

We noticed last time that the first two chapters of Daniel are like giant contests between God and Nebuchadnezzar, or between God and Bel, the god of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar keeps trying to set up this great kingdom and religion, a world order that goes against God. Instead of God's temple he has his own temple, instead of God's priests he has his own priests, instead of God as king, he'll be king.

For example, in the first chapter, Nebuchadnezzar took God's stuff from His house and brought them to the house of his own god. Then he took God's people and brought them to his palace, and changed their names from God-honoring names (Mishael "Who is like God?") to names that honored Babylonian gods (Mismatch "Who is like the god Aku?"). But when he tried to change their diet, we see that God wins this first contest, because they refused to eat what good Babylonian princes eat...and God still blessed them more than all the other princes! Round 1: God 1, Nebuchadnezzar 0.

Then in chapter 2, the king has a bad dream. So he calls up all the wizards and prophets of the Babylonian gods to see who can explain it, but they can't! And then Daniel comes in and says that no man or god could ever tell the king what his dream was, but only the true God. And in the end the king has to honor this God. Round 2: God 2, Nebuchadnezzar 0.

Notice how the story continues...

Something we have to always keep in mind is that every single word of the Bible was inspired. And, in some books more than others, there is a lot of attention to detail. In Daniel, almost every single word was chosen really carefully and for a reason. Pay attention to details that stick out.

1. For example, chapter 3 is really repetitive. We see two lists that are repeated a bunch of times. What two lists are they? How many items are in each list, and how often are the lists repeated? (Notice that "prefects and governors" are considered one item, not two.) Why this number? Where else do you see this number in this chapter? Can you guess what it means? Remember what Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do..  
*(This question is pretty tough. If you can't figure it out, don't worry too much..but give it a shot and try and at least make a guess.)*

2. Why didn't the three friends just give sort-of an external show of bowing down to the image? They could have saved themselves a lot of trouble if they just pretended to worship it. Why not just pretend, since God knows what's in the heart anyways...isn't it the heart that matters? What would you do in this circumstance? (Think of Christians in ancient Rome and present-day Christians in North Korea.) Consider the second commandment and Luke 12:4-9.

3. This chapter definitely teaches us the importance of worshipping God alone no matter what the circumstance. But there's an even bigger lesson at play here, which is the biggest lesson in the entire Bible, and this is why the chapter doesn't just end with God saving the friends, but with Nebuchadnezzar's confession in verses 28ff. What is this bigger lesson? See, for example, Psalm 33:8-9, 71:19, 76:12, 77:12-14, 89:5f, 113:4-5, Daniel 4:3, 37, and Rev 19:1-6. What other Biblical stories teach us this lesson? (All of them is an acceptable answer..but give an example and explain how it teaches this lesson.)
4. Notice that at the end of chapter three the score is 3:0. Can you guess what it will be at the end of chapter 4?
5. Notice that chapter 4 is a letter. Who wrote it and who is for? Why did he write it? What's the story, and what's the moral of the story?
6. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar's conversion was genuine? What reasons do you have for or against this? Why does it matter?