

# Midianite

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Mid'ianite (Heb. *Midyani'*, מִדְיָנִי, [Nu 10:29](#), used collectively, and so rendered "Midianites," which is the usual translation for *Midian* itself; Sept. Μαδιανίτης; but the plur. מִדְיָנִים also occurs, [Ge 37:28](#), and the fem. מִדְיָנִית, [Nu 25:15](#); [SEE MADIAN](#)), a tribe of people descended from Abraham's son Midian (q.v.), a branch of the Arabians dwelling principally in the desert north of the peninsula of Arabia. Southwards they extended along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aileh; and northwards they stretched along the eastern frontier of Palestine; while the oases in the peninsula of Sinai seem to have afforded them pasturegrounds, and caused it to be included in the "land of Midian.". The notion that there were two peoples called Midian, founded on the supposed shortness of the interval for any considerable multiplication from Abraham to Moses, and on the mention of Moses's Cushite wife, seems to be untenable. Even conceding the former objection, which is unnecessary, one tribe has often become merged into another and older one, and only the name of the latter retained. See Burton, *Goldmines of Midian and Ruined Midianitish Cities* (Lond. 1878, 8vo).

**I. History.** — Midian, though not the oldest, was the most celebrated son of Keturah. What Judah became among the tribes of Israel. Midian became among the tribes of Arabia. It is true we find the other branches of the Keturites spoken of a few times in sacred history, and mentioned in such a way as to prove that as tribes they never lost their individuality; yet the

Midianites were the dominant people, and Midian is the great name which always comes out prominently before the historian. Not only so, but the Midianites appear to have been for a lengthened period the virtual rulers of Arabia, combining into a grand confederacy, and then guiding or controlling, as circumstances required, all the Arabian branches of the Hebrew race. This fact comes out incidentally in many parts of Scripture; and we require to keep it carefully in view in order to understand the sacred narrative.

1. Midian had five sons, who, doubtless, in accordance with Arab custom, became heads of distinct tribes ([Ge 25:4](#); comp. [Nu 31:8](#)). We are told that while "Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac," that is, made him his heir — head of his house and patrimony — "to the sons of the concubines Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son while he yet lived, eastward, to the land in the east" (verses 5, 6). This is the first indication of the country occupied by the Midianites and other descendants of Keturah. The expression is not very definite. Abraham's principal place of residence was Southern Palestine — Mamre and Beersheba. The "country of the east" appears to have included the whole region on the east side of the Arabah or great valley which reaches from the fountains of the Jordan to the AElanitic Gulf. All Arabia, in fact, and even Mesopotamia were included in the "country of the East" ([Ge 29:1](#); [Nu 23:7](#), etc.). *SEE BENE-KEDEM*. Another incidental notice in [Ge 36:35](#) points more clearly to the exact territory of Midian. Hadad, one of the early kings of Edom, is said to have "smitten Midian in the field of Moab." We may conclude from this that the Midianites were at that time settled on the eastern borders of Moab and Edom. They were, like all Arabians, a nomad or semi-nomad people; having some settlements around fountains and in fertile valleys, but forced to wander in their tents from place to place to secure sufficient

pasture for their flocks. The Midianites were an enterprising people. They were not satisfied with the dull routine of pastoral and agricultural life. From the first they appear to have engaged in commercial pursuits. Some districts of Arabia, Eastern Palestine, and Lebanon, yielded valuable spices and perfumes which were in great demand in Egypt, not merely for the luxuries of the living, but for the embalming of the dead. In this profitable trade the Midianites engaged. It was to one of their caravans passing through Palestine from Gilead to Egypt that Joseph was sold by his brethren ([Ge 37:25](#) sq.). Slaves at that time found as ready a market in Egypt as they do now. It will be observed that the traders are called by the historian both *Ishmaelites* and *Midianites*, the two names being used as synonymous. The reason probably is that these were the dominant tribes in Arabia, and carried on the trade jointly; hence they were known among strangers by both names. It would seem, however, that the merchants in this caravan were true Midianites. though they may have been accompanied by Ishmaelites (verses 28, 36; but comp. 25, 27). In verse 36 the Hebrew is מִדְיָנִים, the *Medanites*, which is the regular plural of *Medan* (מִדְיָן), the third son of Keturah ([Ge 25:2](#)); while in verse 28 the word is מִדְיָנִים, the regular plural of מִדְיָן. There can be little doubt that the Midianites are referred to in both passages, as represented in the Septuagint, Vulgate, Targums, and other ancient versions. *SEE MEDAN.*

⇒ "Midianites." topical outline.

By a similar latitude of expression, the Midianites sometimes appear to be reckoned among the Ishmaelites ([Jg 7:12](#); [Jg 8:22,24](#)); elsewhere they are distinguished from them ([Ge 25:2,4,12,16](#)). This probably arose from their being nomadic in their habits, so that bands of them often moved from place to place. But the difficulty may be avoided by supposing that

the terms "Midianite" and "Ishmaelite" are used as a synonyme of travelling merchant, such as they became in later times. *SEE ISHMAELITE.*

**2.** The next notice of Midian is in connection with the eventful history of Moses — "Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of *Midian*" (*Ex 2:15*). Reuel or Jethro, the priest of Midian, became his master and father-in-law. Moses kept his flock. The subsequent incidents of this strange narrative show clearly the region then inhabited by Jethro, and called "the land of Msidian." It was the peninsula of Sinai, and it was while watching his flock there on the side of Horeb that Moses saw the glory of the Lord in the burning bush, and received the commission to return to Egypt for the deliverance of Israel (*Ex 3:1* sq.). It would appear, from a comparison of the several incidental notices of Jethro given in the Pentateuch, that the peninsula of Sinai was not his settled place of abode. When Israel was encamped at Horeb, Jethro brought thither Moses's wife and his two sons; and, after a brief stay, we are told that "he went his way into his own land" (*Ex 18:1-3,27*; comp. *Nu 10:29-30*). The Midianites were nomads roaming over a very wide region, but, like most Arab tribes, having one permanent nucleus. This nucleus was specially their home: it was the "land of their kindred;" yet they also claimed the whole region in which they pastured their flocks as their own. The nucleus of the Midianites was somewhere on the eastern border of Edom, but their pasture grounds probably extended as far as Gilead and Bashan on the north, while on the south they embraced an extensive territory along both shores of the Atlantic Gulf. Hence Horeb was said to be in the land of Midian (*Ex 2:15* with 3:1), while the chief seat of Jethro's tribe was on the east of Edom. The Midianites were thus accustomed to lead their flocks and herds over the whole of that region which the Israelites afterwards traversed

the choice pastures, the fountains, and the wells in the desert were all known to them. This fact throws light on Moses's urgent request to his father-in-law, "Leave us not, I pray thee: forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes" (Nu 10:31).

⇒Bible concordance for MIDIANITES.

It should, however, be remembered that the name of Midian (and hence the "land of Midian") was perhaps often applied, as that of the most powerful of the northern Arab tribes, to the northern Arabs generally, i.e., those of Abrahamic descent (comp. Ge 37:28, but see respecting this passage above; and Jg 8:24); just as BENE-KEDEM embraced all those peoples, and, with a wider signification, other Eastern tribes. If this reading of the name be correct, "Midian" would correspond very nearly with our modern word "Arab;" limiting, however, the modern word to the Arabs of the northern and Egyptian deserts: all the Ishmaelitish tribes of those deserts would thus be Midianites, as we call them Arabs, the desert being their "land." At least it cannot be doubted that the descendants of Hagar and Keturah intermarried; and thus the Midianites are apparently called Ishmaelites in Jg 8:24, being connected, both by blood and national customs, with the father of the Arabs. The wandering habits of nomadic tribes must also preclude our arguing from the fact of Moses's leading his father's flock to Horeb, that Sinai was necessarily more than a station of Midian: those tribes annually traverse a great extent of country in search of pasturage, and have their established summer and winter pastures. The Midianites were mostly (not always) dwellers in tents, not towns; and Sinai has not sufficient pasture to support more than a small, or a moving people. But it must be remembered that perhaps (or we may say *probably*) the peninsula of Sinai has considerably changed

in its physical character since the time of Moses; even the adjacent isthmus has been thought, since that period, to have risen many feet, so that "the tongue of the Egyptian Sea" has "dried up;" and this supposition would much diminish the difficulty of accounting for the means of subsistence found by the Israelites in their wanderings in the wilderness, when not miraculously supplied. Apart from this consideration, we know that the Egyptians afterwards worked mines at Sarabet el-Khddim, and a small mining population may have found sufficient sustenance, at least in some seasons of the year, in the few watered valleys, and wherever ground could be reclaimed: rock-inscriptions (though of later date) testify to the number of at least passers-by; and the remains of villages of a mining population have recently been discovered. Whatever may have been the position of Midian in the Sinaitic peninsula, if we may believe the Arabian historians and geographers, backed as their testimony is by the Greek geographers (see below), the city of Midian was situate on the opposite or Arabian shore of the Arabian Gulf; and thence northwards, and spreading east and west, we have the true country of the wandering Midianites. *SEE SINAI.*

**3.** The next occurrence of the name of this people in the sacred history marks their northern settlements on the border of the Promised Land, "on this side Jordan [by] Jericho," in the plains of Moab ([Nu 22:1-4](#)). The Midianites were a wise and a wily people. So long as the Israelites only traversed their outlying pasturegrounds on the west of the Arabah, they were content to cultivate their friendship; but when, in the latter part of their journey, having passed round the southern end of Edom, they entered the proper territory of Midian, the Midianites tried every plan and used every effort to work their destruction. They consulted with their neighbors, the chiefs of Moab, and resolved to bring the prophet Balaam to curse the



powerful strangers (Nu 33:4-7). Balaam came, and the Lord turned the intended curse into a blessing. The prophet, however, adopted a more effectual mode of injuring the Israelites than by the agency of enchantments. He persuaded the women of Midian and Moab to work upon the passions of the Israelites, and entice them to the licentious festivals of their idols, and thus bring upon them the curse of heaven (Nu 31:16). This infamous scheme proved only too successful (ch. 25), and, had it not been checked by the almost complete annihilation of the Midianites, it would have brought destruction upon the whole host of Israel (Nu 25:17; Nu 31:2). The vengeance then executed upon Midian was terrible. Their cities and castles were burned; the entire males that fell into the hands of the conquerors were put to death, including the five kings of Midian — Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, together with Balaam and with them all the married females; and the young women and children were reduced to slavery. It has been affirmed that these acts of vengeance are so cruel, so barbarous in their character, that they could never have been prompted by a God of love, and that, therefore, the narrative cannot be considered as of divine authority. Those who bring such an accusation against the Scriptures must surely overlook the leading circumstances of the case—they must forget that the God of love is also the God *of justice*. The whole Midianitish nation, male and female, had deliberately combined and conspired, by wile and stratagem, to wean the Israelites from their allegiance to the God of heaven, and not only so, but wantonly to allure them to the commission of the most foul and degrading crimes. Was it inconsistent with justice for the moral Governor of the universe to punish such guilt? Could any punishment less sweeping have freed the earth from crime so deep-rooted and so dangerous? The influence of the Midianites on the Israelites was clearly most

evil, and directly tended to lead them from the injunctions of Moses. Much of the dangerous character of their influence may probably be ascribed to the common descent from Abraham. While the Canaanitish tribes were abhorred, Midian might claim consanguinity, and more readily seduce Israel from its allegiance.

The details of this war given by Moses afford us some little insight into the nature of the country of Midian, and the occupations of the people. The Midianite: were not pure nomads; they had cities and goodly castles (Nu 31:10). Their principal wealth consisted, however, in flocks and herds, for the Israelites capture( 675,000 sheep, 72,000 beeves, and 61,000 asses. It is singular that camels are not mentioned; but it is probable that, as the Israelites were all footmen, the camel escaped to the desert. Recent investigations have shown that the whole desert east of Edom and Moab it thickly studded with the ruins of ancient cities and castles (Wallin, in *Journal of R.G.S.* 24:115 sq.; Porter *Damascus*, 2:188; Wetstein, *Reisebericht iiber Hauran* etc.; Graham, in *Journal of R.G. S* for 1859). These were doubtless the habitations of the Midianites. The whole region around their cities, extending from the mountains of Hauran to the AElanitic Gulf, though no dreary and desolate, is not barren. In spring and early summer it is covered with vegetation, and it has many rich valleys, a few patches of which are still here and there cultivated by the Arab tribes. Everywhere there are evidences of partial cultivation in former days, and there are also traces of a comparatively dense population (see Porter, *Hand-book*, pages 501, 508, 523, etc.).

Some time previous to the exodus it appears that the Midianites had allied themselves closely to the Moabites. Sihon, king of the Amorites, made war upon Moab and Ammon, conquered a large part of their territory, and retained



possession of it (Jg 11:13-23). At the same time he made Midian, the ally of Moab, tributary; and hence the five princes of Midian are called by Joshua *vassals* (נְסִיכִם; Keil on Joshua 13:21) or "dukes" of Sihon. The defeat of Sihon by the Israelites secured the freedom of the Midianites; and then they, fearing lest they should in like manner be subdued by Moses, conspired to destroy Israel, and thus brought destruction upon themselves. The government of Midian was doubtless similar to that of all the nations of Arabia-patriarchal. The nation was divided into a number of tribes, each of which was independent, and led by its own *sheik* or chief. In time of common danger or of war, the sheiks of the various tribes formed a council, but always acknowledged the presidency of the head of one leading family, who was (and still is) styled the "prince" (*emir*) of the nation. Five of the sheiks of Midian are mentioned in Judges as subjects of Sihon. In Nu 31:8 they are called "kings" (מְלָכִים); while in 22:4 Moab is said to have consulted with the "elders" (זִקְנִים) of Midian. The great Arab tribes have two classes of chiefs: one class is composed of the rulers of the leading divisions of the tribe, the other of the rulers of subdivisions. The former are hereditary, the latter are simply influential or warlike men who, by their talents, have gathered around them a number of families. It would seem to be the former class-the hereditary rulers of Midian-who are called "kings ;" while the others, the influential leaders or senators of the tribe, are termed "elders." In the transaction with Balaam, the elders of Midian went with those of Moab, "with the rewards of divination in their hand" (22:7); but in the remarkable words of Balaam; the Midianites are not mentioned. This might be explained by the supposition that Midian was a wandering tribe, whose pasture-lands reached wherever, in the Arabian desert and frontier of Palestine, pasture was to be found, and who would

not feel, in the same degree. as Moab, Amalek, or the other more settled and agricultural inhabitants of the land allotted to the tribes of Israel, the arrival of the latter. But the spoil taken in the war that soon followed, and more especially the mention of the dwellings of Midian, render this suggestion very doubtful, and point rather to a considerable pastoral settlement of Midian in the trans-Jordanic country. 'Such settlements of Arabs have, however, been very common. In this case the Midianites were evidently *tributary* to the Amorites, being "dukes of Sihon, dwelling in the country" (יֹשְׁבֵי הָאֶרֶץ): this inferior position; explains their omission from Balaam's prophecy. The rank of the Midianitish woman Cozbi, that of a daughter of Zur, who was "head over a people, of a chief house in Midian," throws a strange light over the obscure page of that people's history. The vices of the Canaanites, idolatry and licentiousness, had infected the descendants of Abraham, doubtless connected by successive intermarriages with those tribes; and the prostitution of this chief's daughter, caught as it was from the customs of the Canaanites, is evidence of the ethnological type of the latter tribes. Some African nations have a similar custom: they offer their unmarried daughters to show hospitality to their guests.

**4.** There is no further mention of the Midianites in history for two hundred and fifty years. During that period the nation had completely recovered its ancient influence and power, probably by the arrival of fresh colonists from the desert tracts over which their tribes wandered; and they again turned their arms against their old enemies, the Israelites. For seven years they oppressed them so grievously that the people were forced to flee from the open country, and to seek an asylum in mountain fastnesses, in caves, and in fortified cities ([Jg 6:1-2](#)). Midian was now at the head of a great confederacy,

comprising the Amalekites and the leading tribes of Arabia, called by the sacred historian *Beni Kedem* ("children of the East," verse 3). In early spring the confederates assembled their vast flocks and herds, descended through the defiles of Gilead, crossed the Jordan, and overran the rich plains of Central Palestine, plundering and destroying all before them — "sheep, oxen, asses," property, the young corn, and the luxuriant pastures: "For they came up with their cattle, and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without 'number; and they entered into the land to destroy it" (verse 5). In their distress the Israelites cried unto the Lord, and he sent a deliverer in the person of Gideon (verses 8-13). The invaders were concentrated on Esdraelon-their flocks covering the whole of that splendid plain, and their encampment lying along the base of "the hill of Moreh," now called Little Hermon (verses 33; 7:1,12). Gideon assembled his band of warriors 'at the well of Harod, or fountain of Jezreel, situated at the foot of Gilboa, and famed in after-days as the scene of Saul's defeat and death ([Jg 7:1](#)). [SEE HAROD](#). The romantic incidents in this memorable campaign have been treated of elsewhere, [see GIDEON](#), but the Midianitish side of the story is pregnant with interest. The scene over that fertile plain, dotted with the enemies of Israel, "the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and all the Bene-Kedem, [who] lay along (נִפְלִים, *fell*, i.e., *pitched* their tents) in the valley like locusts for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea-side for multitude" ([Jg 7:12](#)), has been picturesquely painted by Prof. Stanley (*Sinai and Palestine*, page 333).

The descent of Gideon and his servant into the camp, and the conversation of the Midianitish watch, forms a vivid picture of Arab life. It does more:: it proves that as Gideon, or Phurah, his servant, or both, understood the language of Midian, the

Shemitic languages-differed much less in the 14th century B.C. than they did in after-times, see [ARABIA](#); and we besides obtain a remarkable proof of the consanguinity of the Midianites, and learn that, though the name was probably applied to all or most of the northern Abrahamic Arabs, it was not applied to the Canaanites, who certainly did not then speak a Shemitic language that Gideon could understand. The stratagem of Gideon-receives an illustration from modern Oriental life.

Until lately, the police in Cairo were accustomed to go their rounds with a lighted torch thrust into a pitcher, and the pitcher was suddenly withdrawn when. light was required (Lane's *Mod. Eg.* 5th edit. page 120) — a custom affording an exact parallel to the ancient expedient adopted by Gideon. The consequent panic of the great multitude in the valley, if it have no parallels in modern European history, is consistent with Oriental character. Of all peoples, the nations of the East are most liable to sudden and violent emotions; and a panic in one of their heterogeneous, undisciplined, and excitable hosts has always proved disastrous. In the case of Gideon, however, the result of his attack was directed by God, the divine hand being especially shown in the small number of Israel, 300 men, against 135,000 of the enemy. At the sight of the 300 torches, suddenly blazing round about the camp, in the beginning of the middle-watch (which the Midianites had newly set), with the confused din of the trumpets, " for the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow [withal], and they cried, [The sword] of the Lord and of Gideon" (7:20), "all the host ran, and cried, and fled" (verse 21). The panic-stricken multitude knew not enemy from friend, for "the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow even throughout all the host" (verse 22).

The rout was complete, the first places made for being Beth-shittah ("the house of the acacia") in Zererath, and the "border" (שְׂפָרָה) of Abel-meholah, "the meadow of the dance," both being probably down the Jordan valley, unto Tabbath, shaping their flight to the ford of Beth-barah, where probably they had crossed the river as invaders. The flight of so great a host, encumbered with slow-moving camels, baggage, and cattle, was calamitous.. All the men of Israel, out of Naphtali, and Asher, and Manasseh, joined in the pursuit; and Gideon roused the men of Mount Ephraim to "take before" the Midianites "the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan" (verses 23, 24). Thus cut off; two princes, Oreb and Zeeb (the "raven," or, more correctly "crow," and the "wolf"), fell into the hands of Ephraim, and Oreb they slew at the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the wine-press of Zeeb (Jg 7:25; comp. Isa 10:26, where the "slaughter of Midian at the rock Oreb" is referred to). It is added, in the same verse, that they pursued Midian, and brought the heads of the princes to Gideon "on the other side Jordan." This anticipates the account of his crossing Jordan (Jg 8:4), but such transpositions are frequent, and the Hebrew may be read "On this side Jordan." But though we have seen that many joined in a desultory pursuit of the rabble of the Midianites, only the 300 men who had blown the trumpets in the valley of Jezreel crossed Jordan with Gideon, "faint yet pursuing" (Jg 8:4). With this force it remained for the liberator to attack the enemy on his own ground, for Midian had dwelt on the other side Jordan since the days of Moses. Fifteen thousand men, under the "kings" of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, were at Karkor, the sole remains of 135,000, "for there fell a hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword" (Jg 8:10). The assurance of God's help encouraged the weary three hundred, and they ascended from the plain (or *ghdr*) to the higher country by a ravine or



torrentbed in the hills, "by the way of them that dwelt in tents [that is, the pastoral or wandering people as distinguished from towns-people], on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host, for the host was secure" (Jg 8:11) secure in that wild country, on their own ground, and away from the frequent haunts of man. A sharp pursuit seems to have followed this fresh victory, ending in the capture of the kings and the final discomfiture of the Midianites. The overthrow of Midian in its encampment, when it was "secure," by the exhausted companies of Gideon (they were "faint," and had been refused bread both at Succoth and at Penuel, 8:5-9), set the seal to God's manifest hand in the deliverance of his people from the oppression of Midian. Zebah and Zalmunna were slain, and with them the name itself of Midian almost disappears from sacred history. That people never afterwards took up arms against Israel, though they may have been allied with the nameless hordes who, under the common designation of "the people of the East," Bene-Kedem, harassed the eastern border of Palestine.

To this victory there are subsequent allusions in the sacred writings (Ps 83:10,12; Isa 9:4; Isa 10:6); but the Midianites do not again appear in sacred or profane history. The name, indeed, occurs after the exile in Judith 2:16, but it seems to be there confounded with the Arabians. Josephus, however, asserts (*Ant.* 4:7,1) that Petra, the capital of Arabia (i.e., Idumea), was called by the natives Arceme, from the Midianitish king Rekem slain by Moses (Nu 31:8). Eusebius and Jerome also mention a city *lladian*, so named after the son of Abraham by Keturah, situated beyond Arabia (Idumsea) to the south, by the Red Sea, from which the district was called; and another city of the same name near the Arnon and Areopolis, the ruins of which only existed in their days (*Onomast.* s.v.; comp. Jerome, *Comment. ad Jes.* 60,



and *Ezech.* 25). These. were doubtless traditional recollections of the different branches of the Midianitish stock, showing their prevalence throughout Idumsea and the Sinaitic peninsula as a migratory tribe.

**II. *Geographical Identification.*** — From all the above notices, we may gather with considerable certainty that there were at least two main branches of the Midianites. It seems to have been that portion of the tribe dwelling about the eastern arm of the Red Sea, among whom Moses found refuge when he fled from Egypt, and whose priest or sheik was Jethro, who became the father-in-law of the future lawgiver (*Ex* 3:1; *Nu* 10:29). *SEE KENITE*. These in like manner are usually reckoned along with the Ethiopians of Cushite origin. It is certain that some Cushite tribes did settle in and on the outskirts of Arabia, which was therefore called Gush, in common with other districts occupied by Cushite tribes; and, under this view, it is observable that the wife of Moses is called a Cushite (*Nu* 12:1), and that, in *Hab* 3:7, the Midianites are named with the Cushites; for these are undoubtedly the Midianites who trembled for fear when they heard that the Israelites, had passed through the Red Sea. We do not again meet with these Midianites in the Jewish history, but they appear to have remained for a long time settled in the same quarter, where indeed is the seat of the only Midianites known to Oriental authors. The Arabian geographers of the middle age (*Edrisi, Clim.* 3:5, page 3; *Ibn el-Wardi*, and *Abulfeda, Arab. descr.* page 77; comp. *Seetzen*, 20:311) speak of the ruins of an ancient town called *Jiadian*, on the eastern side of the Red Sea, where was still to be seen the well at which Moses watered the flocks of Shoaib or Jethro. This was doubtless the same as *Modiana*, a town in the same district, mentioned by *Ptolemy (Geog.* 5:19); and *Niebuhr* conjectures that the site is now occupied by *Moilah*, a small town or

village on the Red Sea, on the Haj road from Egypt (*Descript. Arab.* page 377); but, as Rosenmuller remarks (*Bibl. Geog.* 3:224), this place is too far south to be identified with the Midian of Jethro. The Madian of Abulfeda is doubtless that mentioned by Josephus (*Ant.* 12:11, 1) as *Madiene* (Μαδυνή), situated at the Red Sea, 'properly identified by Reland (*Paleest.* pages 98, 100) with the modern *Miidyen*, situated about half-way down the eastern coast of the AElanitic Gulf (Forster's *Geogr. of Arabia*, 2:116, and Index, s.v.). To the same effect are the notices of the city Madian in Eusebius and Jerome above.

Another branch of the Midianites occupied the country east and south-east of the Moabites, who were seated on the east of the Dead Sea; or rather, perhaps, we should say that, as they appear to have been a seminomad people, they pastured their flocks in the unsettled country beyond the Moabites, with whom, as a kindred, although more settled tribe, they seem to have been on the most friendly terms, and on whose borders were situated those "cities and goodly castles which they possessed" ([Nu 31:10](#)). It is to these Midianites that we must refer the brief statements of a collision with Hadad, one of the early Edomitish kings ([Ge 36:35](#)). These Midianites, like the other tribes and nations who had a common origin with them, were highly hostile to the Israelites.

Midian is named authentically only in the Bible. It has no history elsewhere. The names of places and tribes occasionally throw a feeble light on its past dwellings; but the stories of Arabian writers, borrowed, in the case of the northern Arabs, too frequently from late and untrustworthy Jewish writers, cannot be seriously treated. For trustworthy facts we must rest on the Biblical narrative. The city of "Medyen [say the Arabs] is the city of the people of Shu'eib, and is opposite Tabuk, on the shore of Bahr el-Kulzum [the Red Sea]:

between these is six days' journey. It [Medyen] is larger than Tabuk; and in it is the well from which Moses watered the flock of Shu'eib" (*Mardsid*, s.v.). El-Makrfzi (in his *Khitat*) enters into considerable detail respecting this city and people. The substance of his account, which is full of incredible fables, is as follows: Medyen are the people of Shu'eib, and are the offspring of Medyan [Midian], son of Abraham, and their mother was Kanturan, the daughter of Yuktan [Joktan] the Canaanite: she bare him eight children, from whom descended peoples. He here quotes the passage above cited from the *Marasid* almost verbatim, and adds that the Arabs dispute whether the name be foreign or Arabic, and whether Medyen spoke Arabic, so called. Some say that they had a number of kings, who were respectively named Abjad, Hawez, Hutti, Kelemen, Saafas, and Karashet. This absurd enumeration forms a sentence common in Arabic grammars, which gives the order of the Hebrew and ancient Arabic alphabets, and the numerical order of the letters. It is only curious as possibly containing some vague reference to the *language* of Midian, and it is therefore inserted here. These kings are said to have ruled at Mekkeh, Western Nejd, the Yemen, Medyen, and Egypt, etc., contemporaneously. That Midian penetrated into the Yemen is, it must be observed, extremely improbable, notwithstanding the hints of Arab authors to the contrary: Yakut, in the *Moqjam* (cited in the *Journal of the Deutsch. Morgenl. Gesellschaft*), saying that a southern Arabian dialect is of Midian; and El-Mes'udl (*ap.* Schultens, page 158) inserting a Midianitish king among the rulers of the Yemen; the latter being, however, more possible than the former, as an accidental and individual, not a national occurrence. The story of Shu'eib is found in the Kuran. He was sent as a prophet to warn the people of Midian, and being rejected by them, they were destroyed by a storm

from heaven (Sale's *Kurdn*, 7 and 11). He is generally supposed to be the same as Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses; but some, as Sale informs us, deny this; and one of these says that " he was first called Buyun, and afterwards Shu'eib; that he was a comely person, but spare and lean, and of few words." The whole Arab story of Medyen and Shu'eib, even if it contain any truth, is encumbered by a mass of late rabbinical myths. El-Makrizi tells us that in the land of Midian were many cities, of which the people had disappeared, and the cities themselves had fallen to ruin; that when he wrote (in the year 825 of the Hegira) forty cities remained, the names of some being known, and of others lost. Of the former, he says there were, between the Hijaz and Palestine and Egypt, sixteen cities; and ten of these in the direction of Palestine. They were El- Khalasah, El-Sanitah. El-Medereh, El-Minyeh, El-Aawaj, El-Khuwevrak, ElBirein, El-May-eyn, El-Seba, and El-Mu'allak. The most important of these cities were El-Khalasah and El-Sanitah; the stones of many of them had been removed to El-Ghazzah (Gaza) to build with them. This list, however, must be taken with caution.

**III. Condition and Customs.** — Much of this has already been incidentally mentioned. The whole account of the doings of the Midianites with Israel- and it is only thus that they find a place in the sacred writings plainly marks them as characteristically Arab. We have already stated our opinion that they had intermarried with Ishmael's descendants, and become nationally one people, so that they are apparently called Ishmaelites; and that, conversely, it is most probable their power and numbers, with such intermarriages, had caused the name of Midian to be applied to the northern Abrahamic Arabs generally. They are described as true Arabs — now Bedawin, or "people of the desert;" anon pastoral or settled Arabs — the "flock" of Jethro; the cattle and flocks of

Midian, in the later days of Moses; their camels without number, as the sand of the sea-side for multitude when they oppressed Israel in the days of the Judges — all agree with such a description. Like Arabs, who are predominantly a nomadic people, they seem to have partially settled in the land of Moab, under the rule of Sihon the Amorite, and to have adapted themselves readily to the "cities" (עָרִים) and forts (A.V. "goodly castles," טִירֹת), which they did not build, but occupied, retaining even then their flocks and herds (Nu 31:9-10), but not their camels, which are not common among settled Arabs, because they are not required, and are never, in that state, healthy. Israel seems to have devastated that settlement, and when next Midian appears in history it is as a desert horde, pouring into Palestine with innumerable camels; and, when routed and broken by Gideon, fleeing "by the way of them that dwelt in tents" to the east of Jordan. The character of Midian we think is thus unmistakably marked. The only glimpse of their habits is found in the vigorous picture of the camp in the valley of Jezreel, when the men talked together in the camp, and one told how he had dreamed that "a cake of barleybread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came into a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along" (Jg 7:13). The spoil taken in both the war of Moses and that of Gideon is remarkable. On the former occasion, the spoil of 675,000 sheep, 72,000 beeves, and 61,000 asses, seems to confirm the other indications of the then pastoral character of the Midianites; the omission of any mention of camels has already been explained. But the gold, silver, brass, iron, tin, and lead (Nu 31:22), the jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and tablets" (verse 50) — the offering to the Lord being 16,750 shekels (verse 52) — taken by Moses, is especially noteworthy; and it is confirmed by the booty taken

by Gideon; for when he slew Zebah and Zalmunna he "took away the ornaments that [were] on their camels' necks" ([Jg 8:21](#)), and (verses 24-26) he asked of every man the ear-rings of his prey, "for they had golden ear-rings, because they [were] Ishmaelites." "And the weight of the golden ear-rings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred [shekels] of gold; besides ornaments and collars, and purple raiment that [was] on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that [were] about their camels' necks." (The rendering of the A.V. is sufficiently accurate for our purpose here, and any examination into the form or character of these ornaments, tempting though it is, belongs more properly to other articles.) We have here a wealthy Arab nation, living by plunder, delighting in finery (especially their women, for we may here read "nose-ring"), and, where forays were impossible, carrying on the traffic southwards into Arabia, the land of gold- if not naturally, by trade-and across to Chaldsea, or into the rich plains of Egypt. *SEE [ARABIA](#)*.