

Where is Elim?

by

William F. Danielson, Ph.D.

My daughter is a member of the Elim Lutheran Church in Petaluma, California. Over the years my wife and I have driven to Petaluma at Christmas time or Easter and attended services at the Elim Lutheran Church, where our daughter sings in the choir.

Curious, I asked our daughter what does Elim mean? She answered "Oasis." I asked, "What oasis?" "Where is Elim located?" She did not know. Her pastor did not know.

I own some excellent Bible software, Accordance, created by Oak Tree Software, Inc. At a MacExpo meeting in San Francisco three years ago, I told a representative at the Accordance booth that I could not find Elim on my Accordance map. He tried and failed to find it.

Using the Accordance software, he entered the name "Elim" to see where it appears in the Bible. It appears six times, as shown in the four verses below:

Ex. 15:27 ¶ Then they came to **Elim** where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.

Ex. 16:1 ¶ Then they set out from **Elim**, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between **Elim** and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.

Num. 33:9 They journeyed from Marah and came to **Elim**; and in **Elim** there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there.

Num. 33:10 They journeyed from **Elim** and camped by the Red Sea.

In 1926 or 1927, I do not know the date, a small group attempted to replicate the path the Israelites followed on their exodus from Egypt. Maynard Owen Williams, then Chief of the Foreign Editorial Staff of the National Geographic Society, was one member of that group that traveled by camelback. Two other members of the group were Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick and Mrs. Fosdick.

Dr. Williams and Dr. Fosdick each wrote about this journey. Maynard Owen Williams published an article in the December 1927 issue of the National Geographic Magazine, entitled East of Suez to the Mount of the Decalogue. Dr.

Fosdick wrote a book titled A Pilgrimage to Palestine. His narrative of their pilgrimage to Mt. Sinai appears in Chapter III, The Impressiveness of Sinai.

Each of these authors identify where Elim is. Excerpts below are from the National Geographic article and from Chapter III in Dr. Fosdick's book.

Excerpt from EAST OF SUEZ TO THE MOUNT OF THE DECALOGUE, National Geographic Magazine, December, 1927, page 739. This article was written by my father-in-law, Maynard Owen Williams. Many of the photographs in the article were taken by him, as well. He was a Bible scholar in his own right, having served as a missionary teacher at the Syrian Protestant College (now known as American University at Beirut) for three years (1911-1914), and was very familiar with that part of the Middle East. The map of the journey appears on page 713 of the article, and is reproduced at the end of this document.

Wadi Taiyibeh may be the site of Elim, but it can overlook uncertain claims to former fame and bask in the name the Arabs have given it --- The Goodly Valley.

It is more likely that **Elim**, with its 12 springs and 70 palm trees, is the present **Wadi Gharandel**. Scholars assert that deforestation has caused a change of climate since the Exodus. But it is evident that 70 palm trees were worthy of enumeration then (Exodus XV, 27). There are fully that many in **Wadi Gharandel** now.

The paragraphs below appear in Chapter III, The Impressiveness of Sinai, pages 65-66, in Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick's book ***A Pilgrimage to Palestine***. This book was published by The MacMillan Company, New York, in 1927.

"There can be no dispute," wrote Dean Stanley in 1856, "as to the general track of the Israelites after the passage." Well, there can be, for there is, but the consensus of opinion among those who have made the trip is quite extraordinary. "They went three days in the wilderness, and found no water," (Exodus 15:22) and we did also.

That same unspeakable, blazing waste of arid sand and gravel stretches still from the wells of Moses, near Suez, three days' journey to the bitter waters of Marah, (Exodus 15:23) where the Hebrews camped. Those waters, too, are there, — called Hawarah by the Arabs, — brackish springs in soil

impregnated with natron, from which men will drink not at all and camels only grudgingly.

From there the Hebrews went to **Elim**, with its twelve springs and seventy palm trees, (Exodus 15:27) and it still is there — the **Wady Gharandel**, with a series of spring holes and how many palm trees I did not count — a whipped and beaten oasis in a dreadful desert but, for all that, a refreshing resting place.

They encamped then, we are told, by the Red Sea. (Numbers 33:10) We did too. The only natural route for them to follow down the Wady Taiyibeh would lead them there, and it was a fair camping ground on the sand, with the glorious blue waters of the gulf stretching to the red hills of Africa, on one side, and the foothills of the Sinaitic range, upon the other.

Maynard Owen Williams and Harry Emerson Fosdick each identify **Elim** as being **Wadi Gharandel** (Williams) or alternative spelling **Wady Gharandel** (Fosdick).

Addendum to “Where is Elim?”

On July 1, 2010 I gave my friend Bob Andersen, a retired Lutheran pastor, a copy of my June 29, 2010 “Where is Elim?” article. After reading my article, Bob told me that Elim is cited in two atlases that he owns. He loaned them to me. I had not seen either of them before. I was very interested in reading the Elim citations to see if they would agree or dispute my findings that Elim is Wadi Garandal. The descriptions and maps of Elim in these two atlases appear below.

In 2007, the National Geographic Society published The Biblical World, an Illustrated Atlas. This stunning volume is the best of its kind I ever have seen. In Chapter Four, *The Exodus*, pages 134-135, Elim’s location is identified:

Where was **Elim**? Some scholars associate it with ‘Uyun Musa, suggesting that Marah should be identified with the oasis farther north called Bir Marah. Others, however, place **Elim** some five miles from Sarabit el Khadim, in a small grove known as **Wadi Gharandal**. **Elim** means “tamarisks,” which are shrubs found throughout the Sinai landscape. Even today there is a well under a copse of date palms and tamarisks, often used by local Bedouin. From there, Moses turns inland, “and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between **Elim** and Sinai (Exodus 16: 1). Though their water bags were filled, at this moment the Israelites begin to complain of hunger.

A map of Exodus in the Sinai is shown on pages 132-133. A cropped portion of this map, identifying that the National Geographic Society places **Elim** at **Wadi Gharandal**, is shown below:



The second atlas Rev. Andersen loaned to me is The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible, published by the Westminster Press in 1946. This atlas describes the route of the Exodus that includes Elim, as follows:

On Plate V the stations of the Israelite journey which can be identified with the most probability along the traditional route have been designated. The first source of water on the ancient road to the Sinai mines is *'Ain Hawarah*. This, therefore, is probably Marah, the first station of the Israelite journey which was reached after three waterless days in the wilderness (v, D-4; Ex. 15:22 ff.). The next oasis to the south is in the **Wadi Gharandel**, which corresponds to the Biblical **Elim** where twelve springs and seventy palm trees are said to have existed (v, D-4; Ex. 16:1; Num. 33:9). The next stages of the journey took them along the Red Sea, and thence inland to the Wilderness of Sin and to Dophkah (Num. 33:10-12).

Plate V in this atlas shows the “probable route of the Exodus.” Because of uncertainty, each of the stops on the map in the Sinai include a question mark. A cropped portion of this map shows **Elim** as being at **Wadi Gharandal**.



The texts and maps of these two Biblical atlases, one very new (2007) and the second much older (1946), place **Elim** at **Wadi Gharandal**. The maps confirm the separate identifications by Dr. Maynard Owen Williams and Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick that **Elim** is located at **Wadi Gharandal**.