

The Underground City of Bashan

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I was in Damascus in 1954 on a day they were changing governments. The change was by force. I saw dead men and horses lying on the street. There was shooting and shouting everywhere, so I kept out of the danger area. When leaving Syria and crossing into Jordan, the guards searched my luggage carefully, no doubt after weapons. As they were doing this I happened to look up at the notice and I realized I was in Earei. The place is mentioned in Numbers 21:22 and in other places in the Bible. It is now named Dera. This was the capital city of Og, the king of Bashan who went out and fought against the Israelites over 3300 years ago.

H.M.S. Richards, who was in his day probably the best known and best loved preacher in Adventist ranks, wrote:

A modern archaeologist described his visit to this town some time ago. The inhabitants showed him the entrance to the ancient buried city, which is underneath the modern inhabited town and also goes away back under the mountains and nearby countryside. He entered through a small hole about 15 inches high, and found himself in a place of absolute darkness. The rock everywhere is a black volcanic lava formation.

The natives of the district say that this underground city extends for many miles, perhaps twenty or more, and no modern scientist has ever explored all of it. It's a real underground maze, a city with room after room, apartments, houses, market places, stores, all cut from the solid rock. There were air shafts here and there leading to the surface so that there was perfect ventilation, but the entrances to these ventilators were camouflaged with piles of volcanic stones; and, as the whole country above is covered with these rocks, it was easy for them to be hidden and hard for them to be found. The average depth of the city below ground level is about seventy five feet.

They had wells as the source of a constant water supply. Some of the wells are used now from the surface and are also available by tunnels below. In the days of the crusaders the army of King Baldwin was in desperate need of water, but when they let down their buckets into these wells somebody in the underground city would take the buckets from the ropes, and the crusaders were not able to get water. The inhabitants had fled to the underground city, and had simply disappeared from the face of the land.

According to the Scriptures, King Og ruled over sixty cities when the Israelites came into the country. "All these cities [said the Scriptures] well fenced with high walls, gates, and bars; beside unwalled towns a great many." Deuteronomy 3: 5.

A hundred years ago many Bible critics denied that any such city or cities could exist in the barren country east of the Sea of Galilee. But Dr. Porter examined these cities and

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wrote his book, "The Giant Cities of Bashan." Of these deserted cities and underground cities, he says. "I have more than once entered a deserted city in the evening and taken possession of a comfortable house and spent the night in peace. Many of these houses are in perfect condition as though they were finished yesterday. The walls are sound, the roofs unbroken, the doors and even window shutters are in place.

Someone asks, How could they be preserved for so long? Because they are all made of stone-even the doors, some of which are still swinging on their pivot hinges. The walls of the houses are from five to eight feet thick, built of large square stones of basalt or volcanic rock. The roofs were formed of slabs of the same stone hewn like planks, reaching from wall to wall. Some of these ancient cities have from two to five hundred houses still perfect, but not a man is dwelling in them.

Someone asks, Well, if Og had this underground city, why didn't he retreat into it as the people did in the days of the crusades? I've already read the answer. The Bible says that "Og the king of Bashan came out against us." He left his cities and came out to battle there at Edrei. So, as our bus was puffing up the hill from the customs station along that road lined on both sides with blocks of black volcanic stone, we were travelling over the very battlefield where Moses led the Israelites to a smashing victory over this great opponent of God's work.

Og himself was a giant, and his cities were giant cities but he went down in defeat before the hosts of God, and his cities are mostly uninhabited today. What was the reason for the victory? The Scripture writer says: "The Lord our God delivered into our hands Og." And so his kingdom with all his cities and his thirteen-foot iron bedstead was turned over to the victorious people from Egypt. We must remember that not only then, but today, believers must trust in God and not in man for deliverance.

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