

Was Jonah a False Prophet?

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Question: Deuteronomy 18:22 says if what a prophet says doesn't come to pass, he's a false prophet. How could Jonah be a true prophet of God since his prophecy did not come to pass?

Answer: Jonah 3:1-4 says:

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

First we see that God said, "Proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you" (v.2). We don't know the exact words God told Jonah, but it's possible that He may have told him they needed to repent of their ways. Verse 4 records that Jonah said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." In Hebrew, that's only five words: "**Forty--days--more--Nineveh--destroyed.**"

God gave Nineveh 40 days to repent—because He wanted them to repent. Otherwise, He would have wiped them out on day one. God loved the Assyrians even though they worshipped false gods. Amazingly, the people repented, including the king:

Jonah 3:5-6 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God, and called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes.

When God saw them change their hearts and their evil ways, He stopped the judgment.

Jonah 3:10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

The King James Version says "God repented" but it is best translated "God relented." It's not like God changed His mind. Someone said, "When man repents, he changes his will. When God repents, He wills a change."

Jonah said judgment was coming in 40 days, but it didn't happen. Does that make Jonah a false prophet? Deuteronomy 18:22 says if what a prophet says doesn't come to pass, he's a false prophet. However, Jonah's declaration was a conditional prophecy. The condition was, if they would repent, God would withhold judgment on them.

Jeremiah 18:7-8 (The Lord said) "At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it."

God gave the warning of judgment but it was conditional. If the people would repent and change their ways, the Lord would call off the judgment. Notice the order of what happened. The **people repented**, and **God relented**. Jesus talked about this in Matthew 12:41, "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah."

God gave the Ninevites another chance, and He will also give you another chance. But they first repented and became willing to do God's will. And if you want another chance, you must do the same.

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