

# 23 Mt Horeb and Mt Sinai

## Names (also known as)

Mt Horeb is known in Scripture as the "Mountain of God" and "the Mountain of Yahweh" - modern name is Ras Sufsafeh.

Mt Sinai - modern name is Jebel Musa.

## Etymology

“Horeb” - Strong – desolate; BDB – desert; Wikipedia – glowing heat.

“Sinai” – BDB – thorny. Hitchcock – a bush, enmity.



## Location/Description

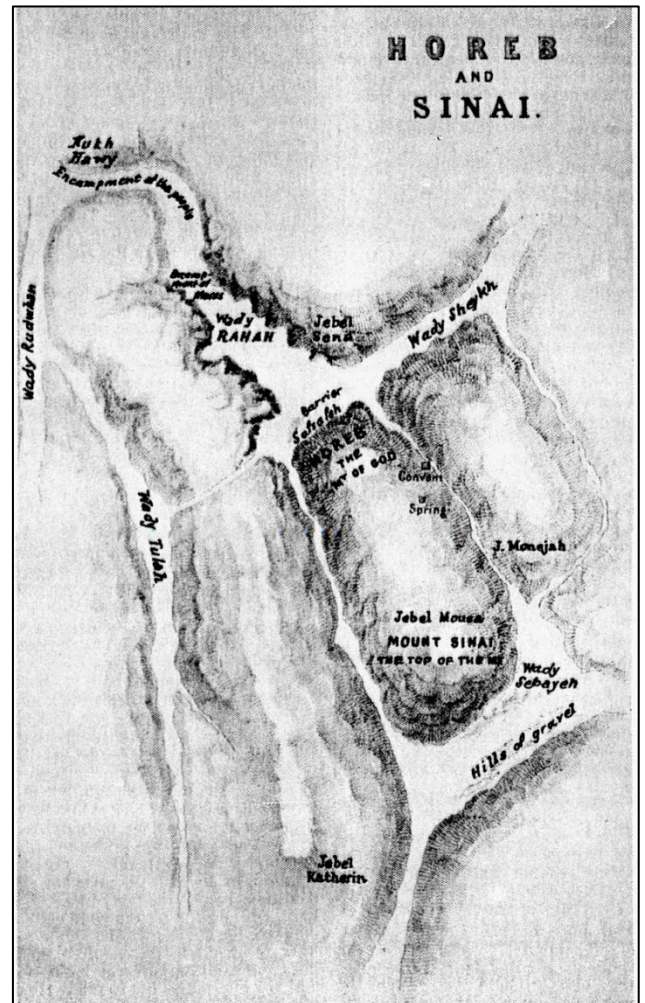
The longstanding traditional view is that Mt Horeb and Sinai are located in the south of the Sinai Peninsular. This has been challenged by modern scholars but there are sound reasons for staying with it (see below).

## Horeb and Sinai

The requirements of Scripture are [1] a "mount that might be touched;" [2] an elevation from whence might sound the voice of God proclaiming the ten commandments to the people; [3] a summit from whence Moses could neither see nor hear the revelries beneath when told by the

angel that the people "had corrupted themselves" (Ex. 32:7); [4] a stream descending from the mount to the plain.

All are provided for at the area of modern Ras Sufsafeh and Jebel Musa. The record of Exodus 32 is important in identifying the twin peaks of Horeb and Sinai. Moses had ascended Sinai, leaving Joshua at an adjoining point. When told by the angel to return, both men walked back discussing as to what the circumstances of the crisis might be, and it was only when "they came nigh unto the camp" (v.19) that the scene of wickedness opened out to them. Now if they had merely ascended the precipitous cliff of Sufsafeh (identified by the Jews as Sinai), they could have seen what was taking place from the inception. It is only 500 metres (1600 ft) high above the plain, and commands an excellent view of it. It is evident, therefore, that a discrimination must be made between Horeb, from whence the people heard the voice of God, and Sinai up into which Moses ascended: and a careful reading of Scripture will reveal that they are two different peaks of a plateau, and, in fact, are about five kilometres (3 miles) distant one from the other.



## Mt Sinai



Here Moses received the tables of stone, and remained for forty days. It is defined as the "top of the mount" (Ex. 19:20; 24:16-17; 34:2). Sinai is about 5 kilometres distant from the plain where the Israelites were encamped, agreeing with the narrative that represents Moses and Joshua as hearing and seeing nothing of the revelry taking place until they came closer to the site (Ex. 32:1-20). On arrival at Sufsafeh the scene burst upon them, and in anger Moses descended on the camp and smashed the tables of stone at the foot of the mount (Ex. 32:19).

## Mt Horeb



Horeb is called "the mount of God" (Ex. 4:27; 18:5; 24:13; I Kings 19:8). It is always described as distinct from Sinai which is either given that name or called "the top of the mount" (both Horeb and Sinai are on a plateau). Horeb is close to the plain, at "the nether part of the mount" (Ex. 19:17), "before Yahweh under the mount" (Deut. 4:10-11), which expressions require a precipitous cliff, and not the more gradual slopes of Jebel Musa. Yahweh is represented as speaking "face to face" with the people (Deut. 5:4). He could not do that from Jebel Musa, but it is certainly appropriate to Ras Sufafeh. This cliff rises abruptly from the

plain and overhangs it, whereas Jebel Musa (the Mount of Moses) throws out from its base a number of spurs and rocky undulations far into the plain. Sufsafeh, therefore, answers to the description of "a mountain that might be touched" (Heb. 12:18), and such as required a barrier to prevent the people coming too near (Ex. 19:23).

## Yahweh spoke from Horeb

When Yahweh addressed the people it was from Horeb; when He spoke with Moses "face to face," it was from Sinai. In either case, it was not Yahweh personally, but His angelic manifestation that appeared. When He spoke with the people, they were gathered together before Horeb for that purpose (Deut. 4:10; 5:4, 26). They heard and understood the words addressed to them (Deut. 4:12,33,36; 5:23; Ex. 20:22).

This would hardly be possible if the voice thundered to them from a hidden eminence five kilometres (3 miles) distance. Such utterance would be broken up with echoes, so that the words would not be distinguishable. Nor would there be a need to "gather the people together," if it sounded from such a distance. Yet later when the people retired to their tents, they no longer heard the voice, suggesting the need to come close to the mount to do so (Ex. 20:21; Deut. 5:27-32). When Yahweh spake thus to the people, Moses was on the plain, not on Sinai (Ex. 24:1-3).

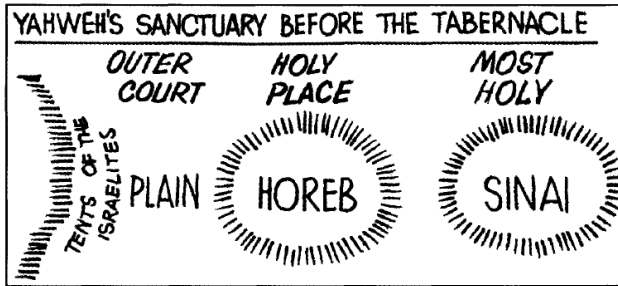
The plain at the foot of Sinai does not answer to the description of the narrative, whereas that in front of Sufsafeh does. Unlike that in front of Horeb, it is a narrow, rugged, winding valley with spurs from the mount reaching far into it. Therefore, by gathering together all relevant details, we conclude that Horeb and Sinai are two peaks on a mountainous plateau.

Reference to the former is usually described as the "Mount of God," or as Horeb; reference to the latter is either by the name of Sinai, "the top of the mount," or some such designation. Where reference is made merely to "the mount" as unnamed, it generally includes the entire range of which Horeb and Sinai are two peaks.

## Notable connections

The mount where God's glory was revealed was evidently chosen by God as a sanctuary, endowed with the unapproachable sacredness of the ark or the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle to be built. In that relationship, Horeb and Sinai stand related to each other as the holy place

and the most holy did in the tabernacle, whereas the plain before the mount was as the outer court where the people assembled for worship.



## Scriptural references

### Old Testament

Horeb is mentioned 17 times in the O.T. – firstly in Ex. 3:1 and the last Mal. 4:4.

Sinai occurs 35 times in the O.T. – first occ. Ex. 16:1 and the last Ps. 68:17.

### New Testament

Horeb is not mentioned in the N.T.

Sinai occurs by name 4 times in the N.T. – twice by Stephen in Acts 7 and twice by Paul in Galatians in relation to the allegory. It is also the subject of Paul's treatise in Heb. 12:18-29.

## Future importance

In the same way that Israel was organised at Mt Horeb and taken as Yahweh's covenant people, and His wife, and built the Tabernacle here, so the saints (the Israel of God) will be judged here and taken as the bride of Christ in glory. This is proven by considering Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:1-17; Hab. 3:1-5 and other related passages.

Like the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle with all its furniture was built from materials brought out of Egypt, so the saints drawn from all nations will be brought to this place that the glory of Yahweh might be revealed in them just as the Shekinah glory shone from between the Cherubim above the Mercy Seat.

## Sources:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MtHoreb/MtSinai>

Expositor – Exodus – HP Mansfield

Eureka – John Thomas

(Compiler – Jim Cowie)