

LIFE.101

What's it all about?



In the Beginning...

The Seven Wonders of Life



The first wonder of the Word comes in the first verse of the Bible:

In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

The universe in all its vastness and complexity did not happen by random chance, but by the supernatural creation of an infinite and eternal God. Think of this: we have already discovered billions upon billions of stars in the universe and we aren't done yet! How awesome God must be . . . he created it all!

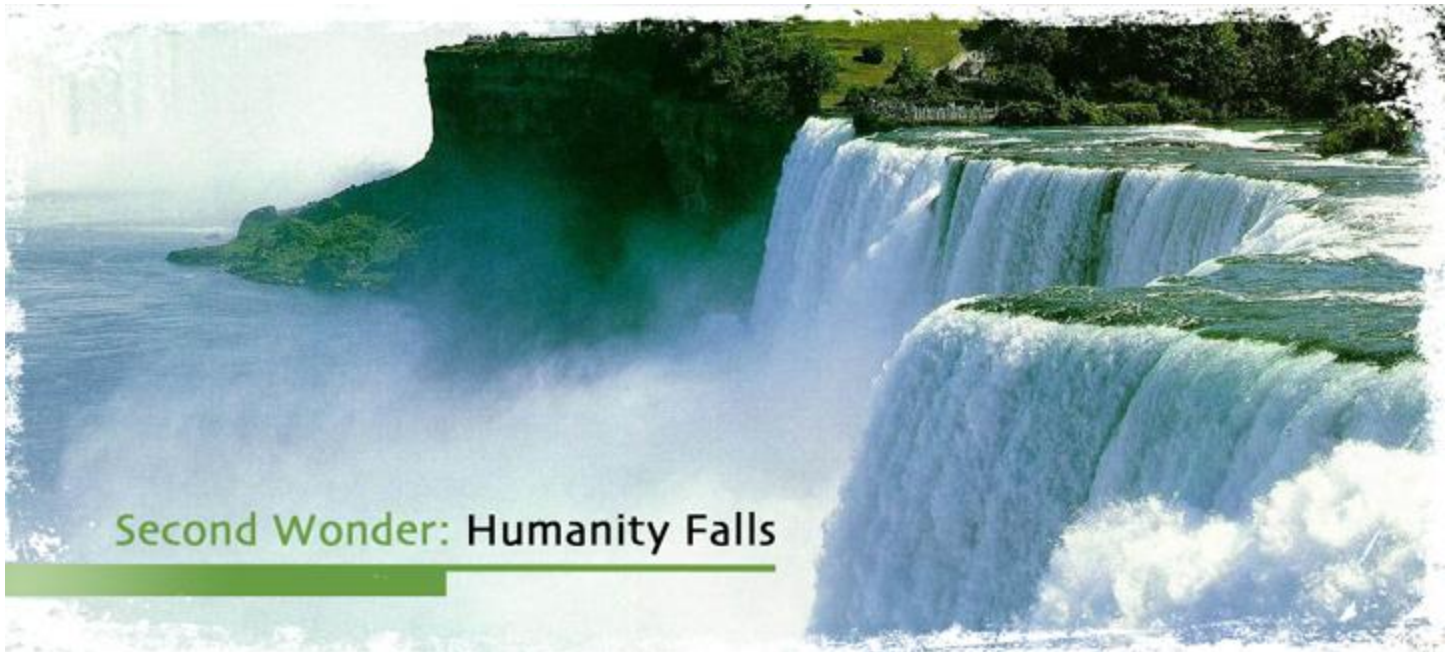
But even a more astounding wonder is this: At the pinnacle of all his creation, God created us . . . men and women. And God made us "in his own image" (Genesis 1:26-27) for a personal relationship with him. God created us with a capacity for a deep and everlasting bond with the Creator of the Universe. Every person has an innate yearning to somehow experience a connection with this Eternal God (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

At the outset, the original man and woman enjoyed a close walk with God, a great relationship with each other, and an environment that was wonderfully suited to their happiness and contentment. It was absolutely perfect! (Genesis 2)

Questions for Reflection

1. Assume you find a pocket watch in the middle of a desert? You examine it. What can you say about the watch with some degree of certainty?
2. What part of Creation reminds you of God's character...

Love	Power	Creativity	Peace
Forgiveness	Gentleness	Humor	Bigness



The second wonder of the Word is equally astounding, although tragic. Scripture records that although the original man and woman (Adam and Eve) enjoyed a wonderful relationship with God and a paradise of a home, they trashed it all when they chose to disobey the God who had made them and blessed them so much.

The unthinkable happened: the man and the woman chose to reject the Lord and to pursue their own course. Immediately, they experienced a lifestyle cut off from the constant flow of God's goodness and love. As the book of Genesis tells us, they and their descendents would all experience the tragic consequences of sin: loneliness, rebellion, fear, anger, hatred, discouragement and finally, death. And worst of all, the human race was separated from God and the relationship was broken (Genesis 3).

On that very day, the headline would read: "*Humanity Falls!*"

Fallen--from the highest peak of God's creation to the pit of despair and sadness. And perhaps saddest of all, the headline of today's paper reads no differently. All of us have fallen through sin (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

Questions for Reflection

Can you give an example of how sin has changed our perspective of the world?

What does it mean to be deceived? How does deception and sin go hand in hand?

What does "Sin" mean to you? To the Bible? To society?

1. Anyone who **knows** the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. James 4:17
2. The power of sin is the **law** 1 Cor 15:56
3. The wages of sin is **death** Romans 6:23



Perhaps you have been to the Grand Canyon and scanned the expanse between the north and south rims. It is an awe-inspiring experience. The span between the two sides seems almost uncrossable. It is immense. How could anyone get to the other side?

Amazingly, there is an even greater chasm that now separates the children of earth from the God of heaven. Sin is the Great Divide between humanity and a loving and just God. Scripture declares bluntly: "Your sins have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2). Because of sin, the whole human race is justly condemned and separated from God. This great divide threatens to continue not only in this life, but in the age to come. The chasm **seems** uncrossable, but it's not! There is hope that we can cross the great divide.

Questions for Reflection

What words would you use to describe this state of existence?

Despair

Hopelessness

Suicidal

Envy

Exhaustion

bitterness

Anger

Self-absorption

futility

directionless

What would you say to someone who only knows this kind of barren existence?

Have you ever been in the "desert" of life? What was it like? How did you move on?

When Jesus offers the Samaritan woman "living Water" what does He mean?



On a specific day in history, God himself crossed the great divide and came over to our side of the chasm. We call that day Christmas.

The celebration of Christmas in our culture is lavish, extravagant, joyous and noisy! But perhaps in the midst of the excitement, we lose the true reason to celebrate. The wonder of Christmas is that God actually humbled himself and became one of us! Yes, Jesus, God's own Son, took on human flesh and lived among us on Planet Earth. Talk about a miracle!

The details of Jesus' birth are equally miraculous. The Bible spells out that he was born of the virgin Mary, a humble Jewish girl from Nazareth. In perhaps the most astounding event in all of human history, the Spirit of God caused a child to be conceived in the womb of Mary. On the day of Jesus' birth, Mary and her betrothed husband Joseph found themselves in Bethlehem. And on that very first Christmas, the Son of God himself arrived in the humblest of surroundings . . . born in a stable.

This miracle would be but the first of many to follow in the life of Jesus. God's plan was to bridge the great divide caused by sin through the work of his only Son. Jesus' mission was to rescue sinners from the separation caused by sin. He would be a Savior, as the Scriptures foretold: "*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*" And the angels declared: "*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*"

Questions for Reflection

1. What does Christmas mean to you? Do you celebrate it? Why and how?
2. What memories do you have of Christmas?
3. What would you like others to know about Christmas they don't know now?
4. How will Christmas be different for you this year?



But the question is raised: "How will Jesus save people from their sins?" The answer to this question is yet another wonder of the Word of God.

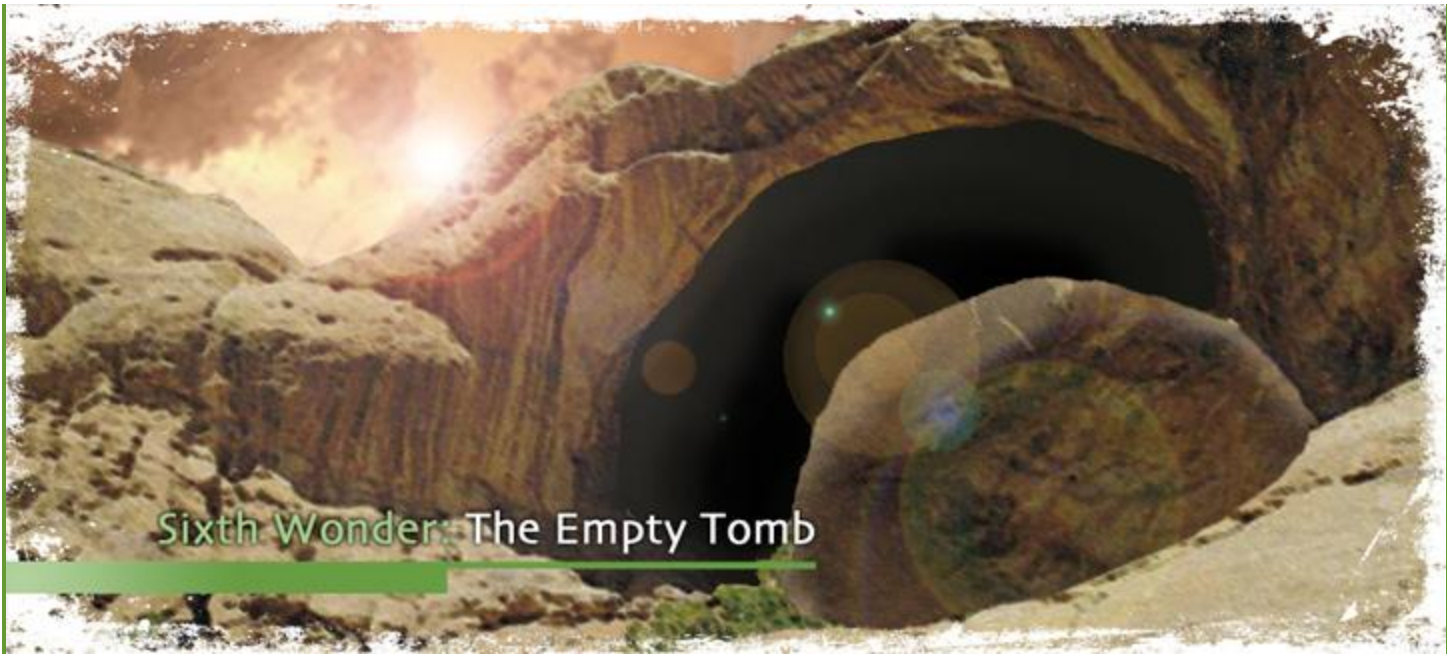
The "sin problem" is a central issue in the New Testament. God created us for a relationship with him, but our sins have separated every person from God. God, in his great love and mercy, desires to forgive our sin and to give us a personal and enduring relationship with him as his children. But God's justice and holiness demand a punishment for sin. The Word says, "the wages of sin is death." That is, our sin earns us both physical and spiritual death. How can God be both loving toward us and carry out his just punishment for sin at the same time?

Is there any way out? The Bible answers a resounding; "YES!" For someone has been sent as the mediator between a holy God and a sinful humanity. His name is Jesus. The Scriptures proclaim: *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men."*

Jesus, who himself never sinned, took upon himself the punishment for the sins of the whole world. When he was crucified on the cross, he satisfied the justice of God by dying in the place of sinners. At the same time, he demonstrated the immense love of God. The New Testament explains: *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

Questions for Reflection

1. Why didn't God answer Jesus' prayer in Luke 22:42?
2. What did Jesus do on the cross that we, in our sin, could not do? See Romans 3:25
3. What does God want you to know about Himself through the cross? see 1 John 4:9
4. What is the result of the cross of Christ? Hebrew 10:10



The message of Christianity is unique. For no other belief system, world religion, or religious faith makes the claim that its founder actually rose from the dead! But that is precisely what the Bible proclaims. In fact, this truth is truly the "heartbeat" of the whole Bible. The essential good news is taught in the Bible: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep."

Read the dramatic ending of each of the four gospels in the New Testament. Jesus is crucified and buried on Friday, but on Sunday he rose from the grave! His tomb is now empty forever. Over 500 eyewitnesses confirmed his resurrection. What's more, there is no record of a single one of these eyewitnesses ever recanting or denying their testimony even when tortured and put to death.

Jesus' physical resurrection is the only explanation for the explosive growth of the Christian church. From a rag-tag collection of disciples to a vibrant movement of God, the Christian faith spread to the entire Roman empire within a few years.

Why did Jesus have to rise from the dead? First, God vindicated Jesus' claims to be the perfect Son of God by raising him from the dead, forever proving that Jesus is Lord of all. Second, his resurrection shows that his sacrifice for sin (on the cross) was acceptable to God to pay for the sins of the world. Third, Jesus defeated both sin and death by rising from the dead. Fourth, Jesus now offers the same hope of eternal life and resurrection to all who trust in him.

Questions for Reflection

What burden has been lifted from humanity as a result of the Resurrection? Romans 8:2

What does "Faith in Christ" mean to you? Hebrews 11:1

For Christians who put their faith in Christ, what is the consequence of Resurrection? Romans 6:4

How should we now live as Easter People?

See – Philippians 4:13, 1 Thess 5:11, Hebrews 10:25



Seventh Wonder: The Bridge to Life

The seventh wonder of the Word is simple, but astounding. The Bible makes it clear that we could never earn forgiveness from God or earn our own way to heaven: *"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."* Trying on our own will be as futile as trying on our own to build a bridge across the Grand Canyon! We will die trying!

But God has built a bridge across the Great Divide. We can cross over to the other side! Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*

The good news is this: God has provided a way out by sending his own Son to die on the cross in the place of sinners who deserved his punishment. He calls on everyone, even you, to turn from trying to achieve your own self-righteousness, and to trust entirely in Jesus Christ. Will you trust in Him completely? Will you give your life, your destiny, yourself to Him? His love is so immense that he can forgive all your sin and give you eternal life... TODAY! One of the most well known Bible verses tells the story: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* John 3:16

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. He calls on you to trust in Him and to follow him. He calls on each of us to come in faith to him and not to ignore his love and his sacrifice on the cross.

D. James Kennedy tells this true story of sacrifice: Back in the days of the Great Depression, a Missouri man named John Griffith was the controller of a great railroad drawbridge across the Mississippi River. One day in the summer of 1937 he decided to take his eight-year-old son, Greg, with him to work. At noon, John Griffith put the bridge up to allow ships to pass and sat on the observation deck with his son to eat lunch. Time passed quickly. Suddenly the shrieking of a train whistle in the distance startled him. He quickly looked at his watch and noticed it was 1:07 - the Memphis Express, with four hundred passengers on

board, was roaring toward the raised bridge! He leaped from the observation deck and ran back to the control tower. Just before throwing the master lever he glanced down for any ships below. There a sight caught his eye that caused his heart to leap poundingly into his throat. Greg had slipped from the observation deck and had fallen into the massive gears that operate the bridge. His left leg was caught in the cogs of the two main gears! Desperately John's mind whirled to devise a rescue plan. But as soon as he thought of a possibility he knew there was no way it could be done.

Again, with alarming closeness, the train whistle shrieked in the air. He could hear the clicking of the locomotive wheels over the tracks. That was his son down there - yet there were four hundred passengers on the train. John knew what he had to do, so he buried his head in his left arm and pushed the master switch forward. That great massive bridge lowered into place just as the Memphis Express began to roar across the river. When John Griffith lifted his head with his face smeared with tears, he looked into the passing windows of the train. There were businessmen casually reading their afternoon papers, finely dressed ladies in the dining car sipping coffee, and children pushing long spoons into their dishes of ice cream. No one looked at the control house, and no one looked at the great gear box. With wrenching agony, John Griffith cried out at the steel train: "I sacrificed my son for you people! Don't you care?" The train rushed by, but nobody heard the father's words.

No one cared.

Today, if you hear the Father's words, respond to him in faith and love.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

Questions for Reflection [read Luke 15]

- a. What has God done for you that you could not do for yourself?
- b. Why do you believe God loves you so much?
- c. Have you ever had a love that was not returned? How did that make you feel?
- d. Have you ever been loved so thoroughly that it gave you strength and courage to try new things?

Next Step in L.I.F.E. 101

The Church