

Exodus, route of

What do you think is the correct route of the Exodus taken by the Ancient Israelites?

The challenge that Biblical scholars have had regarding the route of the Exodus has varied facets to it. While there are certainly some specific details given to us in the Torah of Ancient Israel's trek from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Exodus chs. 14-19; Numbers 33), too frequently this is more of a list of obscure place names that no longer exist than anything else. While everyone can be agreed that the Israelites moved in territory that today composes the countries of Egypt, Israel, and possibly also Jordan and Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to tell for certain what the exact route was that the Israelites took. Sadly, modern day politics and the volatility of the region, frequently prevent archaeologists from examining the different sites relevant to the Ancient Israelites' journeys.

There are three main views of the route of the Exodus, which Biblical scholars and students, do have available to them to consider, in their evaluations of the Israelites' journeys:

1. The **Northern Route Theory** argues that the Israelites crossed Lake Sirbonis, adjacent to the Mediterranean, and that Mount Sinai was located in the northern Sinai Peninsula. This view does not have a wide amount of support today. Notably against it is how God prohibited the Israelites from traveling via a route that would take them into Philistia (Exodus 13:17).
2. The **Southern Route Theory** is the most widely espoused today. It advocates that the Israelites probably crossed between the many marshy, water boundaries (now dry) in the isthmus between Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula, which moved northward from the Gulf of Suez. The Israelites headed south to a site in the Sinai Peninsula, the traditional location of Mount Sinai being Jebel Musa. While there are variations of this viewpoint, one of the main criticisms of it is that the Sinai Peninsula (or at least some of it) was controlled by the Egyptian Empire, and an escape from Egypt would surely have to constitute being completely removed from Pharaoh's jurisdiction.
3. The **Arabian Route Theory** is something that has only been recently suggested. It postulates that the traditional location of Mount Sinai is wrong, and that the Red Sea that the Israelites crossed is today's Gulf of Aqaba, sitting to the east of the modern-day Sinai Peninsula. Since the Sinai Peninsula was still controlled by Egypt, the Israelites could have escaped via the Darb el-Hajj, or a trade route connecting Egypt to Arabia. The volcanic Mount Bedr is proposed as a possible site for Mount Sinai. While there are compelling reasons in favor of this theory, not enough work or investigation has been undertaken at present to confirm it.

Given the three options proposed for the route of the Exodus, there are some good reasons for us to consider the suggestions made by the Arabian Route Theory. It does advocate that the Israelites would be completely out of Egyptian territory before arriving at Mount Sinai. What it lacks is enough scholarly research and support at present. But, given the great appreciation that evangelical Christians have for the Exodus, as well as the interests of Jewish academia, we can be guaranteed that more investigation into this third proposal will be available in the future.¹

¹ The information summarized here has been largely adapted from Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp 108-109, 112.