

The Man Caught by a Fish

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Everybody has heard the story of Jonah being swallowed by a big fish but nobody really thinks much about it. Surviving in a fish for three days and nights would take a miracle of God... but what would it have been like for Jonah? (Or the people of Nineveh, for that matter?)

Here's one possible way that it might have happened. The original story is recorded in the book of Jonah.

When God told Jonah to go to Nineveh,
an evil city full of Israel's enemies,
and tell them that He loved them
and would destroy them unless they turned to Him,
Jonah refused to go.

Jonah didn't want to see them saved from God's wrath!

In fact, he ran in the opposite direction—

Nineveh was east of Israel so Jonah headed west.

He ran to a seaport called Joppa
and boarded a ship sailing far away.

But God wouldn't let him get away with that because,
despite all their evil,

God still loved the Ninevites.

So after Jonah boarded the ship and it was well out to sea,
God sent a big storm to stop the ship
and get the sailors' attention. Boy, did those sailors pray!

Jonah admitted the storm was all his fault

and told them to throw him overboard and save themselves,
but they were good men and refused to let him die—
until the boat was about to sink, that is.

They finally tossed him overboard. And when they did
the storm stopped... and they watched in horror
as a giant fish swallowed Jonah in one big gulp
and then dove beneath the waves!

What was it like, spending three days and nights in a fish's belly?

Soaked in sea water, surrounded by the smell of dead rotting fish,
with no light and nothing to eat but dead rotting fish...

and nothing to think about
except the folly of disobeying God.

On the fleet of fishing boats sailing the sea around Ninevah
poor fishermen went about their daily work,
 casting their nets in hopes of catching
 enough to feed themselves and
enough extra to sell for a profit in the marketplace.

Suddenly the biggest fish they ever saw burst from the sea!

The waves rocked the boats, throwing fishermen overboard.
Amid the panic and the screams someone pointed and yelled,
 “GOD HAVE MERCY! LOOK AT THAT!”
And while they looked,
 the biggest fish they’d ever seen
 lifted its head, opened its mouth
 and spit out a stream of water... *and a man!*
He flapped his arms and kicked his legs as he flew through the air
and plunged into the water with a great splash.

Then the fish dove back into the sea and swam away.

The fishermen fished Jonah out of the sea
and asked him how this miracle happened.
 No one survives being swallowed by a fish!
So Jonah, still infuriated at God for making him come,
mumbled something about
 how God would destroy Ninevah
 unless the Ninevites repented.

The fishermen were so overcome with fear
 that they took him to the ruler of the city,
 who made Jonah tell him the whole story again.
After talking to Jonah he too was filled with fear
 and ordered the people of Ninevah to repent.
And when the people heard what had happened to Jonah
 the entire city was terrified and begged God for mercy...
 so God spared their city.

Jonah’s preaching probably wouldn’t have been as effective
had he not been covered in seaweed
and smelling like dead rotting fish...

but it probably wouldn’t have been as humiliating either.