

# Jonah 3:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

## Analysis

**And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.** Jonah's message is shockingly brief—only five words in Hebrew: *od arba'im yom veNineveh nehpakhet* (עוד ארבעים יום וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת). No explanation, no call to repentance, no offer of mercy—just stark announcement of imminent destruction.

"Forty days" (*arba'im yom*) establishes a divine timeline. The number forty frequently appears in Scripture as a period of testing, judgment, or probation: the flood rains (Genesis 7:12), Moses on Sinai (Exodus 24:18), Israel's wilderness wandering (Numbers 14:33-34), Jesus's temptation (Matthew 4:2). Here it represents a grace period—time to respond before judgment falls.

"Nineveh shall be overthrown" uses *haphak* (הִפָּךְ), the same verb describing Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction (Genesis 19:25, 29). This verb means to turn over, overturn, or destroy completely—suggesting catastrophic divine judgment like fire from heaven. Jonah likely expected—and wanted—literal destruction matching Sodom's fate.

The message's brevity may reflect Jonah's minimal compliance. He delivers God's word but without pastoral concern or pleading. No "repent," no "turn from your evil ways," no explanation of who this Hebrew God is. Yet remarkably, Nineveh responds with immediate, citywide repentance (3:5). God's word carries inherent

power regardless of the messenger's attitude (Isaiah 55:11, Hebrews 4:12). Even reluctant, minimalist preaching can accomplish God's purposes when His Spirit works.

## Historical Context

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The forty-day warning parallels other prophetic announcements giving opportunity for repentance before judgment. Jeremiah 18:7-8 articulates this principle: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." God's threats aren't fatalistic decrees but conditional warnings intended to produce repentance. Nineveh's response proves that even hardened sinners can turn when confronted with God's word and imminent judgment. Jesus cited Nineveh's repentance as condemning His generation's hardness (Matthew 12:41, Luke 11:32).

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does Nineveh's response to minimal, reluctant preaching demonstrate the power of God's word itself?
2. What does the forty-day grace period teach about God's patience and desire for repentance over judgment?
3. How should Jonah's example warn against delivering God's truth without compassion for the lost?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיִּתְּחַל	יֹנָה	לָבֹא	בְּעִיר	מִהַלֵּךְ	אֶחָד יוֹם	אֵת	וַיִּקְרָא
began	And Jonah	to enter	into the city	journey	day's	a	and he cried
H2490	H3124	H935	H5892	H4109	H3117	H259	H7121
וַיֹּאמֶר	עַד	אַרְבָּעִים	יּוֹם	וְנִינִי	הָ	נִהְפָּכֶת:	
and said	H5750	Yet forty	day's	and Nineveh		shall be overthrown	
H559		H705	H3117	H5210		H2015	

## Additional Cross-References

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**Deuteronomy 18:22** (Parallel theme): When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

**Jonah 3:10** (Parallel theme): And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

**2 Kings 20:6** (Parallel theme): And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

**2 Kings 20:1** (Parallel theme): In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.