

Who was Og king of Bashan?

Og king of Bashan was a mighty and infamous Amorite king in the days of Moses who fought the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land. God granted the Israelites victory over King Og's forces, and Moses and the Israelites possessed Bashan, a fruitful land east of the Jordan River. The victory was significant because of the fearsome strength of Og and the relative inexperience of the Israelite forces.

Leading up to the Israelites' encounter with Og king of Bashan was a battle with another Amorite king, Sihon. Moses had requested that Sihon allow the Israelites to pass through his land—they promised not to take any of the Amorites' resources along the way—but instead of granting permission, Sihon mustered his forces and attacked the Israelites. God enabled Moses and the people of Israel to defeat the Amorites and take their land (Numbers 21:21-31). Then the Israelites made their way toward Bashan, and King Og came out to confront them at Edrei (verse 33). The Israelites were frightened because Og's reputation preceded him. But God reassured Moses, saying, “Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands, along with his whole army and his land” (verse 34).

The battle between the forces of Og and Moses is described in greater detail in the book of Deuteronomy. There we read that Og was king over sixty fortified cities, all of which the Israelites captured (Deuteronomy 3:3-7). He was also a very large man—his bed was made of iron and was of enormous size: nine cubits long and four cubits wide (13.5 feet long and 6 feet wide). The inclusion of this detail emphasizes the size of Og. A man needing this size of bed was likely very tall—ten or eleven feet. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Og was one of the last of the Rephaites (Deuteronomy 3:11), which means he was strong and tall (see Deuteronomy 2:20-21).

The Rephaites (or Rephaim) were a group of people who lived in Canaan and elsewhere at the time of Moses and Joshua. The word Rephaites is not an ethnic but rather a descriptive term; it literally means “terrible ones.” The Rephaim were giants and fierce fighters. Earlier, when the Israelites had first tried to enter the Promised Land, the spies reported the land was populated by giants, whom they called “Nephilim” and “sons of Anak” (Numbers 13:32-33).

Og king of Bashan was one of the last of this race of giants. Goliath, the giant who fought David, was likely another. Og and his sons all lost their lives in their foolish opposition to God’s people (Numbers 21:35). Despite King Og’s great size and strength, God gave Israel’s army the victory, and they possessed the land of Bashan. The half-tribe of Manasseh inherited Og’s territory (Joshua 13:29-30). There is no obstacle too large for God; there is nothing impossible for Him (Matthew 19:26). God does not quake before giants, and neither should His children.