



## Bible Books Chapter by Chapter Series

# JONAH

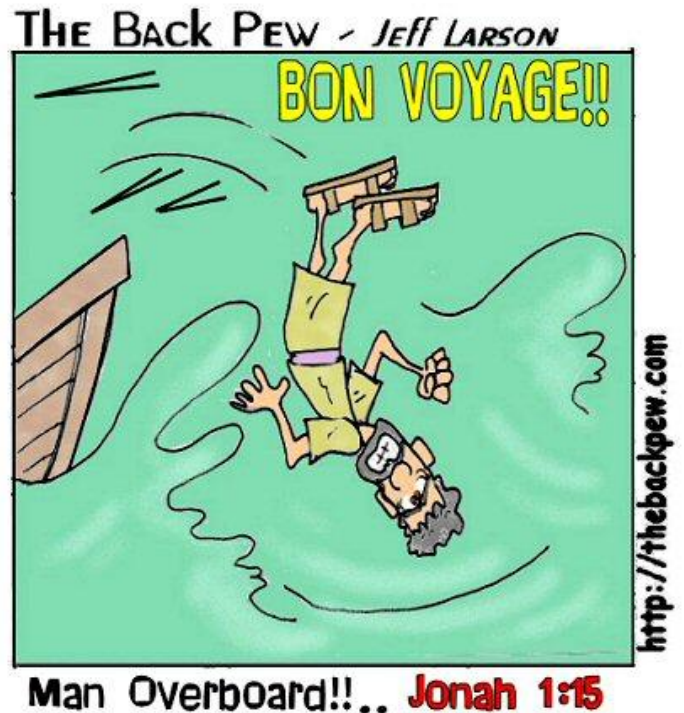
Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart."

Course Text: Jonah

Outline:

| <u>Lesson</u> | <u>Topic</u>                               |
|---------------|--|
| 1             | Chapter 1 – The Journey Begins             |
| 2             | Chapter 2 – In the Belly of the Great Fish |
| 3             | Chapter 3 – Nineveh Repents                |
| 4             | Chapter 4 – The Prophet Complains          |

This little book of Jonah is mostly in narrative form and tells the well known Sunday school story of Jonah and the "whale." (The Bible uses the words "huge fish," rather than whale, so we are not really sure what kind of creature it was, but it could have been a whale. Today's biologists distinguish between fish and whales, but they had no such classification system in those days.)



**Suggested methodology for each lesson:**

1. Fellowship (Save most of this for the end of class.)
2. Take prayer requests (Try to keep it from becoming a competition to see who has the most or the worst.)
3. Pray (The idea here is to leave our troubles with God so we can give His word our attention with a clear mind.)
4. Read the lesson's chapter aloud from the Bible. (... or a few verses at a time as you answer the questions.)
5. Answer and *briefly* discuss the "fill in the blank" questions. (Let those who prefer to listen, listen. My answers on the next page are just one opinion; you may have a better answer.)
6. On the final "Think & Pray" question everyone should take a few minutes to pray over it and jot down their own thoughts before the discussion. **This will give the Holy Spirit a time to speak.**
7. Discuss your "Think & Pray" answers. (Never force anyone to share theirs. As with the other questions, my answer is just one more opinion; you may have a better answer.)
8. Close in prayer (It is best to call on others to pray, but try to get their permission ahead of time.)
9. Fellowship (Leave this as open ended as possible for the time and place you meet.)

Depending on the number of people, each lesson is expected to take about one hour. Steps 4 thru 7 are about half of that. If you take longer, let each lesson take more than one meeting, or consider breaking into two groups. If you take less time, extra questions are provided for discussion called "For Further Thought"

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## Lesson 1 – The Journey Begins - Jonah Chapter 1

Please read Jonah chapter 1 and answer these questions:

[1A] What was Jonah's father's name? \_\_\_\_\_

[1B] What two things do we learn about Nineveh in this chapter?

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

[1C] To whom did the sailors pray when they saw their danger? \_\_\_\_\_

[1D] Compare this chapter with Matthew 8:23-27. What were Jonah and Jesus both doing during the storm? \_\_\_\_\_

[1E] After Jonah told them to throw him into the sea, what did the sailors do?

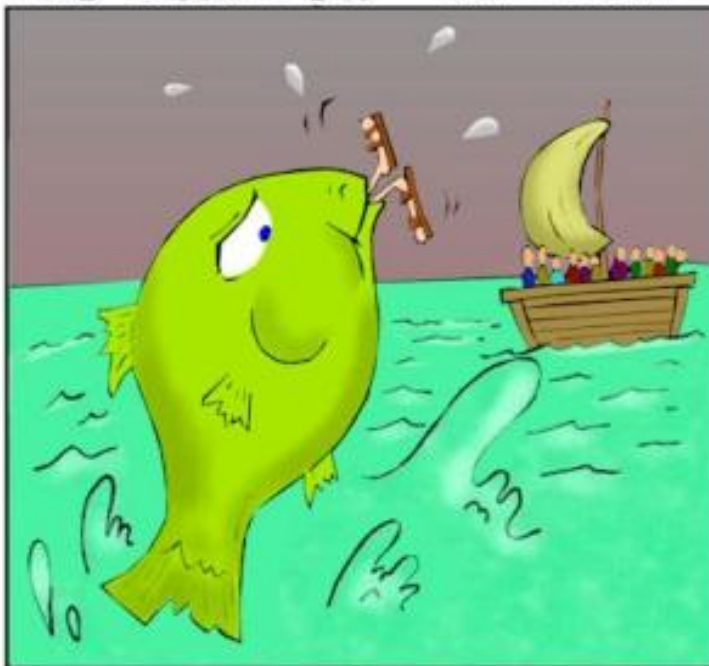
[1F] To whom did the sailors pray when they saw they were out of danger? \_\_\_\_\_

[1G] In Jonah 1:5-10 there is an interesting contrast. The sailors knew Jonah was fleeing from his god, but it did not occur to them to worry about it until they found out Who Jonah's God was. What do you think that says about what the sailors really believed? Why?

Think & Pray \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### The Back Pew - Jeff Larson



Fish Bait.. **Jonah 1:17**

#### A little about the Hebrew words:

*Jonah* means "dove" Just as in English it suggests endearment or gentleness.

*Amittai* means "my truth"

*Joppa* was established as the main port of Israel on the Mediterranean during the reign of Solomon. It means "beautiful"

*Tarshish* literally means "yellow jasper." It is thought to be a city in Spain, a Phoenician colony at the time, where semi-precious stones were quarried, but that is just an educated guess. However, even if the guess is wrong, the lesson is the same. You did not get on a ship at Joppa to go to Nineveh, not before Columbus anyway.

## Lesson 1 – The Journey Begins - Jonah Chapter 1

[1A] All we know about Jonah's father is his name, Amittai. (Jonah 1:1) According to 2Kg 14:25 Jonah was from Gath-hepher which was in the area designated for the tribe of Zebulun. (Joshua 19:10-16.) He might have been of the tribe of Zebulun, but it is also likely that he was a Levite. Jonah's home town has been identified with the modern el-Meshed, a village on the top of a rocky hill. This town is about 5 miles from Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The local people living there now still point to a particular tomb as the burial place of Jonah. It is possible after 2,700 years that they still know exactly where he was buried, but since there is no inscription; it seems more likely that they just picked one out for the tourists. What is amazing is that the legend of it being Jonah's home, still continues in that same town after so long, even though the town has a different name.

[1B] What two things do we learn about Nineveh in this chapter?

It was a great city and had too much wickedness. Jn 1:2

It was possible to take a ship towards Nineveh, but not from Joppa. Joppa was on the Mediterranean. To take a ship to Nineveh would have required a journey far to the south. If Jonah had been going to Nineveh, where God told him to go, Jonah would probably have traveled overland. Going south, taking a ship around to Mesopotamia, and then going up river to Nineveh, would be kind of like driving from New York to Miami to catch a boat to Chicago via the Mississippi River. Many scholars think Tarshish was a town in what we now call Spain. It was about as far as you could go in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

[1C] To whom did the sailors pray when they realized their danger? Each to his own god Jn 1:5

[1D] Compare this chapter with Matthew 8:23-27. What were Jonah and Jesus both doing during the storm? Sleeping Jn 1:5-6

[1E] After Jonah told them to throw him into the sea, what did the sailors do?

They tried to row to shore before finally giving in and throwing him overboard Jn 1:13

[1F] To whom did the sailors pray when they realized they were out of danger? The Lord Jn 1:16

[1G] I think like most "unbelievers" today, the sailors really knew the truth. God is real. It is obvious from His creation. The mighty miracles of God; done on behalf of His people, starting with the total humiliation of the world power, Egypt, at the Exodus; were not hidden. They were well known. The sailor's probably knew about all that. They traveled about and heard all kinds of stuff.

### **For further thought:**

(1h) If you were one of the people mentioned in Chapter 1,( Jonah, sailors, or people of Nineveh,) which one are you most like? "None of them," might be your answer, but whatever your answer, why do you say so?

(1i) Jonah is one of those Bible characters I would like to ask, "What were you thinking? You know Who God is! What did you think you were going to accomplish by getting on that boat?" How do you think Jonah would have answered my question?

(1j) Read Nahum 3:1-5. Could this explain why Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh?

## Lesson 2 – In the Belly of the Great Fish - Jonah Chapter 2

This account of the prayer of Jonah is in the form of Hebrew poetry. You should expect to find parallelism and figures of speech.

Please read Jonah chapter 2 and answer these questions:

[2A] Where was Jonah while he was praying? \_\_\_\_\_

[2B] What did Jonah ask God for? \_\_\_\_\_

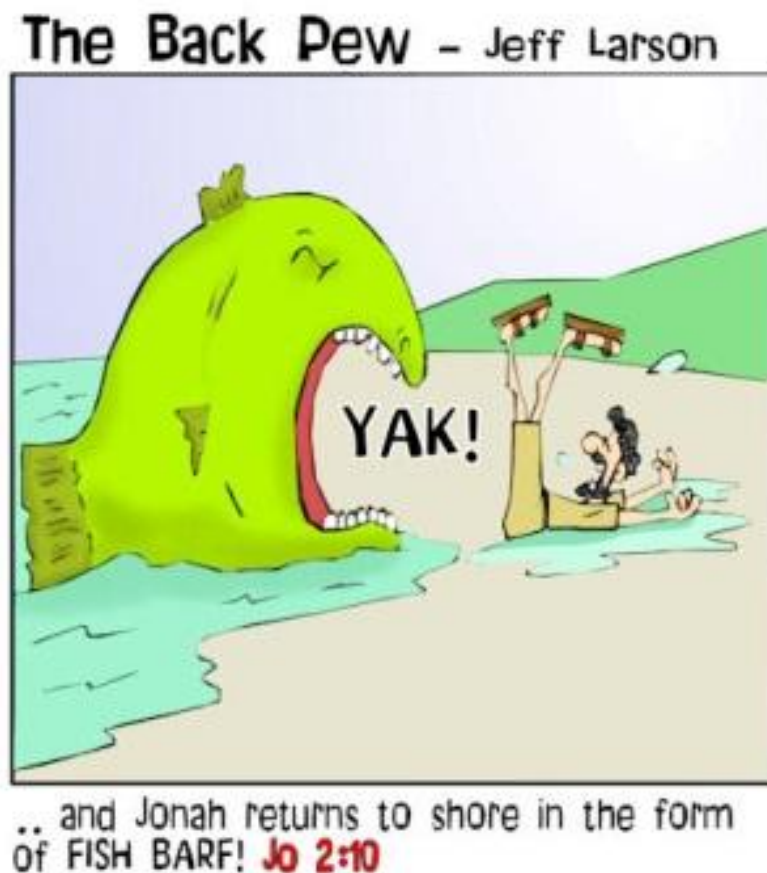
[2C] How does Jonah try to convince God to answer?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[2D] What did Jonah say was wrapped around his head? \_\_\_\_\_

[2E] What results, if any, are reported to the prayer?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[2F] In Jonah 2:4 and 2:9 Jonah makes promises. Do you think these kinds of prayers work? Why?

*Think & Pray* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Lesson 2 – In the Belly of the Great Fish - Jonah Chapter 2

[2A] Where was Jonah while he was praying? Inside the fish Jn 2:1

[2B] What did Jonah ask God for? No specific request is being made, but the context strongly suggests Jonah wants out of that fish!

[2C] How does Jonah try to convince God to answer? In his repentance, Jonah makes two promises:

(Jon2:4) yet I will look once more toward Your holy temple In other words he would begin to pray and worship again. Sort of like, "Let me out of here, Lord, and I'll start going to church."

(Jon2:9) I will sacrifice to You with a voice of thanksgiving. I will fulfill what I have vowed. Sort of like, "Let me out of here, Lord, and I'll give money to the church." In the jail ministry I often hear these kinds of bargains being offered to God by the prisoners. Jonah goes a little further and thanks God and praises Him as if the prayer were already answered. It takes a lot of faith to pray that way, if you really mean it.

[2D] What did Jonah say was wrapped around his head? Seaweed Jn 2:5

[2E] What results, if any, are reported to the prayer?

The result of the prayer is that the fish spits the prophet out. Jn 2:10

[2F] In Jonah 2:4 and 2:9 Jonah makes promises to God. Do you think these kinds of prayers work? Why?

We have nothing to bargain with. He needs nothing from us. He created and owns the whole universe. He owns us two or three times over. One, He created us. Two, He redeemed us on the cross. And, three, if we are saved, we gave ourselves to Him. He would like to have our love, but love offered as a bargaining chip is not really love. There is no way to manipulate God. We are totally at His mercy. Thankfully, He has lots of mercy and grace. God is love.

### For further thought:

(2g) I think God cared nothing for Jonah's promises. I think Jonah was saved because God still had something for him to do. Do you agree? Why or why not?

(2h) Jonah uses an interesting method of praying to God. He does not ask God for anything directly, although it is clear what he wants. Why do you think Jonah did this?

(2i) Some people think these are the exact words used by Jonah at the time, but other people think that Jonah simply groaned (Jon2:1) while verses 2 to 9 are the words prayed by the Holy Spirit on his behalf. Speaking carefully worded Hebrew poetry while being slowly digested in a dark and terrible place seems farfetched to them. Read Romans 8:26 and then re-read Jonah chapter 2. What do you think about this issue and why?

(2j) We know this chapter is Hebrew poetry because of the parallelism. For instance in verse 2, "I called to the Lord in my distress" is parallel to "I cried out for help in the belly of Sheol." Can you pick out more parallelism in this chapter?

(2k) How can we apply the lessons learned in this chapter to our own prayer life?

### Lesson 3 – Nineveh Repents - Jonah Chapter 3

Even after all this, Jonah still does not go to Nineveh as he was told in the first place. We are not told how much time passed between chapters 2 and 3, but even if it was no time at all, Jonah still had to be told a second time to go to Nineveh.

Please read Jonah chapter 3 and answer these questions:

[3A] How big was Nineveh? \_\_\_\_\_

[3B] What did Jonah preach? \_\_\_\_\_

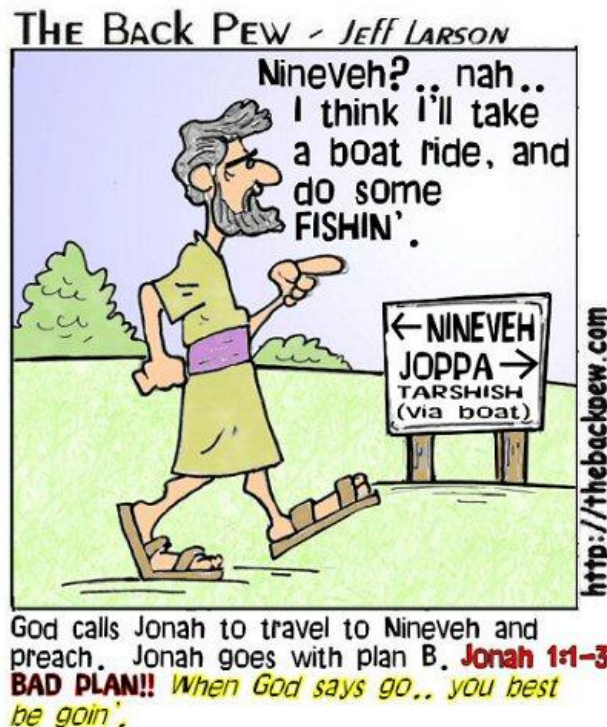
[3C] What did the people of Nineveh do when they heard this?  
\_\_\_\_\_

[3D] How many of the people of Nineveh participated in this response to Jonah's preaching?  
\_\_\_\_\_

[3E] What made God change His mind about destroying Nineveh?  
\_\_\_\_\_

[3F] Doesn't the last sentence of Jonah 3:10, "And He (God) did not do it," mean that Jonah was a false prophet? (Hint: Deuteronomy 13:1-5)

Think & Pray \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



### Lesson 3 – Nineveh Repents - Jonah Chapter 3

[3A] How big was Nineveh? An extremely large city, a three-day walk. Jn 3:3 Scholars dispute the size of the city, and what was meant by the phrase "three days' walk." Does it mean three days to walk straight through, to walk around it, or to visit each part of it? Looking at the archeological evidence does not help much, because it depends on whether you are talking about the city, or the city and its suburbs, or the city and its county (so to speak). Either way Jonah was preaching to tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands of people.

[3B] What did Jonah preach? "In 40 days Nineveh will be demolished!"Jn 3:4  
Not exactly a great sermon with an opening joke, three main points, and several appealing illustrations, is it?

[3C] What did the people of Nineveh do when they heard this? Called a fast and put on sackcloth  
Jn 3:5 This means that they quit eating, and put on uncomfortable clothes, in order to remind themselves to pray all the time.

[3D] How many of the people of Nineveh participated in this response to Jonah's preaching?  
All of them Jn 3:5-8  
Jonah was the most successful prophet in the Old Testament, if you measure success in the number of people who responded to his call for repentance. He was a prophet at about the same time, or a little before Amos, during the last decades before Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was carried into captivity. All of the prophecies of Jonah are not recorded, although the fulfillment of one of them is in 2nd Kings 14:23-25.

[3E] What made God change His mind about destroying Nineveh?  
God saw that they had turned from their evil ways Jn 3:10. It was not the fasting and praying, but their repentance from doing wicked things, which caught His eye.

[3F] Doesn't the last sentence of Jn 3:10, "And He did not do it," mean that Jonah was a false prophet? Not at all. We see in the next chapter that Jonah felt like it did, but it is not true. The purpose of prophesy is not to impress people with what a good fortune teller someone is. The purpose of prophesy is to bring about repentance. It did that. A true prophet accurately speaks God's word. A false prophet does not. See Deut 13:1-5.

#### For further thought:

(3g) Read Matthew 12:38-42 and/or Luke 11:29-32. What does this tell us about Jonah, Solomon and Jesus?

(3h) The king of Nineveh or one of his scribes is the author of Jn 3:7-9. Does this have any implications with regard to the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures? Heb 4:12

(3i) The response of Nineveh was from the people first (Jon3:5) and then later the king joined in. (Jon3:6-9) What does this say about his leadership?

(3j) Is putting on sackcloth, sitting in ashes, and fasting things we should do today? Why?



## Lesson 4 – The Prophet Complains - Jonah Chapter 4

Apparently Jonah's pride was hurt after his prophecy regarding the destruction of Nineveh did not come true. God uses a plant to teach Jonah an object lesson.

Please read chapter 4 and answer these questions:

[4A] After God revealed to Jonah that He had changed His mind, did Jonah give up hope the city would be destroyed? \_\_\_\_\_

[4B] How did Jonah feel about the plant that grew up. \_\_\_\_\_

[4C] What killed the plant? \_\_\_\_\_

[4D] What two groups did God name as some of the justification for His compassion on Nineveh?

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

[4E] In Jonah 4:11 God asks Jonah the question we just read in 4D above. Jonah's answer is not shown. How do you think Jonah answered the question, and why do you think that? What is the "right" answer to God's question and why?

*Think & Pray* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

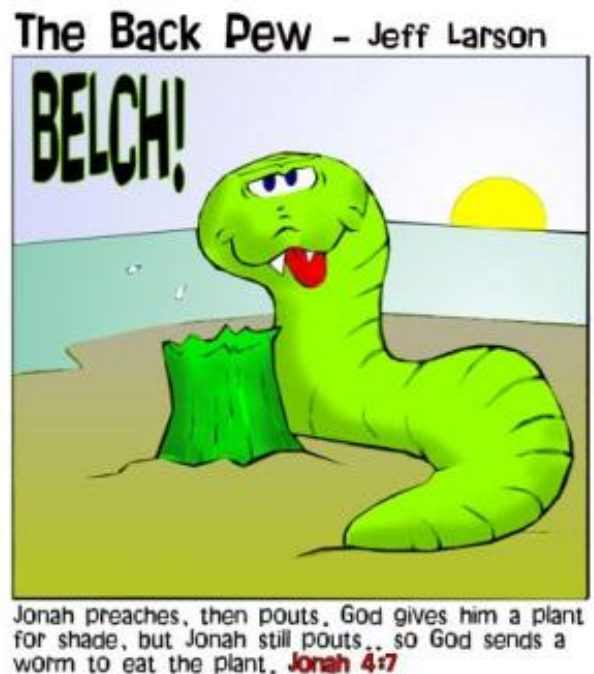
### Jonah Conclusion:

[C1] Which verse would you select to memorize from Jonah? Why?

[C2] How can the lessons of Jonah be applied to our own life?

[C3] If someone asked you what Jonah was about what would you say?

If you have any questions, now might be a good time to discuss them with your classmates.



## Lesson 4 – The Prophet Complains - Jonah Chapter 4

[4A] After God revealed to Jonah that He had changed His mind, did Jonah give up hope the city would be destroyed? Apparently not. Why watch if nothing is expected to happen? Jn 4:5 Perhaps this was a man who was used to getting his own way with God?

[4B] How did Jonah feel about the plant that grew up. Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant Jn 4:6

[4C] What killed the plant? A worm. Jn 4:7

[4D] What two groups did God name as some of the justification for His compassion on Nineveh? “Should I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals?” Jn 4:11

[4E] In Jonah 4:11 God asks Jonah the question we just read in 4D above. Jonah's answer is not shown. How do you think Jonah answered the question, and why do you think that? What is the "right" answer and why?

Without the Bible saying, we are just speculating, but he might have spluttered some more objections, or he might have finally learned his lesson. Either way, clearly God will have compassion. It is His nature and He will not deny it.

### For further thought:

(4f) I think it is interesting that it is not only the presence of young children, the elderly with dementia, and the mentally ill (ie. people who do not know their left from their right) that excites God's compassion. The existence of animals there also compels His compassion.

- What does that tell us about God?
- What does that tell us about animals place in creation?
- Does that mean our pets will meet us in heaven? Why?

### Jonah Conclusion:

[C1] I like Jonah 2:2 "I called to the Lord in my distress, and He answered me. I cried out for help in the belly of Sheol; You heard my voice." I find it comforting that God can hear us anywhere.

[C2] For me I would say, we should go where God says for us to go. We should never run from God. When we are admonished, we should readily repent and ask for forgiveness. We should often put compassion before justice. When we find ourselves swallowed up in the belly of the huge fish of our circumstances, we should remember that God still hears and answers prayer.

[C3] Jonah was the most successful prophet in the Old Testament, if you measure success in the number of people who responded to his call for repentance. However, the hero of this book is God, not Jonah. His power, kindness and compassion are made evident. Two generations later, in 612 BC, Nineveh reverts to its evil ways and is destroyed just as Jonah prophesied, but with a little delay in timing. After all Jonah's prophecy could also be translated “*After 40 days Nineveh will be demolished.*” How long after is not specified.