

Parshat Devarim 5781

Og's bed *For only Og king of the Basan was left of the remaining Rephaim. Behold his bed was an iron bed, in Rabbah of the children of Ammon. Nine cubits was its length and four cubits its width, by the cubit of man.* (Devarim 3:11)

Who was Og? Og is first mentioned in the Torah as the king of Bashan who was defeated and killed by the Israelites (Bemba 21:33). In our parasha, Moshe recounts that previous battle. Og is here called the last of the *Rephaim*. The *Rephaim* were defeated in the war of the four kings against the five kings (Bereishit 14:5). Rashi, based on Midrash Bereishit Rabbah (42:8), identifies Og as the fugitive who then told Avram that his nephew Lot had been captured (Bereishit 14:13). Rashi provides two explanations as to why Og was called a fugitive. First, Og had just escaped from a battle. Second, based on Midrash, Rashi identifies Og as being one of the *Nephilim* who were giants on earth before the Flood at the time of Noach (Bereishit 6:4). Og survived the flood by clinging to the outside of Noah's Ark. (I will leave for another time the question of how to resolve Og's longevity.)

Many Midrashim tell us that Og was a giant who was very strong. Rashbam, the master of simple meaning rather than quoting Midrash, comments that the reference to Og's bed being made of iron rather than wood is to Og's cradle when he was a baby. Even as a baby, Og was so strong that he would break any wooden cradle. As an adult he had more sense and self-control and would not destroy his own bed, so his adult bed did not need to be made of iron.

What were the dimensions of Og's bed? The Torah tells us that Og's bed measured nine by four cubits. A cubit is defined as the distance between a man's elbow and the tip of his middle finger. The length of a cubit is generally taken today as being between about 45 and 54cm. Taking a cubit to be about 50cm, this would mean that Og's bed was about 4.5m long. Clearly this would be a large bed by our standards, but perhaps befitting a giant.

Consistent with Onkeles and Targum Yonatan, Rashi compounds the size of Og's bed, by explaining that when our verse gives the dimensions of Og's bed "by the cubit of man", it means "by the cubit of Og". While the distance between a regular man's elbow and the tip of his middle finger might be about 50cm, Og was a giant,

so for him that distance would be a lot bigger. The cubit of Og would be far longer than 50cm. Thus, the length of Og's bed would be far longer than 4.5m.

In contrast, Ibn Ezra understands the words "by the cubit of man" to mean "by the cubit of an ordinary man". According to Ibn Ezra, Og's bed was about double the length of a regular bed.

How tall was Og? Mizrachi's commentary on Rashi states that we like our beds to be about a cubit or so longer than we are. So if Og's bed was nine cubits long, Og's height was about eight cubits, which would make him about twice the height of a reasonably tall non-giant adult male if the cubits were regular cubits. Mizrachi refutes this as being inconsistent with the Midrashim that relate of Og's super size and strength. Thus Mizrachi supports Rashi's view that Og's bed was much longer, and hence Og was much taller.

In his rejection of Ibn Ezra's explanation, Mizrachi cites the Talmudic statement that a regular person's height is four cubits based on his own cubit measurement (Eruvin 48a). In other words, a regular person's height is four times the distance between that person's elbow and the tip of his middle finger. Og was a cubit shorter than his bed, which means he was eight cubits tall – using his own cubits according to Rashi and Mizrachi – so Og was eight times taller than the distance between his own elbow and the tip of his middle finger. This ratio of eight is in contrast to the regular ratio of four. Mizrachi thus deduces that Og was disproportionately tall as compared to some of his other human dimensions.

The Maharal in his commentary the Gur Aryeh points out that if the cubits being referred to are Og's cubits, this doesn't tell us how tall Og was or how big his bed was, because we don't know what size Og's cubits were. If Og's cubits were disproportionately small, his bed may not have been so big.

Back to the baby cradle In his commentary *Haketav VehaKabbalah*, the 19th century German Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg quotes from the Rashbam that it was Og's baby cradle that was made of iron. R' Mecklenburg suggests that the bed dimensions given in the Torah also refer to Og's baby cradle. It was Og's baby cradle that measured nine cubits by four cubits. This perhaps unique explanation can be coupled with the cubits referring to Og's cubits as a baby, and we can then deduce that Og's bed was really not so remarkably large at all