deuteronomy 9:23. But Kadesh was in Paran and Zin according to Numbers 13:21 and 26, Numbers 20:1, Numbers 27:14, Numbers 33:36 and Deuteronomy 32:51. There is no strong indication in the Bible that there were two Kadesh's as some proposed, therefore the conclusion is that the one and only Kadesh was on the border of the two deserts Paran and Zin, and therefore Kadesh was described as located in either of the two. Both Paran and Zin are found on Google Earth Pro, the Zin river lies to the north and west of the modern town Paran, and the Paran stream lies southwest of the town Paran, therefore putting the town Paran on the border. (The modern town Paran on Google Earth Pro can be found where Kadesh was placed in Figure 4.)

The Bible gives much information on Kadesh (or Kadesh Barnea), and because of all of this, Kadesh was put closely to the modern town of Paran:

- Gen 14:5-7 shows that the Seir mountains, El-Paran and Kadesh were probably not far apart, and Gen 16:14 and 20:1 reveal that Kadesh already existed in the days of Abraham.
- Num 13:26 shows that Kadesh was in the desert Paran.
- Num 20:1, 27:14 and 33:36, and Deut 32:51 show that Kadesh was in the desert Zin.
- Num 20:14 and 16 show that Kadesh was close to, in fact on the border of Edom.
- Num 20:16 shows that Kadesh was a city, Israel's camp therefore should have been just outside the city.
- Deut 1:2 shows that Kadesh was close to the Seir mountain.
- Gen 33:16 and Deut 2:4, 5 and 12 show that Esau and his descendants lived in Seir. Esau was also called Edom according to Gen 25:30, 32:3 and 36:1 and 8. This confirms that Kadesh was close to both Edom and Seir, because the Edomites lived in Seir.

I found an old map (from the year 1856) which approximately agrees with my placement of Kadesh Barnea, in or near to the valley of Arabah.¹¹ See Figures 2 and 4.

There were two Meribahs, the one at Rephidim close to Horeb – called Massah and Meribah (here Moses hit the rock with his staff for water as he should), and the other at Kadesh – called Meribah (here Moses should have spoken to the rock to get water, but he hit it twice with his staff). This can be understood because Meribah means angry disagreement.

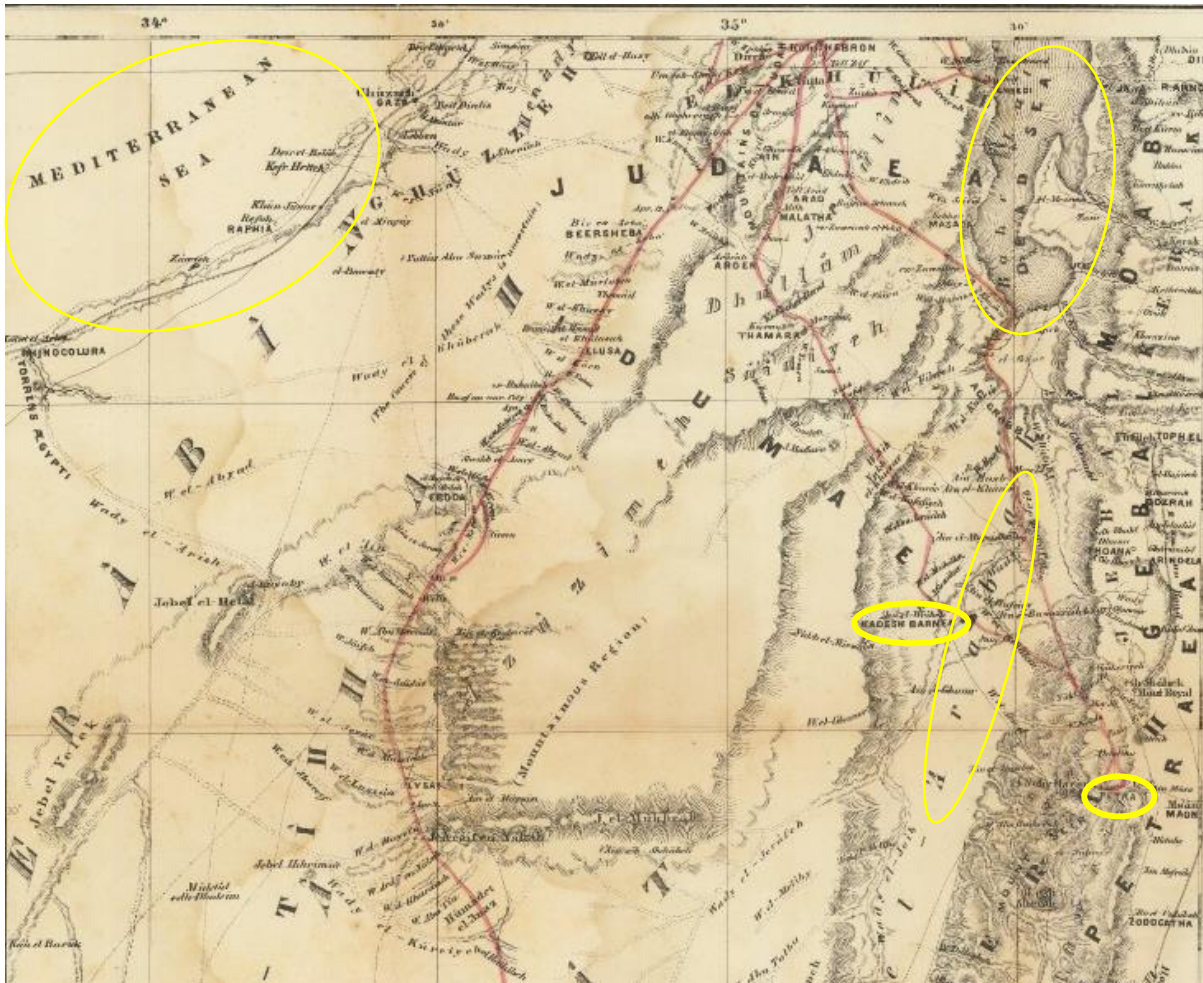


Figure 2: Part of 1856 map

The mountains Sinai, Horeb and the Mountain of God, are all the same mountain (Exo 3:1, 19:11, 33:6 and 34:4). Strong evidence for the location of Mount Sinai is found in the New Testament:

- Gal 4:25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

The argument, that in the time when Paul wrote Galatians, the Roman Empire governed the now called Sinai Peninsula as part of Arabia is incorrect. The Romans only conquered the Sinai Peninsula in 106 AD and then made it part of their province of Arabia, which is after the time of Paul's death. Sinai Peninsula was part of Egypt in the time of Hagar and her descendants the Ishmaelites, who became the Arabs, lived east and south of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Nabataeans took over the control of the trade routes in the north of the Sinai Peninsula about 100 BC from Egypt.⁵ To refer to the southern mountainous region of the peninsula as Arabia in Paul's time, has no good base. There is evidence of Egyptians doing mining in that region and at Serabit al-Khadem in southwest Sinai is the remains of an Egyptian temple, called the largest of the Egyptian temples in the peninsula.¹² This implies there were even more Egyptian temples in that peninsula. It does anyway make more sense for Paul to refer to Arabia as the land east of Aqaba, because that was more suited to the Old Testament descriptions of where Arabia (Havilah) was, and he was well versed in the Old Testament.

Gal 4:25 is also a strong argument against the opinion of Mount Sinai to be at Har Karkom in modern Israel, because Paul would not have considered that region to be part of Arabia. This is because Har Karkom is within the boundaries of the promised land to Israel (see Exo 23:31). Har Karkom is shown on the map of Figure 4.

It is described in Exo 4:18-31 how Abraham travelled from Midian and Aaron from Egypt meeting one another at Horeb. With Midian of Jethro east of the Gulf of Aqaba as shown in Figure 3, and Goshen in

proper Egypt, assuming that Horeb was on the general route between them, it is quite unlikely that Horeb could have been at Har Karkom or at the later St Catherine in the Sinai Peninsula (see Figure 4).

Eloth and Elath are the same place according to the Bible; today Eiloth and Eilath are adjacent on the northern side of the Gulf of Aqaba as part of Israel. Ezion-geber lied just to the east of Eloth/Elath; today it is the harbour city Aqaba in Jordan.

Biblical and geographical information:

Much more biblical information than above will be given in this section which is based on Num 33:1-49 but with important information from other books in the Bible inserted where applicable. This was important to get the full picture. Where necessary, clarifying explanations were added. Numbers 33 gives Moses' recount of Israel's journey just before they entered Canaan at the Jordan river (see Num 33:48,49). It is important to look at a few verses from Exodus before discussing Numbers 33 to clarify the setting.

Exo 3:1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

With Midian in the Arabian Peninsula, it simply does not make sense that he would lead the flock like 300 to 400 km to Horeb (see St Catherine in Figure 4) in the Sinai Peninsula, or to Horeb at Har Karkom in modern Israel where some scholars put Horeb.

Exo 3:2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

Exo 3:16 "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt,

Exo 3:17 and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Exo 3:18 And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.'

Exo 3:19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

Exo 3:20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.

Exo 3:21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty,

Exo 3:22 but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

From Exodus 3:1 can be seen that Horeb was the Mountain of God, and that it was most likely in or close to Midian. It is generally accepted that Midian was in the Arabian Peninsula.¹³ Therefore this indicates that Mount Horeb was to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba. Israel had to ask for a 3 days' journey into the wilderness, to sacrifice at a location that is not specified in the Bible. But clearly this was not the goal in the end as indicated by God in verses 21 and 22 above and as directly spelled out in verse 17. This is important to note because some argue that Israel should have been able to get to Mount Horeb in 3 days, which is not stated in the Bible.

Figure 3 gives all the relevant routes with more names inserted in the figure to follow.

Num 33:1 These are the stages of the people of Israel, when they went out of the land of Egypt by their companies under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.

Num 33:2 Moses wrote down their starting places, stage by stage, by command of the LORD, and these are their stages according to their starting places.



Figure 3: All the routes – Rameses to Jericho

Num 33:3 They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month. On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians, Num 33:4 while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them. On their gods also the LORD executed judgments.

Rameses was possibly Avaris in Egypt, nearby the modern Tell El-Daba.¹⁴

Num 33:5 So the people of Israel set out from Rameses and camped at Succoth.

Figure 4 indicates the route from Rameses up to the 1st time of Israel at Kadesh. Succoth was probably in the Wadi Tumilat.¹⁵ The day and night travelling of Israel is only mentioned from after Succoth (see Exodus 13:20-22).

Num 33:6 And they set out from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness.

Glen Fritz points out that “wilderness” is not necessarily a desert, and can mean a very mountainous terrain which is difficult to travel across.⁷ The wilderness of Etham is mentioned to be entered again in Num 33:8 after they have crossed the Red Sea. Therefore Etham can be the region surrounding the sides of the Red Sea where they crossed, or it can be explained by their “turning back” in the next verse and as indicated on the map of Figure 4. They turned back from Etham into proper Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and were then back in the wilderness of Etham.

Num 33:7 And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which is east of Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol.

This “turning back” was a strange instruction, but they had to go to a specific location right next to the Red Sea. It took them back into proper Egypt and right against the Red Sea with no natural escape route.

Baal-zephon is referring to an idol – there might have been an idol structure in that area. There was apparently more than one Migdol; they were supposedly guardian posts and sometimes even fortresses with postal pigeons who could get messages to the Pharaoh very quickly. It makes sense because the Pharaoh very soon got the information that Israel was trapped against the Red Sea, as he thought. The miracle of the Red Sea crossing was set-up to happen in very special circumstances:

- The Israelites were trapped between the Egyptian army and the sea.
- It was close to an idol structure.
- It was close to a guardian post.
- Exo 14:21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

Note that this does not imply shallow water by arguing that a natural wind could only divide shallow water as some defend their view.¹⁴ From the Hebrew in the KJV+³ this verse can be translated as: Moses stretched out hand over sea, LORD caused sea to go, strong east wind all night made sea dry, waters were divided. This can mean that God split the sea in a short time, and

then He used the east wind to dry the seafloor all night long, resulting in completely divided waters.

- Exo 14:28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained.
- Exo 14:29 But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

Note that deep waters are implied by this description, not any shallow marsh, again making anything such as the shallow Great Bitter Lake impossible as the crossing location.

Num 33:8 And they set out from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and they went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah.

Note that it appears that the Israelites, from after crossing the Red Sea, did not travel day and night anymore, because the distance of 3 days' journey is mentioned here.

The following is a description in Exodus just after Israel crossed the Red Sea.

- Exo 15:22 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

The latter is the wilderness of Etham according to Numbers 33:8 above. So Etham must have been a smaller region in the bigger wilderness of Shur.

- Exo 15:23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah.

Num 33:9 And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there.

I don't have a definite archaeological site for where Elim was, but putting it in one of the valleys of the now-called Sinai Peninsula containing trees seems to be reasonable, because the 12 springs did not necessarily remain since then.

- Exo 15:27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

Num 33:10 And they set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea.

This Red Sea mentioned here is the Gulf of Aqaba. There is no sense in letting them return to the Gulf of Suez if one knows they are heading to Horeb in Arabia, east of Aqaba.

Num 33:11 And they set out from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin.

It does make sense to put the wilderness of Sin to the east of Aqaba.

- Exo 16:1 They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.

I assume the camping at the Red Sea between Elim and Sin was simply omitted here in Exodus.

As can be seen in the next verse, some other sites are also omitted in the book of Exodus.

- Exo 17:1 All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages (see Num 33:12-14 below), according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.
- Exo 17:6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Rephidim was on the one side of Horeb (Mount Sinai) and the camping site at Sinai was on the other side. Therefore, part of a loop is shown on the map of Figure 4 between the 2 places.

- Exo 17:7 And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarrelling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Num 33:12 And they set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah.

Num 33:13 And they set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush.

Num 33:14 And they set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink.

Moses hit the rock at Horeb as commanded by God to get water. This place was called Massah and Meribah. Israel also fought here against the Amalekites and won while Moses' arms were held up by Aaron and Hur according to Exodus 17:6-16. Moses' father-in-law Jethro returned his wife Sipporah here to him, after he had sent her and his two sons to her father. This information is relevant because it indicates that Mount Sinai was close to Midian where Jethro lived and it was in

the region where the Amalekites dwelled, both being supporting evidence for Mount Sinai being to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba.¹⁶

Num 33:15 And they set out from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.

Many laws and regulations, including the Ten Commandments, were given at mount Sinai. The golden calf happened there, resulting in the smashing of the 1st set of the tables of commandments by Moses. The tabernacle, the ark, the altars and priestly garments were made, and then the 2nd set of the tables were made and the Ten Commandments written on them by God. See Exo 24:18, Exodus 25 to 30, Exo 31:18, Exodus 32, Exo 34:1-4, Exodus 35 to 40 and Deut 10:1-5. This camp in the desert Sinai was at the mountain of Horeb, also called the mountain of Sinai and the Mountain of God. They stayed there for a long time according to Deut 1:6 and Num 10:11, consistent with all the events that happened there.

- Exo 19:1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.
- Exo 19:2-3 They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God.

The district over which the Amalekites ranged was south of Judah and probably extended into northern Arabia, therefore also complying with the location of Horeb east of the Gulf of Aqaba.¹⁶ There is also good timeline information in these verses in Exodus, specifically Exo 16:1 and 19:1. Israel came to the wilderness of Sin 30 days after starting the exodus. Assuming they travelled 1 day to Succoth, another day to Etham, and the 3rd day to Migdol, then stayed another day after crossing the sea, 25 days are left of the 30 days. So they must have covered about 380 km in the 25 days to the entrance of the wilderness of Sin to the east of Aqaba. That is on average about 15 km per day, which is feasible.

Exo 19:1 shows that Israel came to the wilderness of Sinai 60 days after starting the exodus, thus 30 days after getting to Sin. The KJV+ uses the words “the same day”, therefore it is assumed it is the same day when the exodus started, therefore 2 months, thus 60 days. This last period of 30 days is also not a problem for the approximate 140 km from the entrance of Sin to the camping site at Mount Sinai, as can be seen from the Figure 4 map. On average there was rather slow travelling due to the delays (striving about water and Amalekite attacks) at Rephidim.

It is important to distinguish between the wildernesses of Sin and Zin; Zin was entered only later and is in another region. (The Afrikaans translation of the Bible refers to both as Sin, which is a mistake.) Manna and quails were provided to Israel as food before they came to Rephidim – see Exodus 16, specifically 16:35, and Exo 17:1. Manna was provided all 40 years of the exodus, but not quails – see Numbers 11:4 where the Israelites complained because they had no meat.

The extent of the promised land was also specified at Sinai. The Red Sea was specified as one of the boundaries.

- Exo 23:30 Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land.
- Exo 23:31 And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

There is no doubt that the Red Sea in this last verse is referring to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Sea of the Philistines is of course the Mediterranean Sea.

Num 33:16 And they set out from the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah.

According to Numbers 10:11 Israel left the wilderness of Sinai 1 year, 1 month and 5 days after starting with the exodus. They were thus 11 months and 5 days at the foot of Horeb, because they arrived at Horeb 2 months after the start according to Exo 19:1 and 2. Between the wilderness of Sinai and Kibroth-hattaavah the Israelites complained at Taberah about their misfortunes according to Num 10:13 and 11:1-3. It displeased the Lord and He killed many of them with fire. At Kibroth-hattaavah the Israelites complained about meat, He then sent an abundance of quails, they handled it greedily and He again killed many of them (see Num 11:4, 34 and 35).

- Num 11:31 Then a wind from the LORD sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground.

Kibroth-hattaavah could not have been too far away from the sea, if it is assumed that the Israelites could see the quails coming from the sea.

Num 33:17 And they set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth.

Miriam got leprosy at Hazeroth after she and Aaron criticised Moses for taking a Cushite wife and for him alone getting instructions from God (see Num 12:1, 2, 10, 15 and 16).

Num 33:18 And they set out from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah.

According to Num 12:16, they journeyed from Hazeroth to a place in the wilderness of Paran. It is likely that this place was Rithmah. This place also looks like Kadesh of Numbers 13:26 because Kadesh is also in the wilderness of Paran and according to Deuteronomy 1:2 it was possible to travel in 11 days from Horeb to Kadesh (note that they did not necessarily travel only 11 days; Moses is simply giving with the number of days an indication of the distance). It is unlikely that Kadesh mentioned later in Num 33:36 is the first time that Israel came to Kadesh given the 11 days and all the camping sites before they came to Kadesh as per Num 33:36. The first time at Kadesh could also have been at some of the places mentioned in Numbers 33 after Rithmah, but it could at the most only have been a few camps later, because of the possibility to travel it in 11 days.

According to Num 20:16 Kadesh was a city, and the reason why the camping site was called Rithmah, not Kadesh, was perhaps because they camped outside the city.



Figure 4: To the 1st time at Kadesh

Conclusion:

Looking at all the information in the Bible, a strong case can be made for Mount Sinai or Horeb to be in the current Saudi Arabia. Likewise, all the information points to the Gulf of Suez in the Red Sea to be the crossing point through the Red Sea rather than the Gulf of Aqaba, and definitely not the Great Bitter Lake or any shallow marsh. The location of Kadesh could be determined reasonably well.

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