

THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

In the Light of
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE EVENTS

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S TREE VISION—HIS PRIDE AND MADNESS

Foreshadowing the Pride and Madness of the Gentile Nations “**in the Latter Time**”

IN OUR last lesson attention was called to the fact that chapters three to six set forth the moral and religious aspects of “**the times of the Gentiles,**” especially as the age draws near its close.

In chapter four we have recorded the second strange dream of Nebuchadnezzar, “**the tree vision,**” foretelling his pride, insanity, and subsequent restoration, all of which is a foreshadowing of the pride, madness, and downfall of Gentile power in the time of the end, and the restoration of certain Gentile nations which shall enter into the millennial reign of Christ.

In his pride Nebuchadnezzar ignored the warning from the God of heaven concerning impending judgment, even as godless Gentile world power in the days of the Antichrist will not only ignore God, but will also defy Him with blasphemous insults to His name.

Chapter four is the record, preserved by Daniel, of what Nebuchadnezzar wrote, bearing testimony to God's dealings with him.

It is the story of the conversion of a heathen king, as related by himself; for the closing verses of the chapter indicate that he accepted Daniel's God as his own. How else could he “**praise and extol and honour the King of heaven**”?

We must give Nebuchadnezzar credit for being just as willing to testify for God after he was saved as he had been to testify for the devil before his conversion.

Can that be said of you, my Christian friend?

Do your neighbors know that you love the Lord?

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DECREE

Let us read the first three verses of this personal testimony of one of the greatest monarchs the world has ever seen. What a wonderful thing is the grace of God, transforming vile, wretched sinners into sober, useful, humble servants of “the Most High”!

Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the High God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

As we study the life of Nebuchadnezzar, we realize anew the wonder of the miracles of grace which God performs in human lives, for here He took a proud, haughty, heathen king, brought him low only to lift him up again, and restored to him the honor and glory of his kingdom.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S TREE VISION

1. The Troubled King.

With a false sense of security Nebuchadnezzar was “**at rest**,” but God aroused him in a strange and startling manner. Listen to the king's own words in verses 4 and 5.

I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

Sin is a deceitful thing. All the time Nebuchadnezzar was “**dead in trespasses and sins**” (Ephesians 2:1), even though he thought he was “**at rest**.” It was a deceitful rest, a deceitful peace that he had. If a man's sense of security does not rest in the finished work of Christ, then we need to arouse him to his danger. It was the grace of God that troubled Nebuchadnezzar and aroused him in his soul. And everyone who is born again must pass through the experience of concern.

Are you praying for unsaved loved ones? That is a serious prayer; it may bring trouble—illness, loss of property, loss of loved ones. Sometimes God has to use drastic measures to arouse sinners to their need of a Saviour. He may know that only trouble will stir some hearts.

A woman in my church had been praying for the conversion of her husband, but she was not prepared for the thing that led to his salvation. Her little girl was stricken with a serious illness, and died after a few days. The mother, though she was saved, rebelled in her heart; not so the father. The Homegoing of his little girl led to him to accept the Lord Jesus as his own Saviour. It took trouble to arouse him from his false sense of security.

I often think of what it took to arouse my own father.

For years my mother prayed for his conversion—and what a testimony she gave before him and her children! But my father was proud, aristocratic, wealthy, not sensing his need of a Saviour. He was the head of a large liquor concern; he had no time for Christ.

However, the day came when he lost everything—money and health. My mother kept on praying, and God answered her prayer. In her heartache and trial she rejoiced in God, for my father was born again. He came to know what real treasure was. But it took trouble to arouse him.

2. The Wise Men Brought before the King.

When Nebuchadnezzar awoke from his dream, he made the same mistake he had made before; he called for “**all the wise men of Babylon . . . the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers**”; but they could not make known the interpretation of the dream (vv. 6, 7). Then “**at the last**” he asked Daniel to explain to him the vision. At this time he was still a believer in his pagan gods, for he addressed Daniel as one in whom was “**the spirit of the holy gods**” (vv. 8, 9, 18). Someone has said that at least he recognized that Daniel's God was “holy”; for his own gods he made no pretense to holiness.

3. The Dream.

Read verses 10-17 to get the king's record of what he dreamed. He saw “**a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great.**” He saw also that “**the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of the earth.**”

The leaves thereof were fair and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.

As the king looked upon this great tree, he saw “**a watcher and an holy one,**” evidently an angel, come down from heaven, and heard him cry aloud, commanding that the tree be hewn down, its branches cut off, and its fruit scattered. The words of verses 15-17 are especially significant; for the “**holy one**” continued:

Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times [i.e., seven years] pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM

When Nebuchadnezzar had finished relating his dream to Daniel, he commanded him to “**declare the interpretation thereof.**”

Then Daniel **“was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him.”** It was not an easy task that Nebuchadnezzar had given to Daniel, for it meant telling the king of his sins, his seven years of insanity that were to come upon him in chastisement for sin, before he would give God the glory that was His due.

No wonder Daniel's **“thoughts troubled him.”**

But the king spake, and said, **“Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee.”**

Whereupon Daniel answered and said, **“My Lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.”** Daniel wished his king no ill.

1. “The Tree . . . Is Thou, O King.”

Faithfully Daniel gave to Nebuchadnezzar the God-given interpretation in verses 20-22:

The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth. . . It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.

As the **“head of gold”** of the image of chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar had great power and authority. Although he did not literally conquer all the world, he had the power to take as much as he saw fit to take. His dominion was **“to the end of the earth.”**

2. Nebuchadnezzar's Madness Foretold.

Because this first Gentile world emperor did not give God the glory, he had to be severely disciplined for seven years, driven insane; and in verses 23-25 Daniel told the king:

And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king: that they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

Evidently Nebuchadnezzar had that form of insanity that caused him to think he was a **“beast of the field.”** Therefore, he acted accordingly. Often insane people imagine that they are kings, rulers, even God.

It was a severe chastisement, but Nebuchadnezzar had to learn to give God the glory, to know **“that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”**

3. Nebuchadnezzar's Restoration Also Foretold.

The king's actions for the year following this dream do not indicate a willingness to turn from his evil ways, but if the vision did make him afraid, at least Daniel's assurance that his kingdom would be restored to him, after seven years, must have been of some comfort.

This is what Daniel said about this part of the dream in verse 26:

And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.

4. Daniel's Wise Counsel to the King.

Daniel, trusting in the forgiving love of his God, sought to turn Nebuchadnezzar from his evil way (v. 27) knowing that God does abundantly pardon.

Wherefore, O king, [he said,] let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PRIDE

This was the dream and this was the God-given interpretation thereof. But Nebuchadnezzar's heart was filled with pride, and he turned a deaf ear to Daniel's advice and pleading.

All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

The margin of some Bibles renders these words as follows: “At the end of twelve months he was walking upon the royal palace of Babylon.”

He was walking upon the flat roof of his palace, viewing the beauty and glory of his kingdom. We are told that the outer wall of his new palace “embraced six miles,” with two other **“embattled walls within, a great tower, and three brazen gates.”**

It was, indeed, a beautiful city, the capital of a mighty kingdom. But Nebuchadnezzar refused to heed God's warning or to learn the lesson God had tried to teach him a whole year previously—**“that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”**

His pride and egotism made him puffed up, boastful, defiant toward God.

Moreover, he seems to have oppressed the poor, for Daniel had begged him to “**shew mercy to the poor.**” No doubt the poor, under great stress, had built for him his beautiful city and palace.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S MADNESS

While the word [of proud boasting, verse 31] was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

Seven years a madman—thinking himself a beast of the field—with matted hair and “**nails like birds' claws**”—unkempt—wretched! What a spectacle the once proud monarch must have made! But God kept His promise to Nebuchadnezzar, for when the seven years were passed, He restored the king's reason, as well as his kingdom and glory. According to verses 34 and 35-

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S RESTORATION AND HIS PRAISE TO GOD

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

As we try to imagine the terrible experience through which Nebuchadnezzar had gone, we get an idea of the full meaning of these words. Surely no one knew better than he that Daniel's God did rule “**according to his will**” in heaven and on earth!

It was all a very great miracle—this dealing by God with this heathen king. The king himself seems to have realized it, for he linked his thanksgiving to God with the return of his reason.

Note his further words of praise and blessing to God in verses 36 and 37:

At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

It was a hard lesson, but surely it was worthwhile, for it meant the salvation of his soul. God alone knows what his testimony may have meant after he turned to Him, possibly leading others to glorify and extol His name.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S EXPERIENCE— A FORESHADOWING OF THE PRIDE AND MADNESS OF THE GENTILE NATIONS

All that we have considered thus far in this lesson has to do only with the application of the message to Nebuchadnezzar himself. But we must keep in mind the fact that, in the Book of Daniel, God is outlining to us the complete picture of Gentile world power, as well as His special dealings with Israel, which we shall study in chapter nine.

Therefore, just as the chapters which we have already studied have a prophetic, as well as a practical and historical, application, so also does this fourth chapter have a prophetic lesson for us.

It foreshadows the haughty pride and madness of Gentile world power, especially in “**the latter time.**” And as Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was restored unto him, so also there will be some Gentile nations which will enter into the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

1. The Significance of the Tree in Prophecy.

First let us see the typical use of the tree in the Word of God.

In Isaiah 5:1-7 we read the parable of the Lord's vineyard, where “**the house of Israel**” is described as “**the vineyard of the Lord of hosts.**” How patiently and tenderly God had planted and cared for His vineyard! He had led Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand, guiding and guarding her for centuries. But when He looked for grapes, He found only “**wild grapes.**”

Again, in the eleventh chapter of Romans, Paul compared Israel to the good olive tree; Gentiles, to the wild olive tree, which had been grafted into the good tree—a picture of Israel's rejection of her Messiah, and of God's giving the gospel to the Gentiles.

In our study of the first chapter of Daniel we spent some time trying to make plain that God permitted the Babylonian captivity because of Israel's apostasy, in order to bring her to repentance. And it was then that “**the times of the Gentiles**” had their beginning—with Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. So great did this kingdom become that God compared it to a great tree, reaching “**unto heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth.**”

In Ezekiel 31:3 the prophet used the tree as a picture of the Assyrian kingdom. And our Lord likened professing Christendom to a great mustard tree, in whose branches dwell “**the birds of the air,**” symbols of evil, as well as born-again souls. (See Matthew 13:31, 32).

The tree vision which God gave to Nebuchadnezzar not only has to do with that heathen king; it also outlines all Gentile world power, even unto the kingdom of our Lord Jesus on earth.

2. The Pride of the Gentile Nations.

Greatness and pride— how truly these two features characterize the Gentile nations! Think for a moment of the greatness of Gentile dominion, of her great cities, her achievements in every line, especially in science, architecture and inventions; of her defense program, with millions of men under arms, and with every conceivable death-dealing device to use in defense against any attempt at her overthrow.

The secrets of air, land, and sea have been delved into and discovered. Distance between nations has been almost annihilated, and countries have been brought into proximity as a result of the marvels of scientific achievement. So great has Gentile dominion become that the average man feels practically sure that any attempt at its overthrow would fail.

Some time ago I gave an address to a group of business men in the city of New York. I spoke to them on what God had said concerning the end of Gentile dominion and the return of the Son of God to the earth.

At the close of the address one of my hearers, a jurist, took me to the window of the hotel.

Pointing to the great city whose streets and avenues lay before us, whose huge buildings reared their heads against the sky, he said, "I cannot believe that a civilization like this could ever pass away in the manner in which you have described!" He went on to speak of America's greatness and the greatness of other Gentile nations, and expressed the belief that Gentile dominion would continue forever.

Although I reminded him of the fact that the earth was covered with the ashes of civilizations that had forgotten God, he was still skeptical. But Gentile dominion will come to an end, just as everything that is not built upon God and His Anointed will come to an end. What keen disappointment awaits this godless civilization—what disaster!

3. The Madness of the Gentile Nations.

The insanity of Nebuchadnezzar gives us a picture of the Gentile nations as God sees them, in their infidelity toward Him and His Word.

- In his intelligence and authority, Babylon's great king represents "**the powers that be,**" which "**are ordained of God**" (Romans 13:1);
- In his pride and consequent madness, he represents the blasphemous indignities heaped upon God and His Word by Gentile powers, especially as it will be in the time of the end.

For coupled with the greatness of Gentile dominion are pride and an arrogant independence of God. The feeling which made Nebuchadnezzar say, "**Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?**" is the same spirit which causes the nations of the world today to ignore God and to deny His Christ.

This will become increasingly evident as the age draws to a close. Running parallel with the marvelous achievements of recent years has been a terrible departure from God. The educated, intellectual classes are rapidly taking up a form of infidelity which leaves out God, His Word, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

In America alone it is said that seventy million people never darken the doors of a church from the beginning of the year to its end. We talk about Gentile nations as if they were Christian, some of them, but at heart they are not. We talk about Christian America, and we thank God for every Christian privilege that is ours. But millions in our country are veritably pagan! So are millions in the other Gentile nations which are considered Christian. The spirit of recent years, as never before in the Christian era, has been like that of Nebuchadnezzar when he said, **“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?”**

Gentile madness has not yet been fully manifested.

The height of insanity will be reached after the true church has been taken out from among the peoples of the earth, when the Antichrist, God's arch-enemy, has been given a place of authority and is made the object of worship. In that day the earth will see the complete fulfillment of the prophecy of the second Psalm, which was partially fulfilled when Herod and Pilate, Jews and Gentiles **“were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ”** (Acts 4:25-27; cf. Psalm 2:1, 2).

What madness! No wonder the Spirit of God, foreseeing these things, added in Psalm 2:4:5:

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

While the height of insanity among the Gentile nations will not be reached until after the church has been translated, forever to be with the Lord, even now we see on every hand signs of this rapidly approaching blasphemy.

A few years ago Professor Leuba, of Bryn Mawr College, sent a questionnaire to 5,000 representative scientists of our country, selected from the following groups: physicists, sociologists, economists, bacteriologists, and ethnologists. He asked them for a statement concerning their faith in God, the Bible, and the immortality of the soul. He received replies indicating that 3,000 had no faith in a personal God, in the infallibility of the Bible, or in immortal life. And literally millions of our youths are being trained by just such **“scientists falsely so called”** (I Timothy 6:20).

This madness, this insanity, is not confined to the intellectual leaders of our country; it has made great inroads into our spiritual life, until today hundreds and thousands of our young ministers are being taught a heathen philosophy.

In a book entitled *The Beliefs of 700 Ministers*, compiled from as many replies to questionnaires sent to 1,500 Protestant ministers, “chosen at random from twenty denominations,” Dr. George Herbert Betts, a professor of Northwestern University, revealed the following startling facts:

Of the ministerial students from this group, 36 per cent were not sure of the omnipotence of God; 91 per cent were not sure of a personal devil; 75 per cent did not believe in the virgin birth of Christ; 71 per cent were not sure of the vicarious atonement of the Lord Jesus on the cross; 58 per cent did not believe in His bodily resurrection from the dead; and 82 per cent did not accept the New Testament as the complete and final revelation of God to man.

My friend, if such unbelieving men as these fill our pulpits— and they do; by the scores—what can you expect from the laymen who sit under their teaching? No wonder our churches are empty, while places of amusement are crowded on the Lord's Day. God will surely judge such apostasy. Because He is holy and righteous, He must! When the true church is translated, the false religious system, which for a time will be linked with the last, bestial form of Gentile world power, will in turn be devoured by that same political world empire. Thus God will permit one evil thing to destroy another. We shall have more to say of this when we come to the study of the next chapter of Daniel.

I tell you, the Gentile world, filled with pride, is a spectacle of veritable madness—that part of it which is opposed to God. Any right-thinking man or woman will agree that a person like Hitler was insane in his hatred of Christ and of believers in Jesus. Think of the suffering of the Jews and the Christians who fell a prey to his fiendish tortures and murders and living deaths!

Think of the cruelty and the defiance against God and His Word that were encouraged by Josef Stalin and by his followers since his death! Do you suppose for a minute that our just God, our holy God, can tolerate very much longer such rebellion and cruelty and blasphemy of Gentile leaders?

If the Lord tarries, and if atheism and indifference increase much more, our country, as well as the other nations, will surely see the judgment of a righteous God. Gentile world dominion, like Nebuchadnezzar's tree in the dream God gave to him, is spreading out its branches. But the day will come when God will cut down the tree. That will be the day when the Smiting Stone, even the Lord Jesus, will fall upon the “**ten toes**,” as it were, of the image of the second chapter of Daniel.

But there is also a bright side of the picture; for Nebuchadnezzar's restoration foreshadows the Gentile nations which will be saved, and will enter into the millennial reign of Christ. Let us consider that wonderful portion of our lesson just here.

4. The Saved Gentile Nations in the Reign of Christ.

You will remember that Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that the stump of the tree which had been cut down was a picture of his restoration, following his seven years of madness.

It is also typical of the Gentile nations which will listen to the preaching of the 144,000 Jews during the reign of the Antichrist and will receive these missionaries from the house of Israel during the terrible persecution that will come upon them. Therefore, they will be saved to enter into Christ's glorious kingdom on earth.

Read carefully Matthew 25:31-46, noting that this is the judgment of “**all nations**” (v. 32)—not individuals; that some are compared to “**sheep**”; others to “**goats**”; that to the “**sheep nations**” the Lord will say in that day when He returns in glory, “**Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.**”

Christ's “**brethren,**” according to the flesh, are Jews.

This is clearly a picture of the day of reward and the day of awful judgment which will come upon the “**sheep nations**” and the “**goat nations**” respectively for their treatment of Israel in that coming “**time of Jacob’s trouble.**”

Would you like to read about the 144,000 Jews who will preach “**the gospel of the kingdom**” during the reign of the Antichrist?

Then turn to the seventh chapter of Revelation, where we learn that there will be 12,000 of these faithful missionaries from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Read how in that day many Gentiles, as well as Jews, will be saved by their testimony. How? By the blood of the Lord Jesus, as in every age, of course! For they will wash “**their robes. . . white in the blood of the Lamb**” (v. 14).

However, their message will be the gospel of the coming King, even as John the Baptist and the twelve disciples and the Lord Himself preached “**the gospel of the kingdom**” before He was rejected by Israel nearly two thousand years ago. (See Matthew 24:14).

Their message will be, “**Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (Matthew 3:2).

In this church age our message is the gospel of grace. Yet do not forget that in every age men are saved by faith in the Christ of the cross, and by Him alone.

The multitudes who are saved in that awful day, when “**the man of sin**” rules, will offer their praise to “**the God of heaven,**” even as did Nebuchadnezzar many centuries ago. They will “**praise and extol and honour the King of heaven!**”

My friend, are you rushing on with the God-defying world today? If you are, let me warn you in the words of the Psalmist (49:6, 7, 10, 11):

They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him . . . For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.

May God make us all winners of souls, snatching them as brands from the burning, pointing them to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose presence we shall dwell forever!

He **“hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven”** for us (I Peter 1:3, 4).

He is the God of Daniel and of all those who love Him; for He is **“the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”** (Hebrews 13:8).

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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