

# Paran

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(Heb. Paran', פָּאֶרָן, according to Gesenius and Furst, excavated, i.e. a place of caves, from an Arab. root; according to others, from פָּאֵר, to be beautiful; Sept. and Josephus, Φαράν; Vulg. Pharan), a name given in the Bible to a desert and to a mountain. The present article embodies the Biblical and the modern information on this subject.

1. THE WILDERNESS OF PARAN (מִדְבַּר פָּאֶרָן; Sept. ἡ ἔρημος τοῦ Φαράν ). The situation and boundaries of this desert are set forth with considerable exactness by a number of incidental notices in Scripture. It had Palestine on the north, the valley of Arabah on the east, and the desert of Sinai on the south. Its western boundary is not mentioned in the Bible, but it appears to have extended to Egypt and the Mediterranean.

The first notice of Paran is in connection with the expedition of the eastern kings against Sodom. After defeating the giant tribes east of the Jordan, they swept over Mount Seir (Edom) "unto the terebinth of Paran (עַד אֵיל פָּאֶרָן; Sept. ἕως τῆς τερεβίνθου τῆς Φαράν Vulg. usque ad Campestria Pharan, A.V. "El Paran"), which is in the wilderness" (**Genesis 14:6**). Doubtless some well-known sacred tree is here referred to. It stood on the western border of Seir, and consequently in the Arabah, (See SEIR); and it was "in the wilderness" — that is, the desert of Paran, apparently considerably south of Kadesh. From the terebinth of Paran they turned back, "and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh." — When Abraham sent away Hagar and Ishmael from his tent at Beersheba, they went out into "the wilderness of Paran;" and Ishmael dwelt there, allying himself doubtless with the nomad tribes who made that place their home (**Genesis 21:14**; **Genesis 21:21**).

But it is from its connection with the wanderings of the Israelites that Paran derives its chief and abiding interest: "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested

in the wilderness of Paran" (**Numbers 10:12**). From this it might be thought that Paran lay close to Mount Sinai, where the Israelites had long been encamped; but the full narrative which is afterwards given shows that from the encampment at Sinai they made a four-days march to Hazeroth (**Numbers 10:33; Numbers 11:3; Numbers 11:34-35**); and then the next march brought them into "the wilderness of Paran" (**Numbers 12:16**). From Paran the spies were sent to survey Canaan (**Numbers 13:3**); and after completing their mission they returned to the camp "unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh" (**Numbers 13:26**). There is an apparent difficulty here. At first sight it would appear as if Kadesh in Paran was only a single march from Hazeroth; while Hazeroth has been identified with Ain Hudherah, which is 140 miles distant from Kadesh. The difficulty is solved by a reference to the detailed itinerary in Numbers 33 :Paran is not mentioned there, because it was the name of a wide region, and the sacred writer records only the names of the camp-stations. Hazeroth is mentioned, however, and so is Kadesh; and between them there are twenty stations (17-38). Most probably all these stations were in Paran, for it is said that when they "took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai, the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran" (10:12); and Moses also states, "When we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness which ye saw by way of the mountain of the Amorites; and we came to Kadesh-barnea" (**Deuteronomy 1:19**). The wilderness of Paran in fact extended from Hazeroth, and the desert of Sinai (or Horeb) on the south, to the foot of the mountains of Palestine on the north; and its eastern border ran along the valley of the Arabah, from the gulf of Akabah to the southern shore of the Dead Sea. Through this wide region the Israelites marched, not in a straight line, but, like the modern Arab tribes, from pasture to pasture; and. it was when entering upon that long and toilsome march that Moses said 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" (**Numbers 10:31**). Jethro was intimately acquainted with the whole wilderness. As a nomad pastoral chief he knew the best pastures and all the wells and fountains; and hence Moses was

most anxious to secure his services as guide.

The reference made to Paran in 1 Samuel 25 shows that it bordered upon the southern declivities of the mountains of Judah. Probably its boundary was not very accurately defined; and whatever part of that region lay between the limits of settled habitation was called "the wilderness, or pasture-land, of Paran." It thus included a large section of the Negeb. (See SOUTH COUNTRY). — The reference to Paran in **Deuteronomy 1:1** is not so clear. The object of the sacred writer is to describe the place where Moses gave his long address to the Israelites. It was "on this (the east) side of Jordan, in the wilderness" (or Midbar of Moab; comp. **Deuteronomy 1:5**), in the plain (the Arabah, ערבה ) over against the Red Sea (or "opposite to Suf, מול סוף), between Paran and Tophel, etc. ("between Paran, and between Tophel and Laban," etc.). The sense appears to be that the Arabah in which Moses stood was opposite to the northern gulf of the Red Sea, and had on the one side Paran, and on the other Tophel, etc. It must not be inferred that Paran extended up to Jericho; all that seems to be meant is that it formed the western boundary of the greater part of the Arabah. — It would seem from the incidental statement in **1 Kings 11:18** that Paran lay between Midian and Egypt. The region there called Midian was situated on the south of Edom, (See MIDLAN), apparently at the head of the A Elanitic gulf; and the road taken by the fugitive Hadad was most probably that now traversed by the Egyptian Haj route, which passes through the whole desert of Tih.

It is strange that both Eusebius and Jerome (followed by Steph. Byz.; Reland, p. 556; Raumer, and others) speak of Paran as a city, which they locate three days' journey east (πρὸς ἀνατολὰς, but they must evidently mean west) of Aila (Onomast. s.v. Faran). They refer, doubtless, to the old town of Faran, in the valley of Feiran, at the foot of Mount Serbal, in the desert of Sinai. In this valley there are still ruins of a town, and indeed of more than one, with towers, aqueducts, and sepulchral excavations; and here Ruppell found the remains of a church, which he assigns to the 5th century (Reise in Nubien. p. 263). This was the Pharan or Faran which had a Christian population, and was the seat of a bishopric so early as A.D. 400 (Orieons Christ. col.

735; Reland, Palaest. p. 219, 220, 228). The city is described, under the name of Feiran, by the Arabian historian Edrisi, about A.D. 1150, and by Makriri about A.D. 1400. The description of the latter is copied by Burckhardt (Syria, p. 616). He mentions it as having been a city of the Amalekites; and the history of the Hebrew pilgrimage renders it extremely probable that the Amalekites were actually stationed in this valley. from which they came forth to attack the Israelites, when encamped near it at Rephidim (**Exodus 17:8**). Feiran was thus an important place in early ages (Robinson, 1:126, 592); but it lies nearly thirty miles beyond the southern boundary of Paran. Nevertheless it seems to be a trace of the ancient name transferred to an adjoining locality. Some writers even regard it as the source of the designation of the region. Josephus mentions a valley of Paran; but it was situated somewhere in the wilderness of Judaea (War, 4:9, 4).

Paran is not strictly speaking "a wilderness." The sacred writers call it midbar; that is, a pasture-land, as distinguished from an agricultural country. Its principal inhabitants were nomads, though it had a few towns and some corn-fields (Robinson, Bibl. Res. 1:190 sq.). The leading features of its physical geography are as follows: The central section, from Beersheba to Jebel et-Tib, is an undulating plateau, from 600 to 800 feet in height, traversed by bare rounded ridges, and shallow, dry valleys, running on the one side into the Arabab, and on the other to the Mediterranean. The soil is scanty, white, and thickly strewn with nodules of flint. In early spring it is partially covered with grass, shrubs, and weeds; but during the heat and drought of summer all vegetation disappears. and the whole surface assumes that aspect of dreary desolation which led the Israelites to call it "a great and terrible wilderness" (**Deuteronomy 1:19**); and which suggested in recent times the somewhat exaggerated language of Mr. Williams — "A frightfully terrific wilderness, whose horrors language must fail to describe" (Holy City, 1, App. 1, p. 464). Fountains are rare, and even wells and tanks are far apart. The plateau rises considerably towards the north-east; and, as deep glens descend from it to the Arabah, this section presents the appearance of a series of parallel ridges extending east and west. Their southern sides are mostly bluffs of naked white rock, which seem from a distance like colossal terrace-

walls. These are the mountains of the Amorites mentioned in [Deuteronomy 1:19-20](#), to which the Israelites approached through the wilderness, and which formed the southern border of Canaan. Besides these there is a line of bare white hills running along the whole western border of the Arabah, and forming the support of the table-land of Paran. Towards the valley they descend in steep shelving slopes and rugged precipices, averaging about a thousand feet in height; and everywhere deeply furrowed by wild ravines. The passes from the Arabah to Paran are difficult,, and a comparatively small band of resolute men might defend them against an army. The southern declivities of the mountain of the Amorites would also present serious obstacles to the advance of a large host.

These natural features enable us to understand more fully some points in the history of the wilderness journey, and to illustrate many incidental expressions in the sacred narrative. They show why the Israelites feared to enter Canaan from Kadesh until they had ascertained by the report of the spies that those formidable mountain-passes were open ([Deuteronomy 1:22](#)). They show how the Amorites, "which dwelt in that mountain," were able to drive them back when they attempted to ascend ([Deuteronomy 1:44](#); comp. [Numbers 14:40-45](#)). They show how expressive and how natural is the language so often used by Moses at Kadesh. When he sent the spies, "he said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain;" "so they went up... they ascended by the south." "Caleb said, Let us go up at once. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people" ([Numbers 13:17](#); [Numbers 13:21-22](#); [Numbers 13:30-31](#)). Again, in describing the defeat of the people — "They rose up early... and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, We will go up into the place which the Lord hath promised... Moses said, Go not up. . . But they presumed to go up. . . and the Amalekites came down," etc. (14:40, 42, 44, 45). The name Paran thus corresponds in general outline with the desert Et-Tih. The Sinaitic desert, including the wedge of metamorphic rocks, granite, syenite, and porphyry, set, as it were, in a superficial margin of old red sandstone, forms nearly a scalene triangle, with its apex southward, and having its base or upper edge not a straight, but

concave crescent line — the ridge, in short, of the Et-Tih range of mountains, extending about 120 miles from east to west, with a slight dip, the curve of the aforesaid crescent southward. Speaking generally, the wilderness of Sinai (**Numbers 10:12**; **Numbers 12:16**), in which the march-stations of Taberah and Hazeroth are probably included towards its north-east limit, may be said to lie south of the Et-Tih range, the wilderness of Paran north of it, and the one to end where the other begins. That of Paran is a stretch of chalky formation, the chalk being covered with coarse gravel, mixed with black flint and drifting. sand. The caravan route from Cairo to Akaba crosses the Et-Tih desert in a line from west to east, a little south. In this wide tract, which extends northward to join the "wilderness of Beersheba" (**Genesis 21:21**; comp. **Genesis 21:14**), and eastward probably to the wilderness of Zin, (See KADESH), on the Edomitish border, Ishmael dwelt, and there probably his posterity originally multiplied. Ascending northward from it on a meridian to the east of Beersheba, we should reach Maon and Carmel, or that southern portion of the territory of Judah, west of the- Dead Sea, known as "the South," where the waste changes gradually into an uninhabited pasture-land, at least in spring and autumn, and in which, under the name of "Paran," Nabal fed his flocks (**1 Samuel 25:1**). Between the wilderness of Paran and that of Zin no strict demarcation exists in the narrative, nor do the natural features of the region, so far as yet ascertained, yield a well-defined boundary. The name of Paran seems, as in the story of Ishmael, to have predominated towards the western extremity of the northern desert frontier of Et-Tih, and in **Numbers 34:4** the wilderness of Zin, not Paran, is spoken of as the southern border of the land or of the tribe of Judah (**Joshua 15:3**). If by the Paran region we understand "that great and terrible wilderness" so emphatically described as the haunt of noxious creatures and the terror of the wayfarer (**Deuteronomy 1:19**; **Deuteronomy 8:15**), then we might see how the adjacent tracts, which still must be called "wilderness," might, either as having less repulsive features, or because they lay near to some settled country, have a special nomenclature of their own. For the latter reason the wilderness of Zin, eastward towards Edom and Mount Seir, and of Shur,

westward towards Egypt, might be thus distinguished; for the former reason that of Zin and Sinai. It would not be inconsistent with the rules of scriptural nomenclature if we suppose these accessory wilds to be sometimes included under the general name of wilderness of Paran;" and to this extent we may perhaps modify the previous general statement that south of the Et-Tih range is the wilderness of Sinai, and north of it that of Paran. Still, construed strictly, the wildernesses of Paran and Zin would seem to lie as already approximately laid down. If, however, as previously hinted, they may in another view be regarded as overlapping, we can more easily understand how Chedorlaomer, when he "smote" the peoples south of the Dead Sea, returned round its south-western curve to the El-Paran, or "terebinth tree of Paran," viewed as indicating a locality in connection with the wilderness of Paran, and yet close, apparently, to that Dead Sea border (**Genesis 14:6**). It is worthy of special note that the wanderings of the Israelites through Paran became to it as a new baptism. Its name is now, and has been for ages; Bedu et-Tih, "The wilderness of wandering" (Abulfeda, Tab. Syr. ed. Kohler, p. 4; Jaubert's Edrisi, 1:360). In addition to the authorities already referred to, notices of Paran will be found in the writings of Burckhardt (Travels in Syria, p. 444); Seetzen (Zach's Monatl. Corresp. ch. xvii); Ruppell (Reisen, p. 241); Bartlett (Forty Days in the Desert, p. 149 sq.); Ritter (Pal. und Syr. 1:147 sq., 1079 sq.); Olin (Travels in Egypt, etc. 2:59 sq.); Miss Martineau (Eastern Life, p. 418 sq.); and especially in Palmer's Desert of the Exodus, (1872). (See SINAI).

2. MOUNT PARAN (הַר פָּאֶרָן) is mentioned only in two passages, both sublime odes celebrating the Divine Majesty. The same glorious event, whatever it may have been, is plainly alluded to in both. Moses says, "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran," etc. (**Deuteronomy 33:2**); and Habakkuk writes: "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran" (**Habakkuk 3:3**). The object of both writers is to call attention to those places where the most striking manifestations of divine power and majesty were made to Israel. Next to Sinai, Kadesh stands out as the theater of the Lord's most remarkable workings. It lies in the valley of the Arabah, with Seir on the one side and the

highlands of Paran on the other. The summits of both these ranges were, doubtless, now illumined, now clouded, like the brow of Sinai, by the divine glory (comp. **Numbers 16:19-35**; **Numbers 16:42**; **Numbers 20:1**). Teman was another name for Edom, or Seir; and hence the local allusions of Moses and Habakkuk are identical. It may therefore be safely concluded that Mount Paran is that ridge, or series of ridges, already described, lying on the north-east part of the wilderness of Tih. There is nothing in Scripture which would lead us to connect it more closely with Sinai than with Seir, or to identify it with Jebel Serbal, which overlooks Wady Feiran, as is done by Stanley and some others.