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JONAH PART 18
Ch. 3:4

In Jonah 3:4 it says, *“and Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried (out), and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.’”*.

Jonah’s preaching instilled great fear throughout Nineveh, the capitol of the great Assyrian Empire. The empire was somewhat new, and the thought of being overthrown was terrifying. Just how big was this empire?

It enveloped all of Babylonia (present day Iraq), Elam (present day Iran), S.E. portion of present-day Turkey, all of Palestine (Israel, Syria, Phoenicia, present-day Lebanon, and Jordan) and Egypt. It was perhaps the largest ancient empire in history prior to Alexander the Great of Greece. This is the empire against which Jonah was preaching.

He preached God’s message for forty days before exiting the city. Was there significance to the specific number of days? Yes.

Forty has always been the biblical number for a period of preparation preceding the next “season” or “era” a person, nation, or people group is about to enter. Let’s look at some examples.

Israel was in Egypt 430 years. The first 30 were as welcome guests of Joseph. The next 400 years were in bondage. Ten is the number of completion. Ten periods of 40 years completed their new era as a free nation as they left Egypt. Their growth was completed, increasing from the original 70 people to two million.

Their leader, Moses, had three periods of forty years for his preparation. His first forty was in Pharaoh’s courts being educated in the Egyptian culture, their language, form of writing, and so forth – knowledge he would later need. His second forty (to age 80) was in the wilderness tending Jethro’s flocks. Here he learned vital survival skills he would need for the next phase of his life. He then led Israel forty years in the wilderness (up to age 120).

Israel’s forty years in the wilderness prepared them to enter the promised land. Oh, and Moses, upon taking Israel out of Egypt, spent forty days with God on the mountain as God gave him the commandments and religious system by which Israel was to live, thus taking them into their new way of life.

After his baptism by John, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness in prayer and fasting as a preparation period for His ministry.

It rained on Noah's ark forty days as the world was prepared to become all new. Jacob was forty when he took Rebekah to wife, as was Esau when he married Judith. Gideon judged Israel forty years. Israel ate manna in the wilderness forty years.

Nineveh's forty days was to prepare them for their next period. Would it be as the subjects of some other world power that would rise? That was the gist of Jonah's preaching. Tomorrow we will look at their response.