

Daniel and the
Sea Serpent

DANIEL AND THE SEA SERPENT

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This book is dedicated to my children:
Toby, Elijah, Abby, and the little girl the
LORD will bring to us through adoption.
May the lessons of Daniel bless you and
generations yet to come.

PROLOGUE

The vision of Ruah, *hokmah* of Hudoti:

In the fiftieth year of my guidance, I beheld a desolate field with the soil dried and cracked. It appeared as if no crops could grow on the crusty land. As I continued to watch, plants and trees of all kinds sprung up yielding fruits and vegetables, the likes of which, I had never seen. In the center of the field, a young boy stood holding a scroll. The boy's name—Daniel.

Ruah laid his quill down next to the freshly inscribed parchment and whispered, “The time of restoration has come. The prophecies will soon be fulfilled.”



"Daniel!" his father beckoned. "Get up and get moving. Your chores won't take care of themselves."

Daniel lay on his side with his back shielding his father's view and scribbled a few more notes on the parchment. The dream remained fresh in his mind and seemed more vivid this time. Each night for the past few weeks the dream seemed to grow in frequency and clarity.

He tucked the piece of parchment under his bedmat and rolled over. His mother busied herself with breakfast preparations in their paltry, adobe hut. The light of dawn had yet to make an appearance, but the bleating of sheep and the scent of his mother's sweet potato porridge confirmed a new day had begun. New—the word sounded so out of place in Hudoti. He pressed his hand on the coarse mat he was lying on and pushed himself upright.

"You better be ready by the time your mother has breakfast on, or you'll be digging tonight instead of meeting with Ruah," his father said.

Daniel reached up and stretched his lean body. At the height of his stretch he let out a moan. No, it was more of a groan. The thought of the day's chores often evoked that response from him. The newest chore would make anyone groan, and Ruah, of all people, assigned it to him. He ran his fingers through his thick, black hair and felt the grit of sand still nestled near the roots. It was a sensation he had grown accustomed to.

Daniel's father turned toward his mother. "I don't know what that boy's problem is. He's always getting up late."

"He is only thirteen," she said as she stirred the porridge. "He just needs more rest."

"I think it's those crazy dreams. They're distracting him from reality."

"He'll get over those dreams eventually."

"He'd better."

I hope I never do, Daniel thought, overhearing their conversation.

He coaxed his limbs into some productive motion and slipped on a camel-skin garment. He lumbered over to the breakfast table that consisted of a rectangular mat on the dirt floor. His mother ladled some porridge into a bowl and placed it in front of him. *Filled to the top again*. He would be expected to eat every last bite. She constantly reminded him that he needed energy for the day. The porridge went down easy enough, but the aftertaste could have been passed on to his grandchildren. They'd had the same meal yesterday morning, and the morning before that, and every morning as far back as Daniel could remember. Though starvation might not kill him, the monotony could.

"Daniel, if you finish your morning chores and make

some good progress on the well, you'll make your lesson tonight. If not, you'll have to stay and work longer. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Daniel said with the enthusiasm of a sand slug.

His father raised his eyebrows and stared at him. "Son, you should consider this project a privilege. In Ruah's fifty-two years as *hokmah*, he's never suggested a location for a new well until now. And he specifically asked that you dig it."

Daniel finished his porridge in silence. Ruah had honored him with this task, but it felt more like punishment than privilege. He swallowed his last bite and rose to carry out his chores. He grabbed a six gallon clay pot on his way out the door and hoisted it to the crown of his head once outside. The well currently in use was on the other side of the village, about eight throws away. A desert gecko scurried in front of him hurrying to its destination. The same could not be said of Daniel.

He trudged by a number of adobe huts similar to his: round, about twenty feet in diameter, and with thatched roofs. The villagers engaged their morning chores with vigor, creating a cacophony of sounds. One villager loaded a wagon with what else—sweet potatoes. Another lady milled some grain outside on a stone slab. Sabria's sister led some hungry, noisy sheep out to look for pasture. He couldn't tell if Sabria had already left the hut yet or not. He wasn't in the mood to run into her.

The light of dawn accented the east side of the village roofs and created the impression of waves. The image reminded him of the dream he had awakened from this morning. His eyes grew glassy and blank. He no longer perceived the activity around him. Even though his legs

kept striding toward the well, his imagination had launched him out to sea. He would figure out a way to make it happen—even in a desert.

A splash of water jolted him back to reality.

“Daniel! Watch where you're going,” Sabria said. He had almost knocked her over in the midst of his daydreaming. The collision had jarred her container of water, spilling some onto his forearm.

“Oh, sorry Sabria. I wasn't paying attention,” Daniel remarked. He set down his pot and dried his arm with his cloak.

“Were you in your ocean world again, Daniel?” Sabria asked.

He straightened up, stared straight into her brown eyes and replied, “As a matter of fact, I was.”

“You and your dreams.” Sabria sauntered off with her long black hair swaying in step. Before she got too far, she paused, turned around and inflicted one more dig. “I hope you can read better than you walk, Daniel. See you tonight at the lesson.”

“It's not that crazy, Sabria,” he shouted. “I'll figure out a way to do it!” He didn't know if she heard, but regardless if she had, it at least felt good. And he believed it.

Daniel shuffled on through the sand toward the ancient well. The coolness of the sand on his feet would last until the sun rose. The daily trek was essential. If it weren't for the village well, Hudoti would have perished centuries ago.

Daniel placed the pot alongside the well's two-foot-high rock wall. He pushed the wooden drawing bucket into the well and let it fall to the bottom. A splash echoed from the mouth of the well as the bucket broke the water's

surface. The oceanic sound drew his attention back to his dream world. *Just like a ship breaking through the waves.*

He pulled the bucket to the top and noticed the wooden pulley still seemed a little jerky. No one had bothered to fix it. The wood had begun to rot and the center hole where the bolt ran through the pulley had expanded making it turn lopsided. The wood had obviously not been treated in some time. Daniel had regularly covered it in lard for lubrication and preservation, but his new chore prevented him from maintaining the pulley. If he ever freed himself from the monotonous chore of digging a new well, he could fix the pulley system.

Why did Ruah request him to dig this new well? No new well had ever produced. Why would this one be any different? It just didn't make sense. He finished filling his jar and headed back home.

Daniel entered his family hut and started pouring the water into the cistern. He turned toward his father who readied his products for market. "Father," he said, "I don't mean to be disrespectful, but isn't this new well a waste of time? We've never had a new well produce water. I don't think Ruah understands—"

"Ruah understands just fine," his father said. "You're the one that doesn't seem to understand. You need to spend more time doing what you're told and less time dreaming."

Daniel let out a sigh and hung his head.

"By the way Daniel," his father pulled a piece of parchment out of his cloak, "what's this?"

Daniel's eyes widened and his face flushed. It was the parchment from under his bedmat. "It's nothing," Daniel replied with a forced attempt at apathy. "Just something

I'm working on."

"What kind of contraption are you working on now? We live in a desert for heaven's sake. Quit wasting your time on this stuff and focus on the present. And the present means you're digging in the new well this morning!"

His father crumpled the parchment, threw it over by Daniel's bedmat and marched out the door. Daniel set the water pot down and scurried over to retrieve the record of dreams his father so flippantly discarded.

"Oh Daniel, you're a good and bright young man," his mother said. "But you do get distracted. I know you hate the mundane chores, but they are necessary for survival. If we find water in the new well, it would mean so much to our village."

"I know, I know," Daniel said as he tucked the parchment back under his bedmat. "I just wish Ruah would have picked someone else for the job."

He walked over and grabbed a water-pouch, pick and shovel for the day's work. "Bye, Mom," he said apathetically and marched out of his hut. Another day of digging awaited him.

The new well was only a few hundred yards from his home, which was good and bad. Daniel took solace in knowing the trip home in the heat of the day would be short, but bemoaned the longer time he would need to give to digging. This end of town witnessed less of the village bustle. A few wisps of sand dunes painted the background of the new well. Tufts of desert grass speckled the plain like the spots of a hyena. Some buzzards fed on a carcass a couple hundred yards away unaffected by Daniel's presence. He didn't mind the solace, just the monotony.

The well was already forty feet deep. Another twenty feet would likely be needed before he would strike water. It probably wouldn't happen, but perhaps Ruah and his father would then give up on the project. Daniel removed the well's wooden cover and took a glance into the dark bottom below. With tools in tow, he began the precarious descent down the rope ladder.

At the bottom were three empty wicker baskets used for hauling up dirt. He felt cool at the bottom, but knew that wouldn't last long. He laid the pick aside and plunged the shovel into some loose gravel. Shovelful after shovelful of moisture-starved dirt was dumped into the baskets. His tender muscles were taxed under the intense work. The first week of digging was the worst for fatigue, but now near the end of the fourth week, his muscles had grown accustomed to the toil. His hands, as well, had grown callused and rough from the repetitious rub of the shovel's handle.

After he filled the baskets, he tossed the shovel aside and scurried up and out of the well to haul them away. By the time he finished hauling up the third basket the sweat flowed freely. The sun blazed, fully above the horizon now. He would have been drenched in sweat had it not been for the arid climate.

He opened his water-pouch and gulped so quickly you would have thought someone were squeezing it down his throat. His body seemed to absorb the water almost instantly. He noticed a couple more buzzards circling overhead now and wondered if they were waiting for him to drop. Replacing the cork, he climbed back into the pit to continue his chore.

Grabbing the shovel he prepared to thrust it in the earth for what felt like the millionth time. But that was

going to be one time too many. “This is pointless,” he said and jammed the shovel into the ground. The shovel bounced off the ground and dropped from his hand. It had never done that before. He picked up the shovel with one hand and poked it into the ground. Something felt different.

Casting his shovel aside, Daniel dropped to his knees and began digging with his hands like a dog. He uncovered a woven type of material that looked similar to some of the village bedmats. This, however, seemed significantly larger than any mat he had ever seen. Grabbing his shovel he rapidly removed the earthen barrier that prevented him from securing the mystery item. The sun’s heat began to intensify as midday approached, but Daniel was undaunted. After two hours of feverish digging he freed the object from its burial place.

Excitement and anxiety flowed through Daniel’s body simultaneously. He wrapped the hauling ropes around the object, climbed to the top, and hauled it out of the well. He stretched it out across the desert sands and furrowed his brow in wonder.

What on earth is it?

The triangularly-shaped object measured twenty feet long on its longest side. It didn’t lie completely flat on the sand and bunched up a little in the middle. The two longer sides each had ten loops spaced evenly apart on the edges. He had never seen anything like it.

Daniel paced around the object and looked at it from multiple angles. The heavy reed material had remained intact despite the years. Who knew how old it was? His father would probably discard the item if he found it. It would merely hinder the work at hand in his mind. He wouldn’t care a-grain-of-sand about identifying it or

determining its significance. Daniel had to find out.

He decided to bury it somewhere nearby until he could figure out what to do. The excavated dirt mound seemed as convenient and safe a place as any. No one was going to be digging into that dirt, only adding to it. He could bury it on the backside of the mound and avoid any more dirt being thrown on top. Then he could retrieve it before dawn and take it to Ruah. If anyone would know what it was, he would. Not seeing any other plausible option, he buried it there.

The sun now radiated its most intense heat of the day. He threw one more shovel of dirt over the item and then reached out his finger and made a half circle to mark the spot. Daniel stared at the mound and rubbed his temples, wondering. He noticed his head was dry. The sweat had ceased. He uncorked his water bottle for a vital drink. A handful of water trickled out and diminished to droplets. Shaking the pouch produced nothing more. Daniel grabbed his supplies and started the short trek back to his hut. His legs felt like they were shackled and the digging implements seemed ten times heavier. As he approached his home the world began to spin. He dropped the tools outside, stumbled into his hut, and collapsed on his mat.

"Daniel, where have you been? Are you OK?" his mother exclaimed.

"What were you doing?" his father asked. "You know better than to try to work in the midday sun."

"I'm sorry," Daniel managed to whisper.

Daniel's mother snatched a bowl of water from the cistern and rushed it to Daniel's lips. He sipped the life-sustaining liquid and then lay down on his mat.

"Daniel, you know how foolish digging at high sun is. What were you thinking?" his father said. "I'll dig alone

this evening.”

Though weary, the thought of his father out alone by his discovery concerned him. “Father, I could...” His voice trailed off into the unintelligible.

“Daniel,” his mother said, “you need to rest. You’ll be lucky if you’re up for Ruah’s lesson tonight, let alone digging. Now rest.”

Daniel had no strength to argue. He closed his eyes to rest. He sensed his father and mother staring at him. He knew they were concerned. He was too, but about something else.

"Something's not right here," Daniel's father said. He grabbed a water-pouch from a hook and started filling it. "I'll find out what he's up to out at the well this evening. If he's feeling better, let him go to Ruah's, but don't let him go back to the well."