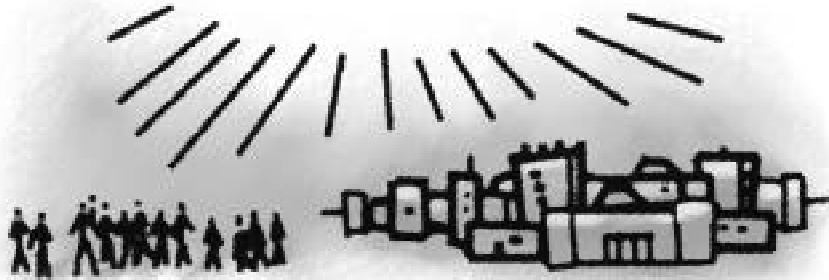


People and Places

**SAB
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ONE OF THE GREAT TRUTHS of the Christian faith is that God is a personal God who is closely involved with His creation. He did not just create us, then leave us to care for ourselves. The Bible is clear that our Creator also gives us what we need to live. He also personally knows about each of us. And He cares about us too.

Jesus' life and ministry¹ show just how much God cares for us. God Himself has become one of us through Jesus so that He can be closely connected to us, now and for eternity.²

This week, we will study the beginning verses of Jonah. These verses give us another example of God's knowledge of people and of His love for humans.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How does God show His concern for people? In what ways does the Bible show us God's personal knowledge of us? How did Jesus show that God knows so much about us? How does the book of Jonah teach us about God's knowledge of us? Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh? What sins were in Nineveh that caused God to send Jonah there as a prophet?

MEMORY VERSE: "I [God] chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected [chose] you to be a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5, TEV).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 11.

¹ministry—work for God.

²eternity—life without end; forever.

SUN THE PERSONAL TOUCH.

“One day the Lord spoke to Jonah son of Amittai. He said, ‘Go to Nineveh, that great city, and speak out against it; I [God] am aware of how wicked its people are’ ” (Jonah 1:1, 2, TEV).

Think about what Jonah 1:1, 2 says. God is the Creator of the universe. He keeps the universe going. In Jonah 1:1, 2, He is talking with *one* person who is just a dot on planet Earth. And Earth itself is just a dot in an entire galaxy.³ The galaxy is just a dot in the universe.⁴

The universe is more than 20 billion light-years⁵ across. At the speed of 186,000 miles (300,000 kilometers) per second, light would take 20 billion years to travel from one end of the universe to the other end. And the God who created this great universe and who keeps it going, talks with Jonah! God is giving him a message to preach to other humans.

Maybe you think you are not important or that nobody cares about you. But in the book of Jonah, we see a picture of a God who knows about us and cares about us. He is a God who has crossed the great universe to touch each of our lives.

How does Psalm 104 show God’s

care and power in the world and in our lives? What comfort do you get from Psalm 104? What is the important message of this psalm?



God gives food to what He has created because of His love.

Psalm 104 is a description of how God cares for His creation. It follows the order of the Creation story in Genesis 1; 2. But in Psalm 104, the verbs⁶ connected with God’s power are used in the present tense.⁷ Psalm 104 shows God in His ever-continuing⁸ work of keeping His creation going. The Bible teaches us that God did not create this world and then leave it to run itself. Rather, the Bible pictures a God who is always involved with His creation and with the lives of His people.

³galaxy—a large group of stars. Earth is in the Milky Way galaxy.

⁴universe—all the matter, light, and energy that scientists have discovered.

⁵light-year—the distance light travels in a year, which is about six trillion miles.

⁶verbs—words that show action.

⁷present tense—action that is happening now.

⁸ever-continuing—always working; always active.

In Psalm 104, the author talks about God's work as Creator and Keeper of the world. What part of God's work does the author talk about in verse 35? What comfort do you get from verse 34? Or does this verse frighten you?

MON THE HAIR ON OUR HEADS.

We cannot see God. But the book of Jonah shows us that He is still very close to His creation. God's knowledge of us is personal. He knows details about us that we would not even consider important.

How does Matthew 10:30 show that God is involved in our lives? Does the thought of God knowing so much about you make you comfortable or afraid? What reasons do you have for your answer?



God even knows the number of hairs on our head.

Now read Psalm 139:1-18, and answer the following questions:

1. How is Psalm 139:1-18 the same as Psalm 104? How are they different? What are both psalms telling us about God?
2. When did God's knowledge of us begin? Psalm 139:13, 15, 16. What does this tell us about God's interest in us?
3. What special things about us does God know? Psalm 139:2-4, 7-10. How should God knowing these things influence our lives?
4. What do you think Psalm 139:1 means? How should the meaning of this verse influence our lives?

God knowing all about us would be bad news if He planned to work against us. But Psalm 139 is clear: "How precious [valuable] to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast [great] is the sum [total] of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber [be more than] the grains of sand" (Psalm 139:17, 18, NIV).

The important thing we need to remember as we study Jonah is that God is a God of love. He has our best interests at heart.

Think about some of the ways you have experienced God's love. Write them down, pray over them, and share them with your friends when opportunities to share them arise.

TUE “HEY, YOU!”

All through the Bible, we have examples of how closely God knows us. It does not matter if we are faithful. God still know us! Again and again, we see that God knows things about us we may not know.

What does 1 Samuel 16:1-3 teach us about God’s knowledge of us?

Read Luke 19:1-10. Jesus is traveling through Jericho with a crowd of people around Him. But He stops at a sycamore tree, because He notices a man sitting in the branches. Jesus does not just say, “Hey, you up there in the tree.” He calls to the man by name: “Zacchaeus, I want to go to your house today” (Luke 19:5). Jesus knew the man by name!



Jesus knew Zacchaeus by name!

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White shows that Zacchaeus was a terrible sinner. But he was open to the influence of the Holy Spirit, who had already been working on him (chapter 61, “Zacchaeus”). Jesus knew all this about Zacchaeus beforehand. But He used this opportunity to work with him in a big way (Luke 19:9).

What secret knowledge did Jesus know about the woman in John 4:4-19? How did He use this knowledge for the woman’s eternal⁹ good? John 4:19-26.

Read Isaiah 44:24, 28 and Isaiah 45:1. God’s involvement in human lives is not limited to people who love Him. Even a non-Israelite¹⁰ ruler is written about by name in prophecy.

The fact that God knows *everyone* by name gives us a better understanding of how God feels about humans. When God calls people, He does not just say, “Hey, you.” He comes to them with close knowledge of who they are, what is inside them, and what their situation is. In Jonah’s case, God knew him as a real person, not just as an unclear¹¹ face in the sea of humanity.¹²

Today we learned that God has a personal knowledge about each of

⁹eternal—forever; without beginning or end.

¹⁰non-Israelite—a person who is not from Israel.

¹¹unclear—not clear.

¹²humanity—all the people of the world.

us and that He uses that knowledge for our good. So how would you answer someone who asked you, “How can I surrender to God so He can take me from where I am to where He wants me to be?”

WED PEOPLE AND PLACES.

God knows about people. He knows about places too. It makes sense for God to know about places, because the places in which people live often influence how they live. God knows cities by name. But more important, He knows what is happening in cities. He is interested in the people who live in the cities.

What do the following verses show about how well God knows this world?

Genesis 11:1-9 _____

Genesis 18:20, 21 _____

Luke 19:41-44 _____

God loved Jerusalem. But Jerusalem refused to accept Him. He showed His

¹³ancient—very old.

¹⁴territories—areas of land that are not cities.

¹⁵appointment—giving a person a special work to do.

¹⁶fertile—able to produce a lot of fruit, vegetables, and grains.

love with His tears as He stood over Jerusalem and wept. He knew of Jerusalem’s terrible future at the hands of Rome.

Jerusalem and the Hebrew nation were the center of God’s salvation plan in Old Testament times. But after Jesus’ death, the center of God’s plan for salvation moved from Jerusalem. Why? Matthew 21:43; Matthew 24:14; Galatians 3:28.

Cities, towns, and other places all over the ancient¹³ world became important in the New Testament. The letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are connected to seven cities. Paul’s great missionary journeys are all connected to different cities (Acts 17:1-4; Acts 17:16-34; Acts 18:1-11). Many of Paul’s letters fill much of the New Testament. These letters are directly tied to important cities and territories¹⁴ (Galatians 1:1, 2; Ephesians 1:1, 2; Philippians 1:1).

So we should not be surprised that God mentioned a city when He called Jonah. The book of Jonah opens with God’s appointment¹⁵ of a person named Jonah. God told Jonah to go to a certain place named Nineveh. Nineveh was a large city on the fertile¹⁶ land along the Tigris River founded by Nimrod, who went from the land of Shinar when the people were forced to scatter from the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).

God knew about all the places mentioned in the Bible. But did He just know about them? Or was He involved in what happened in them and to them? Explain your answer. How can you see God’s involvement where you live?

THU “NINEVEH—THAT GREAT CITY:”

What does the Bible first say about Nineveh? Genesis 10:11.

Archaeologists¹⁷ have dug out and measured the outline of Nineveh’s walls. God sent Jonah to preach to Nineveh in the eighth century B.C.). In Nineveh, the king’s palace probably belonged to Ashurnasirpal. His name means “the god Assur is guardian of the heir.”¹⁸ The palace buildings filled six acres.

Documents from the first century B.C. describe Nineveh as a quadrangle,¹⁹ with a total perimeter of about 60 miles (96 kilometers). This agrees with the Bible when it says that it took three days to walk through Nineveh (Jonah 3:3).

The Hebrew word *Nineweh* is a translation of the Assyrian word *Ninua*. This comes from the earlier Sumerian word *Nina*. *Nina* was a name for the goddess Ishtar. She was represented by a picture of a fish inside a womb.

Nineveh was 500 miles (800 kilometers) to the northeast of Israel, near the city of Mosul in today’s Iraq. To obey

God’s command, Jonah would have had to make a long journey across the desert on foot or in a camel train (caravan).



Why does God send Jonah to Nineveh? Jonah 1:2.

Nineveh was full of sinners. Jonah was not the only prophet who warned Nineveh. More than a hundred years after Jonah, God commanded Nahum to warn Nineveh of God’s punishment. Nahum describes in strong words how wicked the people of Nineveh were.

Quickly read through the book of Nahum to get an idea of how wicked Nineveh was.

People in Nineveh were very wicked. Nineveh was not a Hebrew city. But God sent to them a Hebrew prophet to

¹⁷archaeologists—people who dig to find things from the past that have been buried.

¹⁸heir—a person who receives the money and material possessions of someone who dies; also, a person who would become king after the king dies.

¹⁹quadrangle—a space with four sides surrounded by buildings.

tell them to repent.²⁰ What does God sending a Hebrew prophet to wicked people who are not Hebrews teach us about spreading our message? How can we compare²¹ what is happening in Nineveh with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14?

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** While Peter was in Joppa, God called him to take the gospel to a Roman centurion²² named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Gentile (non-Jew) by birth, training, and education. Ellen White describes this meeting between Peter and Cornelius: “The angel appeared to Cornelius while he was at prayer. As Cornelius heard himself called by name, he was afraid. But he knew that the messenger had come from God. So Cornelius said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ The angel answered, ‘God is pleased with your prayers and works of charity [kindness] and is ready to answer you. And now send some men to Joppa for a certain man whose full name is Simon Peter. He is a guest in the home of a leather-worker named Simon who lives by the sea’ (Acts 10:4, 5, TEV).

“The directions to Cornelius were very clear. Even the work of the man with whom Peter was staying was named. This shows that God knows the history and business of people in every walk of life. God knows the experience and work of the humble worker as well as He knows the king upon his

throne.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,²³ pp. 133, 134.

“About this earth, the Holy Bible announces the work of creation to have been completed. ‘The works were finished from the foundation [beginning] of the world.’ Hebrews 4:3. But the power of God is still used in keeping the things of His creation going. Every breath, every beat of the heart, is proof of God’s care. Through His care, we live and move. From the smallest insect to just one person, every living creature depends daily upon God’s watch care.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 130, 131.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

The modern philosophy called “atheistic existentialism” says that there is no God and no real purpose for life. There is *nothing* outside of ourselves. We are alone in the universe. People who believe in “atheistic existentialism” are called “atheistic existentialists.” They believe that human life has no meaning and is foolish. How does this week’s lesson show how wrong “atheistic existentialism” is and why the Bible offers us something much more hopeful?

SUMMARY: The first verses of the book of Jonah give an example of a truth found all through the Bible: There is a God who knows each of us personally and who is interested in our affairs (activities). The story of Jonah is one example of God’s interest in our lives.

²⁰repent—to say you are sorry for your sins, and then to turn away from your sins.

²¹compare—show how things are the same.

²²centurion—a Roman soldier in charge of 100 other soldiers.

²³apostles—the disciples of Jesus whom He chose to preach the gospel after He returned to heaven.