



"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1)

REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

MARCH 2007

What's Happening?

Chapter Meeting

The Seattle Chapter will meet March 17th, 9:30 to 11:30, at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Shoreline. The meeting will feature a presentation titled "Evolution 101." Come meet the local chapter folks and get a primer on science apologetics. For directions, go to <http://www.calvinpc.org/directions.html>.

Upcoming Interviews

Hugh Ross will appear on "The Pastor's Show with Brian Dahlen," April 14, 9:30 A.M. Pacific on KKMS radio in Minnesota. The topic is "Young Earth/Old Earth, What's the Difference?" Available via the web at <http://www.kkms.radio>.

We Do Presentations

The Seattle chapter does presentations on wide range of topics ranging from the scientific evidences for God, to the age of the earth debate. If your church or group is looking for speakers, contact us at seattle@reasons.org.

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Solving the Mysteries of the Exodus

TIM BOYLE

NOTE: This is the second half of an article that began in April.

Route to the Red Sea Crossing

The main reason scholars many centuries later have had trouble putting together a coherent picture of the Exodus is not because the events were not carefully recorded by Moses to be later compiled into the records we have in the Old Testament. Numerous details of the route of the Exodus and the events that happened along the way are listed in the book of Exodus as well as in Numbers and elsewhere. The problem is the specific place names listed were for the most part unknown by later scholars. Because the association of a mountain in the lower Sinai Peninsula with the biblical Mt. Sinai became firmly implanted in biblical scholars' minds, the various speculations as to the actual route were forced into that mold.



Perhaps the biggest issue to be solved in putting together a coherent picture is the crossing of the Red Sea. Since the original Hebrew used the words "yam suph," which literally means "Sea of Reeds," how is it that the tradition arose of the crossing of the "Red Sea?" The Old Testament was first translated into Greek in the 3rd Century B.C. by 70 Jewish scholars living in Alexandria, Egypt. They would have certainly known that the word "suph" meant "reed," and yet they translated it into Greek as "eruthra thalassa," literally, "Sea Red." There must have been a good reason. (The fact that in English "reed" and "red" are so similar is pure coincidence.)

Humphreys spends a considerable portion of his book describing his quest to figure out how both "reed" and "red" would be applicable to the crossing and how the various clues in the text all come together in one location—the northern tip of

the Gulf of Aqaba. First of all, why is the body of water between Africa and Arabia call the “Red Sea?” Humphreys describes his experience in seeing the normally deep blue sea having large splotches of bright red at low tide, when the water level drops down to the tops of the brilliantly colored coral reefs. As soon as the rising tide deepens the water just a bit, this fleeting yet striking effect quickly disappears. This red coral grows extensively along the coasts of the Red Sea and so he speculates that this is the reason this body of water was given that name.

What about reeds, which do not grow in salt water? Scholars who have taken the position that “Red Sea” was the “most famous mistranslation in history” gravitate towards the theory that the Israelites crossed a shallow, reed-filled inland lake. These did exist along what is now the Suez Canal, but the location of possible sites would seem to be too early in the Exodus march. They would have reached these locations shortly after leaving Succoth on the second day. We must keep in mind that Pharaoh had grudgingly authorized a trip of three days into the desert, a day of offerings, and then supposedly three days to come back, for a total of a week. How long it was before he realized they were marching much too fast and far for them to be intending to return is not clear, but certainly they would have had a head start of at least a couple of days if not more. While Pharaoh’s army would be able to move at a considerably faster pace, it would have taken a few days to catch up, as the Israelites pushed on as fast as they could possibly go.

Thus, the clear implication is that the crossing of the Red Sea must have been something like a week or so after they left Egypt, which is much too long a time after they would have been going by any possible inland lakes. Humphreys, however, points out that at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, where desert wadis drain into the sea, there are even today large areas covered with reeds almost to the very shoreline. Presumably, this would have been even more so in ancient times prior to land development. If it were at this point that the Israelites cross the sea, it would have been appropriate to call it both the “Sea of Reeds” and the “Red Sea.”

Almost all biblical references to “Yam Suph” (Red Sea) in the Old Testament are in direct reference to the Exodus, but one reference in 1 Kings 9:26 tells us that King Solomon had a ship-building facility “at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath in Edom, on the shore of the Red Sea.” This places the shipyard at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, precisely the place Humphreys proposes for the Red Sea crossing. Other references in the Exodus story to “Yam Suph,” other than at the actual crossing, also support the same conclusion. Numbers 21:4, referring to a time later on in the wilderness experience, tells us that the Israelites “traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom.” Edom is the region directly north of the Gulf of Aqaba. Likewise, in the listing of campsites in Numbers 33, it says that at least five days after the crossing, they were again camping alongside the “Yam Suph,” which only makes sense if they were proceeding southward along the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba. After proceeding south along the plateau to the east of the gulf, the trade route drops back down to the coast at the Red Sea proper.

Perhaps the most difficult piece of textual data to explain for this proposal is list

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In the **NEWS...**

[Intelligent Design in Biology](#)

This article by Phillip Johnson discusses why many scientific organizations are opposed to ID’s goal of achieving a philosophy of science that allows scientists to follow the evidence wherever it leads. Go to: <http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=view&id=3914&program=CSC%20-%20Scientific%20Research%20and%20Scholarship%20-%20History%20and%20Philosophy%20of%20Science>.

[Amazing Movie](#)

This Breakpoint article by Anne Morse critiques the movie “Amazing Grace,” the story of William Wilberforce, a slave abolitionist. According to Morse, it’s a very positive depiction of religiously motivated people. Go to <http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=6166>.

[An Empty Theory and an Empty Tomb](#)

This Beliefnet article by Ben Witherton examines James Cameron’s TV documentary “The Lost Tomb of Jesus.” Witherton gives six reasons why viewers should be skeptical of this special. Go to: http://www.beliefnet.com/story/212/story_21296_1.html.

[Child’s Play from Dawkins](#)

This Breakpoint article by Tom Gilson examines Dawkins’ proposition that teaching children religion is child abuse by examining whether children who are involved in religion exhibit the negative behaviors typical of abused children. Go to: <http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=6192>.

[Scientific Publications Supporting ID](#)

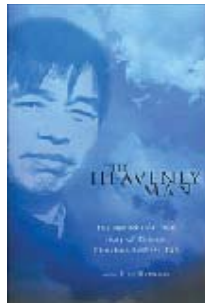
ID critics claim ID advocates don’t publish their work in scientific journals. This Discovery Institute article lists the articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Go to: <http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=view&id=2640&program=CSC%20-%20Scientific%20Research%20and%20Scholarship%20-%20Science>.

Book Reviews

The Heavenly Man

Paul Hathaway
Monarch Books, 2003

Reviewer: Hal Whidden



Brother Yun was born in China in 1958 in a humble farming community. Yun's mother was a Christian and he became a believer at age 16. Yun earnestly wanted to have a Bible which were extremely scarce. He prayed and fasted so much to get a Bible his family was beginning to think he was crazy. He received a vision about a man bringing him a Bible and shortly thereafter someone brought one to his door which he feverishly devoured. After seeking the Holy Spirit, he heard a voice telling him "Yun I'm going to send you to the west and south to be my witness."

From that time on, Yun started being obedient to the Spirit's leadings which came regularly in visions to him and those he was going to minister to. As many started coming to Christ, the government started to arrest Christians. Yun was arrested, beaten and came very close to death multiple times. The beatings and prison conditions are almost beyond description. As his ministry continued in the late 70's and early 80's, thousands were saved and miracles occurred regularly. From these revivals, new leaders from the house churches ministered throughout China.

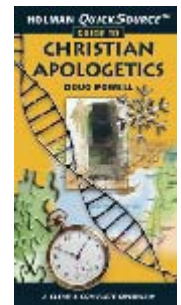
Throughout this book Yun refers to scripture verses which seem to exactly match his precarious circumstances. To me the message here is that when we are obedient to God's leading we should not expect an easy, prosperous life but one that is constantly filled with opportunities to share the Gospel. When God decided Yun's mission was accomplished in China he escaped miraculously with his wife, son and daughter. Since then, he has been instrumental in starting a flow of Chinese missionaries to other countries. These missionaries are willing to endure any persecution that they may encounter.

I highly recommend this book, but be forewarned: Yun's life in the hands of his communist capturers may cause you to set it aside for a time before proceeding. As a side note, Yun has been dismayed by the lack of zeal among many churches in the West. He feels those churches where missions are a priority are much more alive and well.

Guide to Christian Apologetics

Doug Powell
Holman, 2006

Reviewer: Mike Brown



A few months ago I came across this great little reference book by Holman titled, *Holman Quicksource Guide to Understanding the Bible*. It is chock full of beautiful color photographs, illustrations and quotes, and it is very well laid out. This year Holman came out with another book in the series, this one on apologetics—and it's absolutely great! The information is laid out in fourteen chapters:

1. What is apologetics?
2. Does God exist? The cosmological argument.
3. Does God exist? The design argument.
4. Does God exist? The moral argument.
5. Which God exists? (overview of religious beliefs.)
6. Where did the New Testament come from?
7. Is the New Testament reliable?
8. Is the Old Testament Reliable?
9. Do Miracles Happen?
10. What about prophecy?
11. The resurrection?
12. Did Jesus claim to be God? Is Jesus the only way?
13. How could God allow evil?
14. Methodology (types of apologetics)

The book pretty much covers all the bases and I intend to recommend it to the students in my apologetics class. Here's a quote from the introductory chapter:

"Christians who believe but don't know why are often insecure and comfortable only around other Christians. Defensiveness can quickly surface when challenges arise on issues of faith, morality, and truth because of a lack of information regarding the rational grounds for Christianity. At its worst this can lead to either a fortress mentality or a belligerent faith, precisely the opposite of the Great Commission Jesus gave in Matthew 28:19-20. The charge of the Christian is not to withdraw from the world and lead an insular life. Rather, we are to be engaged in the culture, to be salt and light."

of campsites prior to the crossing, as it lists only Succoth, Etham and then Migdol. Immediately after the crossing, however, it specifically states that they “traveled for three days in the Desert of Etham,” and so it’s clear that listed campsites did not automatically mean a day’s travel between them. It makes sense that Moses would plan an ordinary first day’s travel with an overnight stop at the Egyptian outpost of Succoth, so as not to raise undue suspicions. After that, however, he would push ahead at maximum speed. It’s likely they would have traveled along the well-established trade route (which would have water available at several oases) straight across the Sinai to the tip of Aqaba. Since they began the journey at full moon, a bright moon would have been up most of the night for that first week. This would have enabled them to travel per day for considerably more than the 12 hours of daylight they would have had at that time of year. They probably would not have even set up formal campsites as long as they feared Pharaoh might be in hot pursuit. The net result of this is that they could have been to the head of the Gulf of Aqaba in six or seven days, well ahead of Pharaoh’s army.

Humphreys brings together numerous lines of evidence that point towards Etham being the region surrounding the northern Gulf of Aqaba. The lists of place names along the route as described in both Exodus and Numbers are identical except that Exodus names the area immediately after the crossing of the Red Sea as the “Desert of Shur,” while Numbers calls it the “Desert of Etham” (which took three days to cross). “Shur” means “wall” in Hebrew, while “Etham” means the same thing in Egyptian. While these usually refer to manmade walls, they could easily be applied to the cliffs running along either side of the gulf and on up to the north to the Dead Sea. This region is, in fact, a section of the Great Rift Valley, where tectonic plates are pulling apart from each other, extending some 7000 km. from Mozambique to Syria. The ancient trade route the Israelites would likely have taken drops precipitously down from the plateau some 750 m above sea level and along a streambed to the sea just a few km south of the head of the gulf. A similar line of cliffs runs along the other side of the gulf and up the Arabah Valley to the north. Humphreys even located a map in a book entitled “The Land of Midian” published in 1879 that lists “Etham” as the alternative name of the highest peak in the “grand wall that forms the right bank of the Wadi Yitm [Etham]” just north of the end of the gulf.

Exodus 14:2 states that after making camp at Etham, God told Moses to “turn back” and “encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea.” The clear implication is they were already past the end of the Gulf of Aqaba, and could have simply proceeded south from there without any need for a crossing. The following verses, however, tell us that God had them turn back in order to set the stage for God’s final victory over the Egyptians so that they

would know he is “the Lord.” The locations of Pi Hahiroth and Migdol are unknown, but according to this scenario, they would be on the west side of the gulf between where the trade route drops down from the plateau and the head of the gulf.

Pharaoh would have known that the trail leading down the cliffs was too steep and narrow for his chariots, and so Humphreys proposes that the Egyptian force would have split up, with the foot soldiers pushing ahead along the main trail while he and his chariots took the long way around along a gentle slope into the Arabah Valley to the north. From a tactical standpoint, this would seem to be a brilliant move, as the Israelites would be caught between the foot soldiers coming up the road from the southwest, while the chariots roared down from the northeast. They would likewise be hemmed in between the cliffs to the west or northwest and the sea to the east or southeast, depending on their exact location.

The text indicates it was getting dark when the Egyptians arrived, and so they would no doubt have wanted to wait until daybreak to move in and recapture the Israelites. The language of 14:19-20 about the angel of God and his “pillar of cloud” standing between the Israelites and Egyptians to keep them apart throughout the night is, admittedly, not easily explained in terms of any natural phenomenon, even under the control of God. Whether this is a totally supernatural act of God or simply poetic language to express God care by keeping the Egyptian army away, I don’t know. Assuming this event was about seven days after they left Egypt, the moon would not have risen until about midnight, and so the first half of the night would have been very dark.

The Crossing of the Red Sea

The stage is now set for the climax of the entire Exodus drama. God causes a “strong east wind” to blow all through the night, driving the sea back. The image burned in our minds from Hollywood movies of the water suddenly dividing and piling up in massive walls on either side of a dry channel is not at all what is implied in the text. Instead, it clearly states that a strong wind blew all night to drive back the waters of the sea. This describes what is known as “wind setdown,” when strong winds blowing across a long stretch of water for many hours gradually push water downwind, lowering the water level at the upwind shoreline. It is the same mechanism that causes a damaging storm surge in a hurricane, where the wind is blowing onshore and pushes water a considerable distance inland.

At first glance, however, the description of an “east wind” seems to pose a problem, since the Gulf of Aqaba runs from north northeast (NNE) to south southwest (SSW); thus, a wind directly from the east would have only a relatively small component

blowing the right direction. Humphreys points out, however, that the ancient Hebrews only referred to things in terms of the four cardinal directions, so an “east wind” could refer to anything between northeast and southeast. In order for the wind setdown mechanism to be able to explain the effect described in Exodus, the strong winds would have to blow from a direction pretty close to NNE down essentially the entire gulf.

Admittedly, describing such a wind as a “north wind” would seem to make more sense, but since we don’t know exactly where they were on the shoreline and what section of the gulf they were crossing, that is not necessarily the case. When one considers the layout of the shoreline at the head of the gulf, along with the type of pressure gradient that would be necessary to generate such winds along the length of the gulf, then a wind a bit east of northeast at the shoreline where they might very well have been would actually make more sense. Thus, if one were to simply use an ordinal direction, then “east wind” would be it.

From the standpoint of how the atmosphere works, what would be needed is a strong pressure gradient between high pressure to the NNW and low pressure to the SSE of the head of the gulf. In such a scenario, the wind would be blowing from the NE (slightly cross-gradient towards the lower pressure) and would then gradually shift towards a more northerly wind blowing down the center of the gulf. Eventually, the winds would shift towards a NW and then westerly wind farther south, but this could easily have been at the base of the gulf or even out in the Red Sea proper. Thus, it is not at all difficult to imagine a wind-generating pressure system that would have winds starting out a bit east of NE at the head of the gulf and then increasingly shifting towards a north wind further to the south. The high cliffs running down either side of the gulf would also serve to funnel the force of the wind straight down the gulf. Such a scenario blowing all night could indeed cause a considerable wind setdown, exposing the sea bottom for many hundreds of meters out, particularly if the gradient of the beach were not steep.

The Exodus account, however, clearly states that there was water on both sides of the dry pathway across to the other side and so, in order for the wind setdown theory to be valid, that would require some sort of ridge to be running across the gulf to the other side. This bit of speculation, of course, needs to be tested against the actual features along the various possible crossing routes to give it more credibility. It is quite possible, however, that the shoreline itself has changed considerably in past 3300 years, and so what we can see today is not necessarily the same situation as in Moses’ day. Thus, even if there is not such a ridgeline today, that doesn’t necessarily mean there wasn’t one at that time. The presence of such a ridge would, however, lend considerable credence to this theory.

When it comes to the issue of a “wall” of water on both sides, even if we opt for a ridge exposed by a wind setdown, the “wall” would only be on the downwind side. While the Hebrew word translated as “wall” is the same word that is ordinarily used for the walls of a city or house, it needn’t mean a more or less vertical slope to the water. The important point is that water was on both sides of them as they crossed. The text says that the water was “a wall to them on their right hand” (which would be the downwind side), with the original Hebrew wording being imprecise as to what the water was like on the left. If “wall” is understood simply to mean a “barrier,” then it wouldn’t matter, but even if taken to be a steeply sloped “wall” of water being held up by the wind, the text simply doesn’t directly say that the water on the left was the same. As a physical mechanism, no amount of wind could hold up walls of water on both sides unless it was coming from directly above along the entire route and then spreading sideways from there. Such a scenario would have to be totally supernatural, as no natural mechanism exists that could cause it. But the text implies no such thing, and it clearly states that it took all night to accomplish. If God were to use a supernatural mechanism that superseded the natural laws he had created, he could have done that in seconds!

As to what the mechanism would have been for causing the water to surge back in with enough force to knock over the soldiers and their horses, there are several possibilities. If the Israelites were crossing a section of the gulf near its head, it would make more sense for the Egyptians to simply go around the shoreline and cut the Israelites off at the other side. The text, however, says that God “threw the Egyptian army into confusion.” The only light would have been a half moon overhead, as the sun was not yet up, and with such a strong wind, there was no doubt a lot of dust in the air. Likewise, he “made the wheels of their chariots come off so they had difficulty driving.”

The text says it was daybreak when the Lord caused the surge of water that wiped out the Egyptians. Among the factors that could have contributed to this, the moon would have been at its highest point in the sky, which means that the tide would be coming in, adding to the pressure behind the waters being held back. The text doesn’t specifically state the wind suddenly stopped—only that “the sea went back to its place.” Humphreys did some calculations of how fast a “bore wave” would come roaring back in if the wind supporting the water suddenly stopped. He came up with 11 mph (17 kph), which would be sufficient to overtake anyone trying to flee towards the shore through the shallow water already there. Winds being generated by a large low-pressure system do not naturally, of course, just suddenly stop. It is possible, however, for the wind in such a system to suddenly die down in a localized area. For instance, if there were a strong thunderstorm cell a few kilometers out in the gulf, it could have caused a strong downdraft

("microburst") that could have temporarily cancelled out the large-scale wind where they were.

The fact the text doesn't even mention the wind stopping, however, may mean God orchestrated some other natural mechanism to bring the water surging in. An exceptionally big wave coming up the gulf and hitting at just the right time could have done the trick. For all we know, God could have caused an earthquake at the mouth of the gulf that set off a tsunami at just the right time to reach them when Moses raised his hand over the sea. Whatever physical mechanism was involved in drowning "the best of Pharaoh's officers" (Ex. 15:4) (which implies Pharaoh himself was not killed), the purposes of God were fulfilled.

Was Mt. Sinai an Erupting Volcano?

With no more fear of being pursued by the Egyptians, the Israelites could now focus on reaching their destination—Mt. Sinai. Humphreys lists a number of interesting points in the text concerning how Mt. Sinai is described that point to an erupting volcano. If he is correct in his conclusion (and I believe he is), then this means that whatever mountain is the true Mt. Sinai must be an active volcano, of which there are none in the Sinai Peninsula. The only volcanoes in the region with recent (geologically speaking) activity are in western Saudi Arabia, near the ancient land of Midian. This is exactly where the text states that Moses was when he lived in exile.

Moses' first experience on the "mountain of God" was when he saw the "burning bush," where he encountered the living God. The text describes this in terms of a real fire burning within a bush that clearly was more than simply bush wood on fire. Humphreys suggests that this may have been superheated natural gas leaking out of a fissure that opened up under the living bush, something that is entirely possible in a volcanic zone that includes gas and petroleum deposits. The gas would ignite as soon as it encountered air, and if the bush were still green, you would have exactly the spectacle Moses beheld—a burning bush that wasn't immediately consumed.

During the Exodus itself, "a pillar of cloud" by day and a "pillar of fire" by night served as a beacon to direct the Israelites. It has usually been portrayed as a whirlwind moving along in front of them, but Humphreys points out that the text states that it only remained in front of them and nothing about it moving along with them. He suggests that this simply refers to an erupting volcano seen at a distance. Such a pillar-shaped cloud from an erupting Mt. Bedr would easily be visible in the clear desert air from the eastern Sinai Peninsula as they crossed over, and it would be only slightly to the right of their direction of travel. He deals with the conundrum of Ex. 14:19-20, where the "pillar of cloud moved from

in front and stood behind them," as referring to them turning north for a time to go up around the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. He interprets God's command to "turn back" after camping at Etham to simply mean to turn to the left so that their backs would be towards the pillar of cloud.

If their campsite at Etham were prior to them descending down to the gulf, then this would be a possible solution. It does not, however, explain the reference of the pillar of cloud standing between the Egyptian army and Israelites to keep them apart the night of the crossing. Likewise, it does not fit his own hypothesis that Etham was at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. (Remember that the "Desert of Etham" was along the eastern side of the gulf.) Thus, while the pillar-shaped cloud of an erupting Mt. Sinai is an intriguing possibility for explaining the "pillar of cloud," it is not a good explanation of Ex. 14:19-20, and so I feel the jury is still out on this aspect of the story.

Whether the description of the "pillar of cloud" can be explained by a volcanic eruption or not, clearly many other aspects of their experience can be. The description we see in Deut. 4:11 vividly describes what an erupting volcano would look like, "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness." Exodus 19:16-19 describes phenomena that would be associated with an erupting volcano, including earthquakes, lightening coming from thick clouds and even a "loud trumpet blast" (which can be caused by high-pressure gas blowing through a narrow opening of the right shape).

The "Desert of Sin"

Humphreys deals with numerous other details of the story, which I will only briefly touch on. See Humphrey's article at: <http://www.europhysicsnews.com/full/33/article6.pdf> for further details.

For instance, the description of "manna from heaven" is identical to what can be collected under tamarisk trees under the right conditions. The "Desert of Sin" is where the Israelites first ate manna, and Humphreys brings together a number of lines of evidence that this is the "Hisma Desert" in Midian where tamarisk trees are very common. During the spring, when plenty of water is available and the trees are producing lots of sap, tiny drops of sap ooze out of places bitten by insects, etc. and solidify into "thin flakes like frost on the ground" that are "white like coriander seed and taste like wafers made with honey" (Ex. 16:14, 31).

Likewise, Quail are known to winter in southern Arabia and then fly to Europe during the summer. The migratory route takes them right over western Arabia, peaking in April. The Israelites arrived in the "Desert of Sin" one month after leaving Egypt, which would place them there in late April or early May, easily within the time span

when quail would be migrating through the region.

Perhaps the most fascinating part of Humphreys' book is the connection he makes between the events at Mt. Sinai and the cult of the "Moon-god." He weaves together numerous bits of evidence that support the view he shares with many biblical scholars that the name "Sin" is derived from the Babylonia Moon-god of the same name, "Sin." While the Israelites may have sinned in the "Desert of Sin," the linguistic similarity is simply a coincidence of the English language. The nearby city of Tayma has been shown to be an ancient center of this particular cult, and together with other evidence, this paints a picture of the Moon-god being the most revered of the gods of ancient Arabia. Tayma is about 120 km the east of Mt. Bedr.

Humphreys includes the following quote from the book, "Arabia and the Bible," by Hebrew scholar James Montgomery:

"There stands out [in south Arabia] a definite astral triad of highest deities: Moon, Sun and Morning (or Evening) Star [Venus]. The Moon has the pre-eminence, even as he had in the elder Babylonian religion, before settled agricultural society had shifted the center of gravity to the Sun."

Interestingly, it seems the crescent moon with the one bright star that is generally associated with the Muslim faith is a throwback to this pre-Muslim time. While quite rare, a brilliant Venus and a crescent moon can line up exactly in this configuration shortly before sunrise or after sunset, and such a conjunction would have certainly held great significance to the people who worshipped the Moon-god Sin.

Are the names "Sinai" and "Sin" related? Humphreys makes a compelling case for it. Apparently the "ai" ending can mean "from," "belonging to," or "of", and so the Hebrews giving the mountain the name "Mount Sinai" likely meant the "mountain of the Moon-god Sin." Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was a "priest of Midian," and while it is true he may have been a priest to some other deity, it is likely that he was a priest to the Moon-god. Exodus 3:1 tells us that Moses took Jethro's sheep herd all the way to "Horeb, the mountain of God," where he encountered the burning bush, and Ex. 18 says that Jethro came down himself to this same mountain to meet Moses, where he proclaimed, "Now I know the Lord is greater than all other gods," and offered sacrifices to God. Whether his shift in allegiance to Yahweh was total and lasting, we don't know, but he certainly was inspired by God to give Moses very good advice before returning to his own home.

The name of this mountain in Arabic is "Bedr," which means "full moon." The crater at the top forms a nice circle, with the mountain itself being a kind of "mini Mount Fuji" sitting on top of a large tabletop mountain. It's not hard to imagine why this mountain

was thought of as sacred, and with the "full moon" crater on top, it was a natural choice for a mountain dedicated to the Moon-god Sin. Unlike all of the other volcanic craters in the region (which are within large lava fields), Mount Bedr is an isolated cone rising some 180 m above the eastern edge of a 5 km wide by 10 km long tabletop mountain called "Tadra," which itself stands some 1500 m above sea level. This elevated plateau is composed of ancient sandstone into which this volcanic cone has intruded itself.

The following two websites give satellite views of the mountain. The first one (<http://home.att.net/~qata/tadra.htm>) is in black and white and shows the cone of the volcano sitting on the right-hand (eastern) edge of the grayish colored, oblong table mountain. There is an elongated light-colored patch just to the left of the cone, which presumably is very flat and without much vegetation. What it would have looked like 3300 years is, of course, uncertain, but such a spot would have provided an ideal location for building the tabernacle and forming a long-term campsite close to the mountain. Being on the west side of the volcano would have protected it from ash falls, as the prevailing winds would carry that away from them. The other satellite picture (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hala-'l_Badr; then click the "Google Maps satellite view" under "External links") is in color and shows the table mountain in mostly green, indicating its relative abundance of vegetation. The volcanic cone itself appears light brown in the picture.

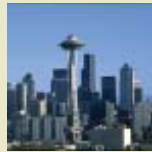
The layout of the mountain would make it very easy to delineate the boundaries of the "holy ground" that the people must not intrude upon or even let their animals enter. Humphreys quotes an explorer by the name of Alois Musil who wrote of his experiences in the area a century ago in a book entitled "The Northern Hegaz." He said that the Bedouins in the area were afraid of climbing Mount Bedr and didn't even allow their animals to graze on "the grey ridge of Tadra," the table mountain on which Bedr stands. Musil likewise describes an intriguing altar of twelve stones on the north side of the mountain were the local tribesmen "still offer up sacrifices when they are encamped close by." These may even be the very stones referred to in Exodus 24:4, "He (Moses) got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel." Unfortunately, this region is off-limits for expeditions to make geological and archaeological explorations, and so we are thus limited to satellite pictures and early accounts such as Musil's for our theorizing. Such explorations to determine if this mountain has any archaeological remains from the Exodus and whether it erupted in the proper time frame would go a long ways towards confirming (or disproving) this theory.

I want to close with a quote from Humphreys' book about the incident of the golden calf:

“Our knowledge that Mount Sinai is Mount Bedr helps us understand better the curious incident of the golden calf recorded in the book of Exodus. The background is that Moses had climbed up Mount Sinai, the summit of which was covered in volcanic smoke, and he had not been seen for forty days and forty nights. Exodus 32:1 records the Israelites’ going to Aaron and saying, ‘As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ But we can guess what they thought. Moses had gone up to the top of the fiery mountain of the Moon-god and had disappeared. The Israelites must have thought Moses had been slain at the top of this terrifying mountain and that the Moon-god had triumphed over Moses. So the Israelites, forgetting all the good things their God had done for them, quickly changed sides and made an idol to worship that represented the Moon-god. And what animal represented the Moon-god, carved on his temples from Babylon to southern Arabia, including the carvings found in Tayma in Midian? As we’ve seen, it was a young bull, otherwise called a calf.”

Tim Boyle is a missionary living in Japan. He is a trained RTB apologist and holds a B.S. in physics and MDiv. and DMin degrees. This article is posted on his website, <http://www.konkyo.org> and includes maps. You can also contact him through the website.

[EDITORS NOTE: The articles published in this newsletter represent the views of local chapter members and apologists associated with the RTB ministry. They do not necessary represent the official view of RTB. The purpose of these articles is to stimulate thought and discussion. While we strive to communicate the views of RTB, we also want to expose readers to a variety of science and the Bible topics, some of which are beyond the primary focus of RTB. If you have questions or comments about our articles, please contact the chapter at seattle@reasons.org.]



Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound area and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction that the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, what God says through His word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

What Do We Do?

Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science, the Bible and related topics.
- Working with teachers and homeschoolers to achieve a balanced approach to the teaching of origins.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of the RTB ministry.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, encouraging them to evaluate their worldviews.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

Questions? Get Answers.

Whether you are looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. You can also call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.