

Shur

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Shur (Heb. *Shur*, שׁוּר; Sept, Σούρ; Vulg. *Sur*), a place just without the eastern border of Egypt. Its name, if Hebrew or Arabic, signifies "a wall;" and there can be little doubt that it is of Shemitic origin from the position of the place. The Sept. seems to have thus interpreted it, if we may judge from the obscure rendering of [1Sa 27:8](#), where it must be remarked the extraordinary form Γελαμψούρ is found. This word is evidently a transcription of the words שׁוּרָה...מְעוֹלָם, the farmer, save the initial particle, not being translated. The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan interpret Shur by *Chagara* (חגרה), and Josephus by *Pelusium* (Πηλούσιον [*Ant.* 6, 7, 3]); but the latter was called Sin by the Hebrews.

Shur is first mentioned in the narrative of Hagar's flight from Sarah. Abraham was then in southernmost Palestine, and when Hagar fled she was found by an angel "by the fountain in the way to Shur" ([Ge 16:7](#)). Probably she was endeavoring to return to Egypt, the country of her birth — she may not have been a pure Egyptian — and had reached a well in the inland caravan route. Abraham afterwards "dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar" (20:1). From this it would seem either that Shur lay in the territory of the Philistines of Gerar, or that this pastoral tribe wandered in a region extending from Kadesh to Shur. *SEE GERAR*. In neither case can we ascertain the position of Shur. The first clear indications of this occurs in the account of Ishmael's posterity: "And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that [is] before Egypt, as thou goest towards Assyria" (25:18). With this

should be compared the mention of the extent of the Amalekitish territory given in this passage, "And, Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah [until] thou comest to Shur, that [is] over against Egypt" (1Sa 15:7). It is also important to notice that the Geshurites, Gezrites, and Amalekites, whom David smote, are described as "from an ancient period the inhabitants of the land as thou comest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt" (27:8). The Wilderness of Shur was entered by the Israelites after they had crossed the Red Sea (Ex 15:22-23). It was also called the Wilderness of *Etham* (Nu 33:8). The first passage presents one difficulty, upon which the Sept. and Vulg. throw no light, in the mention of Assyria. If, however, we compare it with later places, we find בְּאַרְכָּה אֲשׁוּרָה here remarkably like בּוֹאֶךְ שׁוּרָה in 1Sa 27:8, and בּוֹאֶךְ שׁוּר in 15:7, as if the same phrase had been originally found in the first as a gloss; but it may have been there transposed, and have originally followed the mention of Havilah. In the notices of the Amalekitish and Ishmaelitish region, in which the latter succeeded the former, there can be no question that a strip of Northern Arabia is intended, stretching from the Isthmus of Suez towards, and probably to, the Persian Gulf. The name of the wilderness may indicate a somewhat southern position. Dr. Trumbull (*Kadesh-bamea*, p. 44 sq.) labors at great length to prove that Shur was a line of fortifications extending from Suez to the Mediterranean; but in that case the word must have had the *article*, "The Wall," which it never takes; nor does it appear that the forts in question were as continuous as a wall would be. His etmologies connecting it in this sense with Etham are very forced.

According to recent authorities the "Wilderness of Shur" is substantially identical with the modern desert *el-Jifar*, which extends between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean from Pelusium to the southwest borders of Palestine (Rosenmuller,

Alterth. 3, 241 sq.). It consists of white shifting sand (yet see Schubert, 2, 273), has very little signs of habitations, and is some seven days' journey across. The simple word Shur evidently designates, in general, a high ridge running north and south in the form of a high wall, according to the meaning of the word *before*, i.e. on the east side of Egypt ([Ge 25:18](#); [Ex 15:22](#)). This can be no other than the high range to the east of Suez, the continuation of the great chain of Jebel et-Tih northward towards the Mediterranean, forming a sharp ridge or a high *wall* as seen from a distance east and west, and a grand barrier on the east side of Egypt and to the west of the great plain in the interior of the wilderness called Desert et-Tih. There is no other range whatever of the kind between Egypt and the interior of the wilderness (see Palmer, *Desert of the Exodus*, p. 44). This must be, therefore, the Wilderness of Shur. It is called by the Egyptians, and those who live to the west of it, *Jebel er-Rahah*, or the Mountain of Rahah. But (according to some travellers) by the Arabs of the interior of the wilderness, on the east side of the range, it is called *Jebel es-Sur*, or the Mountain of Shur.