



PETRA: CITY OF ANTIQUITY

by Ray Brubaker

Petra, located 180 miles south of Amman in Jordan, is a city believed carved from sandstone rock more than 2,000 years ago.

What makes this city so unique is that it remains hidden--its main entrance being a narrow cleft in the rock called "the Siq."

The Siq is actually 6,000 feet long as the crowflies and from 12 to 20 feet wide at its narrowest points. The sides or walls are stupendous, the towering cliffs so high they make man look small in comparison.

This narrow approach made this ancient city nigh impregnable from attack. And it remained largely hidden until 1812 when an explorer by the name of John Lewis Burckhardt, disguised as a Bedouin sheik, discovered Petra anew. He induced his Arab guides to show him this long lost city by expressing a desire to sacrifice a goat at the traditional tomb of Aaron, brother of Moses.

That is how this ancient city of Petra was found to be a citadel of color, as iron oxide, carried by the water, has stained the rocky fortress walls with colors of tawny reds and browns, ivory, yellow and tan.

As Burgon, the poet, described the city, "From the Rock as if by magic grown, eternal, silent, beautiful, alone."

What makes Petra of significance is not only its beauty as a tourist attraction, but also its history dating back to the time of Esau, and its future accommodation as a place of refuge to the Jewish remnant during the coming awful great tribulation.

The Rev. David Webber expresses the belief that "the builder of Petra was Esau."

Climbing through this rocky ledge, one must wonder whether some of Esau's descendants once dwelt here.

Webber quotes Gen. 36:1 and 8 to indicate that this land is mentioned in the Bible. For we read: "Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom. "And again, "Thus dwelt Esau in Mount Seir: Esau is Edom."

He further points out that before the dynasty of Jacob was established through his 12 sons, Esau reigned as king in Edom, from his throne in Mt. Seir, which is Petra. He adds, "His sons and grandsons became dukes in his kingdom, and archaeological markings in the dwelling places that Esau had dug out of the beautiful red sandstone, indicate that the population of the city grew to 267,000."

Notes in the Scofield Bible likewise refer to Edom (called also "Seir") .. is the name of the country lying south of the ancient kingdom of Juda, and extending from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akaba. It includes the ruins of Petra ..."



In the Bible you have the word "Selah" which means "Rock." This is the same name given Petra. Some believe the name originated when Moses struck the rock in the Bible from which water gushed out.

In driving to Petra you pass the small village of Wadi Musa meaning "Valley of Moses" where water still runs to this day.

There you get the horses that will take you into this great ravine surrounded by cliffs on either side that rise higher and higher as the path you travel twists and turns as you hasten to your destination.

The silence is broken only by the horses' hooves hitting the rocks, or maybe by a gust of wind that sighs through the opening chasm.

Deeper and deeper you penetrate into the unknown when suddenly you come upon this lovely scene framed in between the narrow gorge.

What you see is a building carved out of a sandstone cliffside. It is called "the Treasury" and said to be a tomb. This rocky edifice is the best preserved of all the ruins because it has been sheltered from wind and rain. Most of the other buildings are badly weathered, as the sandstone can't take the treatment of wind and weather.

The question comes to mind--Could this have been built by giants? Dr. Louis Talbot, in his book, I SAW PETRA, notes: "All the doors were about 26 feet in height ... which has led many people to believe that they were carved by a race of giants."

All you have to do is to read related passages which describe the area during the time of Esau and mention is made of giants in the land.

For instance, turn to Deu. 2 where the Lord told Moses, "Command thou the people (of Israel) saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: Meddle not with them: for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession." (Deu. 2:4-5)

Very plainly this area of Petra is said to belong to Esau. Now down in the chapter we read of various groups which dwelt in the land even before the time of Esau of whom it was implied that they were giants.

Deu. 2:10 says: "The Emims dwelt therein in times past, a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; which also were accounted giants ..."

Deu. 2:20 likewise notes: "That also was accounted a land of giants: giants dwelt therein in old time."

In Chapter 3 mention is made of Og, king of Bashan, who alone remained among the remnant of the giants. It was said that his bedstead was of iron... "nine cubits was the length thereof, and

four cubits the breadth of it." A cubit is 1 foot, 5 inches. So Og the giant's bed was around 13 feet long which means a giant was around 13 feet tall, or at least Og was that tall.

So this is the early history of the land--a land once dwelt in by giants which could very well account for the doors carved into the rock 26 feet in height.

Now what about the future of this land of Petra? Will this be the hiding place of persecuted Jews during the coming tribulation, as some prophetic writers believe?

Homer Duncan, in his book, *ISRAEL, Past, Present and Future*, writes: "When the antichrist reveals his true character, the Jews will turn from him in horror, and will flee to the rock fortress of Petra where they will stay until the battle of Armageddon is fought ..." Now this assumption is based on several portions of Scripture.

First, our Lord referred to the time of antichrist's appearance by quoting the prophet Daniel, saying: "But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand), then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains." (Mark 13:14)

It is believed by many that Antichrist's appearance and desecration of the temple by placing an image of himself therein will constitute this abomination of desolation. When this happens, Jews everywhere are told to "flee to the mountains." Petra is located 60 to 100 miles to the south of Jerusalem in a mountain chain so that here is where it is believed many will flee during the time of trouble spoken of by Jesus, Jeremiah and Daniel.

Turn to the book of the Revelation where we read of a place prepared in the wilderness that again prophetic scholars believe is a reference to Petra.

In Rev. 12, the description is as follows of a dragon persecuting the woman that brought forth the man child. The book of Revelation is largely one of symbols so that the woman is a type of Israel, and the man-child is Christ the Messiah of Israel, whereas the dragon is Satan seeking to destroy Israel. For it is through Israel that Messiah will return to rule the world during the thousand-year reign, the millennium.

We read what happens in Rev. 12:14, "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent."

As Cyrus Osterhus points out, "When you enter the city of Petra, the first thing which faces you is the image of a great eagle carved in the rock." He asks, "Was the carving of this eagle a method used by God to mark this place into which the Israelites should flee?"

Personally, we believe that the reference here to "two wings of a great eagle" is a reference to the way God is going to bring the remnant into this secret hiding place. Although no plane, unless it were a helicopter, could land in Petra, there is enough evidence in Scripture to see where God could pick up the remnant as he did Elijah and transport them marvelously and miraculously to the place He has prepared for them.

In the 68th Psalm we read: "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name; extol him that rideth upon the heavens, by his name JAH, and rejoice before him."

Then, after describing the Lord as riding upon the heavens, mention is made of His chariots. We read: "The chariots of God are twenty- thousand, even thousands of angels are among them.. ."

What are the chariots? Are they similar to the chariots of fire that came for Elijah? Could they be conveyances to bring the remnant of Israel to their hiding place who are seen coming on "two wings of a great eagle"?

That chariots will play a leading role at Armageddon is clearly established in Isaiah 66, verses 15-16, where we read: "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire, and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many."

Did you hear it? The battle of Armageddon is going to find the Lord returning to this earth. In the book of Revelation the description is given of Christ coming on a white horse and the saints following with Him.

The book of Revelation is filled with pictures to illustrate events still future. Whatever our interpretation, whether there are real horses or whether this symbolizes the chariots described by Isaiah, makes little difference.

The important lesson to learn is this. Christ is seen returning to this earth. He comes first of all for His saints in an event we call the rapture - when those who are ready are caught up to meet Him in the air. Then, while on earth there is great destruction referred to as the time of tribulation, we will be with our Lord in heaven. Following the tribulation, believed to be a period of seven years, we then return with Him back to earth. Witnessing these armies in the skies finds the kings of earth rallying their forces who gather to this battle predicted to take place at the end of this age--the battle of Armageddon.

It is seeing these chariots in the sky, or the armada of white horses led by our Lord Jesus Christ, that attracts the armies of earth. And with one blast of his breath, for out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, our Lord destroys those who have gathered on the plains of Megiddo, and the blood flows for 186 miles even to the horses' bridles so great is the carnage.

So, it is our belief based upon the Word of God that somehow God will pick up the remnant of Israel wherever they may be and miraculously transports those seeking to escape the cruelty of the antichrist's despotism in demanding the world's worship. He will bring those who cannot flee by foot to this place prepared in the wilderness which many believe to be Petra.

It is said that Dr. W.E. Blackstone and George T.B. Davis have placed Bibles in sealed containers in some of the rocks and crannies of Petra. Whether this is true, and whether they are still there, we do not know. If they find such Bibles we're sure the book in the New Testament they will want to read is the book of Hebrews.

Here is where we believe Isaiah refers to when he says, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a moment, until the indigna-

tion be over past. For, behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." What a picture!

Petra may very well be the hiding place referred to by Isaiah in the day when the armies of earth gather in plains near Petra for the battle of Armageddon.

Again in Revelation we read where the kings of earth gather their forces to fight the one the Scripture calls "the Lamb." For Jesus is the lamb of God whose blood was shed as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Concerning these armies of earth, we read: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they that are with him are called, and chosen and faithful."

In closing we would ask--which army would you be in if Christ were to come today?

Would you be among those who are "called, chosen and faithful"-- caught up to meet Him when He comes?

Or might you be one today who has never received Christ as your Saviour and Lord?

Today you can still be saved. But you must act now. Tomorrow may be too late. By turning to Christ you can make your calling and election sure. By living for Him you can fulfill the command of God who has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we be holy. That is, we are to be separate from the world and found living for Jesus when He comes.

And by doing the will of God we can be found faithful, For our Lord has said, to those who invest their talents or money in His work He will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Which will it be when Jesus comes? May we be among the "called, chosen and faithful!" Amen!

"And be ye therefore ready also, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh! "

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