



Saudi Arabia's Jabal Al Lawz--Is It the Real Mt. Sinai?

Review by Warren Krug

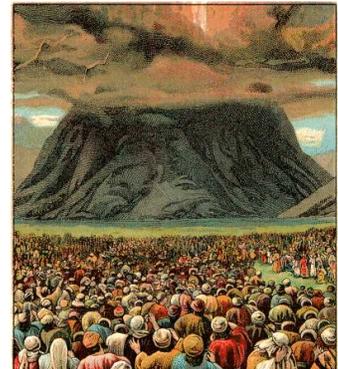
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The Search for the Real Mt. Sinai, DVD, Reel Productions, 50 minutes.

Available at <http://www.explorationfilms.com>.

As every Sunday school teacher and student knows, Mount Sinai, the mountain on which God in flame and smoke delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses, is located in the southern portion of the Sinai peninsula. At least, that's what Bible maps show, and they can't be wrong, can they?

Two amateur archaeologists have created a DVD that answers that question in the affirmative. Mt. Sinai (also called Mt. Horeb) isn't where these maps show it to be; in fact, it isn't even on the Sinai peninsula. Mt. Sinai, they say, is likely located in modern day Saudi Arabia!



The Explorers

The two men are Larry Williams, a commodities trader by profession, and Bob Cornuke, a southern California police investigator. They became interested in searching for the famed mountain after the late Jim Irwin, the astronaut and Noah's Ark hunter, gave Williams a letter from a man claiming to have been in Saudi Arabia and seen what could have been Mt. Sinai.

Irwin warned the two would-be explorers of the dangers of snooping around in Saudi Arabia, but, inspired by Irwin's own courage as well as the excitement of possibly making a major discovery, Williams and Cornuke made plans for an expedition to that country.

The Traditional Mt. Sinai Site

Williams and Cornuke contend that no archaeological evidence has ever been found suggesting anyone ever camped in the area of the traditional site, and archaeologists have thoroughly examined this mountain. This Mt. Sinai, they claim, was named by a fortune teller in or about the third century A.D. Furthermore, they point out that Galatians 4:25 says plainly that Mt. Sinai is in "Arabia." (However, my NIV map of the area when Galatians was written shows that "Arabia" included the Sinai peninsula. wk.)

More telling might be a reference to Midian in Exodus 18:1 which occurred before the Israelites reached Mt. Sinai, and Midian according to Bible maps was located in present-day Saudi Arabia. Williams says the phrase "out of Egypt" occurs 72 times in the Bible in describing the Exodus. The Sinai peninsula at that time was in control of the Egyptian army, he says, with a significant military presence. It would seem logical God would have led His people out of this peninsula.

Planning the Expedition

Williams and Cornuke may have been encouraged by reports they had heard of people seeing a mountain with a scorched top in Saudi Arabia, but these people had been arrested and their film confiscated before they were sent out of the country.

So, using the Bible and old maps as guides, they concluded that a mountain in Arabia called Jabal Al Lawz might be the Mt. Sinai for which they were looking.

Their ambitious plans included trying to find the following features: the exodus route; the Red Sea crossing; the Bitter springs of Marah; the 70 palms; the 12 springs of Elam; the cave of Elijah; boundary markers around the mountain; the golden calf altar; an altar at the foot of the mountain; 12 stone pillars representing the 12 tribes of Israel; a rock from which water gushed; and, of course, the mountain itself.

Getting Into Saudi Arabia

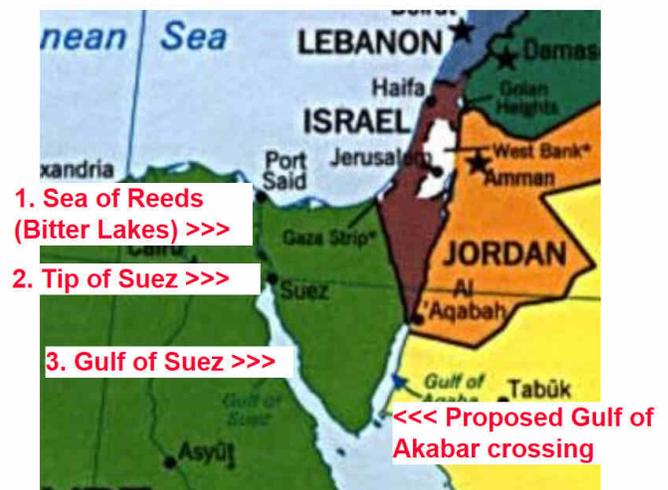
Eyebrows will surely be raised at the admission by Williams and Cornuke of how they got into Saudi Arabia. They somehow managed to get their hands on a letter from the king of Saudi Arabia, a promotional letter of some kind they think. Then using the letterhead and the king's signature, they devised a fake letter supposedly from the king giving them permission to enter Saudi Arabia. Williams seems to express some regret as to this method of gaining entry into the country, but he said they did what they had to do to find out the truth.

The Red Sea Crossing Point

Scholars often point to three possible places at which the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. (See map.) The two northern points (1. & 2.) Williams and Cornuke rule out because Pharaoh could easily have sent part of his army around to the other side to cut off the Israelites.

At the southern point (3.) the sea bottom is like a canyon. With the sea parted, it would have been almost impossible for the elderly, children, and the animals to have climbed down one side and up the other.

But the archaeologists say there is an interesting feature in the Gulf of Akabar that runs from the tip of the Sinai peninsula across the straits to Saudi Arabia—a land bridge. Cornuke feels this bridge which rises from the depths of the sea to within a few feet of the surface was especially created by God to allow the Israelites to escape. A wind following the parting of the sea could have dried out this land bridge so it wasn't slimy or soggy. At the western end of the land bridge is nothing but wilderness and a mountain range so that the Israelites could have felt "hemmed in" as suggested by Exodus 14:3.



Bitter Springs of Marah, 70 Palms, and 12 Springs of Elim

Now on the other side of the Gulf of Akabar, the men traveled about 33 kilometers inland (or a three days' journey on foot—Ex. 15:22-23) where they said they discovered some springs with water so bitter they could not even touch it to their tongues. They think they discovered the Bitter Springs of Marah.

As they traveled on they came to an area of palm trees and 12 springs which would match the Bible's description of palms and springs of Elim (Ex. 15:27). Today the springs have been covered over by concrete encasements to keep the water from soaking into the sand.

Ruins

Using an old map that said there were ruins in the area, Williams and Cornuke started looking for them. Sure enough, they came to an area with caves, surrounded by a fence, and patrolled by a military guard.

The ruins were called the caves of Moses, according to a local person. And the belief that Moses had come through the area is apparently part of the local culture.

Moreover, the two explorers had an opportunity to strike up a conversation with a Syrian archaeologist who told them there were writings in the cave that said Moses and his nation had passed through the region.

Approaching Jabal Al Lawz

Williams and Cornuke were able to get a Bedouin to show them the general area where the mountain is located. The Bedouin seemed in awe of the mountain, and quickly left after pointing it out. A school teacher whom they met in the area pointed to Jabal Al Lawz and also said it was the real Mt. Sinai.

When Williams and Cornuke got closer to the mountain, they discovered a fence around it with signs posted that said in Arabic and English, "It is unlawful to trespass. Violators are subject to penalty." This surprised the men; they had thought the mountain would be in the middle of nowhere but now knew it was being protected by the Saudi government.



The Golden Calf Altar

They wondered if they would find any evidence of the Golden Calf altar. What they did find was a pile of rocks, 30' by 30' by 20' high, and flat on the top. About halfway up they saw petroglyphs of bovine creatures etched into the rocks. Finding pictures of cattle here was unusual because cattle are not indigenous to Saudi Arabia but were, of course, found in Egypt.

Boundary Markers and Pillars

Another feature they sought to find were the boundary markers God had ordered Moses to erect around the mountain (Ex. 19:23).

Indeed, they did discover piles of rocks every 400 yards apart in a two-mile long semicircle around the mountain.

Cornuke and Williams, out of fear of being caught and equipped with nightscopes, decided to wait until night before crossing the valley to the mountain itself. With their nightscopes they were able to evade some guards who were posted near the mountain.

Among their discoveries was an altar of uncut stone at the foot of the mountain (Ex 20:25) with ashes nearby. Cournuke says that only the Hebrews offered burnt offerings. Another discovery was twelve unusual marble pillars that they think may have been the pillars Moses set up to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 24:4)

Split Rock of Horeb

The explorers next found a huge rock, split down the middle, which they think might be the rock which Moses struck to provide water for the people (Ex. 17:5-7). Below it they noted that the granite rocks had been worn smooth as if a lot of water had poured over them, an unusual feature in a part of the world that gets very little rain. Moreover, they also found a large basin of several acres which they think could have held the water from the rock so that the Israelites, perhaps as many as two million people, could easily reach it.



Elijah's Cave

According to 1 Kings 19:8-9, there should also be a cave at Mt. Sinai/Horeb where the prophet Elijah talked with God. Sure enough, they found a cave on Jabal Al Lawz, something they said cannot be found on the traditional Mt. Sinai.

The Mountain Peak

As they neared the top of the mountain, they noticed that the peak is very black in color, unlike the other mountains in the area.

When they reached the blackened peak, the rocks appeared to have been in a fire, which would fit with Exodus 19:18. To ensure that the rocks weren't volcanic in nature, Cornuke slammed one of the rocks to the ground, breaking it. They discovered that only the outside crust had a dark melted appearance while the inside was granite. Other rocks they tested were the same.

Miscellaneous discoveries

Other discoveries Cornuke and Williams said they made included evidence of a battlefield (perhaps where Moses faced the Amalekites—Ex. 17:8-13); a grove of acacia wood trees (the Ark of the Covenant was made of acacia wood—Ex. 25:10); and kilns for making pottery.

Why the Secrecy?

The two amateur archaeologists reflected on why Saudi Arabia appears to be trying to keep this site a secret. If Jabal Al Lawz is Mt. Sinai, it obviously is a place sacred to both Christians and Jews, they say, but it is in a Muslim country. Their theory is simply that Saudi Arabia wants to keep Christians and Jewish archaeologists out of the area.

The wish of Cornuke and Williams is that professional archaeologists could examine the mountain and its surroundings, but they fear that the Saudi government will never permit it.

In Conclusion

One of the members of the LSI Board, after viewing this DVD, said it seemed too good to be true. Could all of the Exodus-related places and artifacts these two men claim to have found still be in existence after thousands of years?

Although the DVD was copyrighted in 1999, the theory that Jabal Al Lawz is the real Mt. Sinai has been around much longer than that.

A man named Ron Wyatt may have been the first to associate Jabal Al Lawz with Mt. Sinai, as early as 1984 or earlier, and one of Wyatt's associates may have been the person to have given Cornuke and Williams the letter that inspired their adventure.

For Additional Study

Readers with Internet access merely need to type in the words "Jabal Al Lawz" in a search engine such as Google to find numerous articles on this topic, both for and against the idea that Jabal Al Lawz is Mt. Sinai.

To view video highlights of the DVD, to listen to an audio documentary and promotion of the DVD (in which the men say they did indeed spend some time in a Saudi prison), and to tune in on an interview which G. Gordon Liddy had with Cornuke, visit the explorationfilms.com website and click on the Search for the Real Mt. Sinai link.

Also, using the new Google Earth program which combines satellite imagery with maps, one can indeed verify that there is a mountain at the location of Jabal Al Lawz (28 o 41' N; 35 o 18' E) with a blackened top. But other places in the region also have that dark color. In addition, by using Google Earth, one can see some hints of a possible land bridge connecting the Sinai peninsula with Saudi Arabia, but the evidence is less clear than the photography on the DVD. *LSI*