

John's 153 Fish

John 21:3-14

“So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a 153 of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.”

The detail of 153 fish seems too specific to be insignificant. Did John have a special meaning by the reference of a 153 fish?

Math : Beauty of 153

153 = 3 x 51 (symmetry)
 $1^3 + 5^3 + 3^3 = 153$
 $12^2 + 3^2 = 153$
 $(10 + 7) \times 3^2 = 153$

Jerome cites Oppian's Halieutica and seemed to think that the 153 types of fish represented all the nations from which the Gospel would save. However, Wikipedia states: “... this could not have been the intended meaning of the Gospel writer (John) because Oppian composed Halieutica after the Gospel text was written, and at any rate never gave a list of fish species that clearly adds up to 153.”

Therefore, it seems impossible for Jerome's idea to have been John's.

Context Points to the Answer :

Archimedes : Measurement of a Circle : Proposition 3

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Then $OA : AC [= \sqrt{3} : 1] > 265 : 153$ (1),
 and $OC : CA [= 2 : 1] = 306 : 153$ (2).

First, draw OD bisecting the angle AOC and meeting AC in D .

Now $CO : OA = CD : DA$, [Eucl. VI. 3]
 so that $[CO + OA : OA = CA : DA, \text{ or }]$
 $CO + OA : CA = OA : AD$.

Therefore [by (1) and (2)]
 $OA : AD > 571 : 153$ (3).

Hence $OD^2 : AD^2 [= (OA^2 + AD^2) : AD^2]$
 $> (571^2 + 153^2) : 153^2$
 $> 349450 : 23409$,

so that $OD : DA > 591\frac{1}{2} : 153$ (4).

Secondly, let OE bisect the angle AOD , meeting AD in E .
 [Then $DO : OA = DE : EA$,
 so that $DO + OA : DA = OA : AE$]
 Therefore $OA : AE [> (591\frac{1}{2} + 571) : 153, \text{ by (3) and (4)]$

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[It follows that
 $OE^2 : EA^2 > \{(1162\frac{1}{2})^2 + 153^2\} : 153^2$
 $> (1350534\frac{3}{4} + 23409) : 23409$
 $> 1373943\frac{3}{4} : 23409$.]

Thus $OE : EA > 1172\frac{1}{2} : 153$ (6).

Thirdly, let OF bisect the angle AOE and meet AE in F .
 We thus obtain the result [corresponding to (3) and (5) above] that
 $OA : AF [> (1162\frac{1}{2} + 1172\frac{1}{2}) : 153]$
 $> 2334\frac{1}{2} : 153$ (7).

[Therefore $OF^2 : FA^2 > \{(2334\frac{1}{2})^2 + 153^2\} : 153^2$
 $> 5472132\frac{1}{4} : 23409$.]

Thus $OF : FA > 2339\frac{1}{2} : 153$ (8).

Fourthly, let OG bisect the angle AOF , meeting AF in G .
 We have then
 $OA : AG [> (2334\frac{1}{2} + 2339\frac{1}{2}) : 153, \text{ by means of (7) and (8)]$
 $> 4673\frac{1}{2} : 153$.

Now the angle AOC , which is one-third of a right angle, has been bisected four times, and it follows that
 $\angle AOG = \frac{1}{18}$ (a right angle).

Make the angle AOH on the other side of OA equal to the angle AOG , and let GA produced meet OH in H .
 Then $\angle GOH = \frac{1}{9}$ (a right angle).
 Thus GH is one side of a regular polygon of 96 sides circumscribed to the given circle.

And, since $OA : AG > 4673\frac{1}{2} : 153$,
 while $AB = 2OA, GH = 2AG$,
 it follows that
 $AB : (\text{perimeter of polygon of 96 sides}) [> 4673\frac{1}{2} : 153 \times 96]$

Context ↑

St. Augustine cites the formula

$1 + 2 + 3 \dots + 17 = 153$

17 represents the combination of divine grace (the 7 gifts of the Spirit) and the Law (the 10 Commandments.) 153, according to St. Augustine, represent all those who will be saved.

An evangelist seeks to convey a message. Therefore, his meaning had to be apparent to those whom he was writing. It seems very difficult if not impossible to defend the idea that John would have known that his readers would have seen these mathematical formulas as part of his message. **Therefore, the Church Fathers' Answers Could Not Be John's**

Jesus calls the Apostles “children.” What are children? Father Bob Stine, if memory serves me correctly, told me about 40 years ago that the key to understanding this verse, and what children are, is to look from a Christian Biblical context. Children are those who lack the wisdom that comes with age. Therefore, the fish, the Divine gift, that filled their empty net represents wisdom.

We must look at this passage not from today's standards but from John's. Understanding the Greek culture opens the key to understanding this Biblical passage.

A few hundred years before Christ, the Greek Pythagoreans made a ground breaking discovery and proved what is now called the Pythagorean Theorem.

“One of the most important characteristics of the Pythagorean order was that it maintained that the **pursuit of philosophical and mathematical studies was a moral basis for the conduct of life.** Indeed, the words *philosophy* (love of **wisdom**) and *mathematics* (that which is learned) are said to have been coined by Pythagoras.” : Wikip.

Above all else the Greeks esteemed Mathematics, Wisdom and Philosophy. Their greatest mathematician was Archimedes. In his *Measurement of a Circle* he calculates the value of π , Pi. It was his most influential work. His calculations included the ratio of 265:153 which represents the most accurate value of $\sqrt{3}$ that can be expressed by using small whole numbers. The unusual number of 153 figured most prominently in that work.

The Greeks would have recognized that John was alluding to all wisdom, but to especially that of the Greeks as represented by Archimedes by using that number 153.

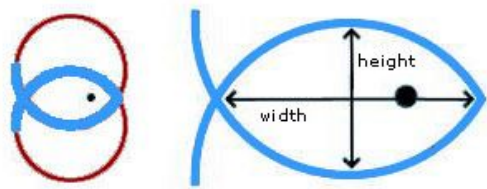
The Church Fathers were separated from John the Evangelist by time and space and lived in a culture different from John's. It had lost familiarity with Archimedes' actual text. Without that context they could not see to what John was alluding.

The Fish

Pythagoreans → Euclid → Archimedes

Measure of the Fish

IXΘΥΣ



$$\frac{w}{h} = \sqrt{3} \cong \frac{265}{153}$$

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John goes even a step further. He makes **8 references to fish** and **8 references to the measure of the fish** in these 11 verses.

The Greeks would notice the connection to Euclid's work *Elements*, where he constructs two circles whose intersection is in the shape of a fish. By using the Pythagorean Theorem the measure of this "fish," the width to the height ratio, can be calculated to be the square root of 3, or approximately 265/153.

John lived and wrote his Greek Gospel in the Greek city of Ephesus. He knew they falsely believed the Gospel of Jesus was foolishness and in contradiction to their wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. So, John included the detail of 153 fish in John 21:11. Further, the use of the word fish, its repetition, its measurement, and the number 3 would be seen as a secondary allusion to all Greek wisdom. The Greeks would have understood that John was claiming that Jesus, who is God, is the source of all the fish, and by extension He is the source of all wisdom. The net which contains all the fish, all the wisdom, both Greek and Christian, does not tear because there is no inconsistency or contradiction between the two.

Fr. Bob's answer is like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle that makes all the other pieces fit together. It answers all the questions without leaving any loose ends, unlike all the other proposed answers that really do not fit and could not be John's primary message.

John's message that true natural wisdom is consistent with Jesus' revelation is very relevant today. Today's culture proposes a "new wisdom" and new concepts that redefine the words love, freedom, happiness, as well as the purpose of life and self-worth. And these new ideas are incompatible with Jesus' wisdom. The same net cannot hold both without tearing.

Read more, and ...

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Luke 5:1-11

What was John's Meaning in 21:11 ?

