

DEEP END - HIGHLIGHTS (text not audio)

Deut 3:11 – Og’s Big Bed

[Most of this reflection is from Peter J. Leithart’s blog , posted on April 6, 2010]

The Bible typically provides measures of “length and breadth” when it is talking about holy places and cosmic models. The ark’s “length and breadth” are recorded (Genesis 6:15), and so is that of the land (Genesis 13:17). Frequently, this combination appears in relation to the tabernacle and its furnishings, Solomon’s temple, the visionary temple of Ezekiel, and the restored holy city of Jerusalem (Zechariah 2:2).

Then we have Deuteronomy 3:11, which gives a detailed description of Og’s bed. We learn that the bed is iron, that it was placed in Rabbah of the Ammonites, and that it had a length of nine cubits and a length of four cubits. So, Og had a really big bed. So what?

First the language: The word “bed” used in Deuteronomy 3:11 is *eres*, a fairly transparent pun on *eretz*, “land.” The description of Og’s bed, *eres*, (something of an oddity to put in the text) is surrounded by Moses’ description and references to the land, *eretz*, (Deuteronomy 3:8, 12), and the whole context is a review of the conquest. Israel’s defeat of Og (along with Sihon of the Amorites) began the conquest.

Second, beds are places of rest and sleep, of course, but in some passages beds are also places of relaxation and entertainment. Amos condemns vain, prideful people who eat and drink on their “beds” (6:4). Picture a potentate dressed in purple, reclining on a couch, eating the grapes that the women of his harem drop into his mouth. Beds are throne-like in that both are linked with the Sabbath rest of victory, but beds are associated with the king at play rather than the king sitting in judgment.

Third, kings (ought to) assume places of rest when they have accomplished their tasks. David says he will not go into the “tabernacle of my house” or go up to his “bed” (*eres*) so long as the Lord has no place to rest (Psalm 132:3). Og’s big bed (*eres*) signified his dominance of the land (*eretz*), the fact that he had no enemies that could threaten him – until Israel appeared in the Transjordan. (This is probably linked to the regular references to kings and their beds that we find as one of the motifs in 1-2 Kings.)

Finally, Deuteronomy’s claim that the bed of Og ended up in Rabbah is intriguing. David conquered Rabbah (2 Samuel 11-12), but only after spending time “resting” in his own bed—with Uriah’s wife. Because of his deep and sincere repentance, David was able to renew the conquest by taking the city of Og’s bed. But his moral decline slowly (and sadly) begins at this point.

So if you have a really big bed (as seems fashionable today) don’t let it go to your head. The One we follow had no place to lay his head.