# Let’s Play Genesis in the Sandbox

Genesis 1 is densely packed with foundational truths that answer the most basic questions of life. In every generation since Adam walked out of the Garden, the world has tried to replace God’s reality with more comfortable fantasies. When we do that, life doesn’t work, and people get hurt. We need to take on board Paul’s words:

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

There is a conflict between modern science and the Bible. Let’s be clear. There has always been a conflict between the world’s scholarship and the Bible. Genesis is not only an account of what actually happened. It is also a model of how to engage in the debate with the alternative models that the world wants us to believe.

Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt. He was highly educated in Egyptian scholarship. He wrote the Genesis narrative to bring God’s people out of that world of myth and fantasy back to God’s reality. Christians face the same challenge today. But it isn’t simple.

To do this well we have to start with a good dose of humility. We don’t know all the answers. We assume that we are smarter and more advanced than any culture that came before us. It is embarrassing to realise that the Egyptians knew the earth was round, and had measured its circumference nearly two thousand years before a wandering European figured it out. Other cultures know things we don’t.

God doesn’t answer all of our questions. Science doesn’t either. Both secular science, and those who trust the Bible, have to admit that we have some problems with our own ways of thinking.

What do we do when the facts in front of us contradict each other? Science struggles with this all the time. Science is about constructing theories and models of how reality works, and then testing those theories in ways that can be observed. Observation takes place without reference to God. Sometimes observation throws up results that don’t make sense. In experiments, light is observed to behave like a particle sometimes, and as a wave at other times. How can that be? Scientists then jump into the sandbox and play. Quantum physics works, but why?

Imagine the great scientists sitting in a sandbox with a mass of Lego. What if …??? Some models seem to hold up. Others collapse. They are all just models based on theories – the products of imagination. They need testing. Sometimes we can’t find a way to test them. So, we keep looking. New observations don’t fit what we thought we knew. Science is not a final truth. Scientists constantly have to go back and rethink the data they cannot explain.

When we read the Bible, sometimes we find passages that seem to contradict other passages. Like the scientist, we too can jump into the sandbox and start playing with models. What if …??? We can test those ideas. We check the original languages. We search the rest of the Bible. We investigate the texts and artifacts of the day. We dig up the archaeological sites. We look for more texts. Sometimes we find an answer, but often we don’t.

If we are going to be a people of truth, we need the humility to leave our models in the sandbox until we have some way of verifying them.

Both Christians and scientists fall into the sin of arrogance and pride. Both trot out their models as truth, and throw them at each other. This is often done with horrible rudeness, and personal abuse from both sides.

Advocates for “Creation Science” imagine solutions as to how Genesis 1 might have worked. They sometimes overstate those models as truth. When one crashes under the weight of more rigorous investigation and testing, it brings discredit on the Bible, and dishonour to Christ’s name. What they are trying to do is good, but overconfidence undermines success. We need to use our imagination and create models, but they need to stay in the sandbox.

We need to remember God’s word to Job (38:4), “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth.” In that speech, God mocks the myths of Job’s day and culture. Those models were ridiculous – as if the earth was a building like a temple with a cornerstone and pillars threatened by sea monsters. God didn’t answer Job’s questions. God made the point that He is not answerable to us. He is not on trial, even though we want to put him in the dock and cross examine him. Who would sit as judge of God? Against what standard would we charge him? We cannot give that seat to people, nor set our standards of science, or our cultural values, as the standard he has to meet. God alone is the judge of truth and right. His character defines the standards we have to meet.

Sometimes science helps us see things in the text that we missed. How does a star form? How could time have a beginning? I used to think that when God created, he put stuff into space. But space/time has a beginning, as in “In the beginning God created …” My brain hurts. But this is wonderful. Genesis stimulates more rigorous science.

A day is one revolution of the earth on its axis. Genesis 1 makes it clear that a day consists of “evening and morning,” not undefined ages. Science can only work with what is observable now. We assume things operated at this rate in the past. What if …?? How long did it take for the earth to rotate on day one?

The key is to maintain and defend what we know, and admit what we don’t. Our method must be to approach knowledge humbly under God’s word. That means we don’t tell the Bible what it can and cannot talk about. It also means we don’t yield the bench to secular science, or social consensus.

We have to learn to leave our toys in the sandbox. Our models and theories might be right. More often, they won’t work, or will have weaknesses. We have to look in lots of places to find the treasure. Our models need to stay in the sandbox. We can’t live in them.

If I cannot validate my imagination, then it should not govern my life. Let’s admit that we can know two things that contradict, and that both things can be true. Then let’s go and play and investigate. We may learn more about what the Creator of all things has done. Let’s not surrender one truth for the other just to take away the tension. Let’s keep searching. It is exciting.

## From Genesis 1:1-2:3 we know that

1:1 God exists independently from the creation.

1:1 Time and space had a beginning.

1:1 God created all that isn’t God.

1:2 At first the earth existed in darkness and was covered in water, without shape or features.

1:2 The Spirit of God was present and active over the earth from the beginning.

1:3 God created by speaking his word of command.

1:3 On day one God created light.

1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 God judged the things he made to be good/ beautiful.

1:5 God defined/ explained the meaning of each thing that he created by naming these things.

1:4, 6, 9, (2:16-17, 3:24) God created boundaries.

1:11-12, 21, 24-25, 27 God created distinctions between creatures and genders.

1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 He created in a sequence of six days.

1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 A day is defined as one period transitioning from darkness (evening) through one period of light (day) = one rotation of the earth on its axis.

1:9-13 On Day three separated land from water and created plants and vegetation.

On the first three days he created the places into which he then placed the things he made on days 4-6.

1:14-19 On day four he commanded the sun, moon and stars to appear in the sky to function as signs by which to measure, days, seasons, and years (see day 1).

1:20-23 On day five he created birds to fly in the atmosphere (see day 2) and creatures to live in the water. He created birds and sea creatures before land creatures.

1:20-23 God commanded birds and sea creatures to breed and multiply.

1:24-25 On day six God created many kinds of animals that live on land and commanded them to breed and multiply.

1:26-27 On day six, after creating the animals, God created the first man and woman.

1:26-27 God created the first humans as a separate act of creation.

1:26-27 Human beings, both man and woman, were created in God’s image – an image being, by definition, a visible representation. The whole person is a physical and visual representation of God. We are God’s personal selfies.

1:26-27 Man and woman are images of the one God who exists as more than one person, “our image.” There is unity and diversity in how human beings image God, just as there is unity and diversity in God himself.

1:26-27 Only human beings are created in God’s image. They are unique beings.

1:28 God blessed the man and woman with three commands. God’s commands are blessings.

1:28 From the start God spoke to the man and the woman and they understood language – an ability no other creature has.

1:28 God commanded the first man and woman to have children and populate the world. Children are a blessing from God.

1:28 God commanded them to subdue the land – work is a blessing.

1:28 God gave the man and woman the power and responsibility to rule the creatures that he had made, on land, sea and in the air. Every human being is a custodian of God’s land.

1:29 God provided plants and trees to bear fruit to feed human beings and the other creatures he had made.

1:31 God judged his creation to be very beautiful/ good.

2:2 On the seventh day God stopped creating because he had completed his creation. [The word *shabbat* in Hebrew means to stop.

2:3 God determined that the seventh day would be different from the other six days. The pattern of seven as representing completion is grounded in God’s blessing of this original seventh day.

## From Genesis 2:4-25 we know that

2:5-6 When God created human beings it hadn’t rained yet.

2:7 The man was created first

2:7 The man was created out of the ground, not out of another animal.

2:7 The lifeless body of the man was named man before God breathed breath into him (the word for “life” is the word for “breath.” A living being is a breathing being.)

2:7 There was a personal intimacy in God’s formation of the man and the woman.

2:8, 10-14 God planted a food garden in Eden which provided all the necessities of life including fresh water. Mankind was commissions to expand the garden into all the world.

2:9 God planted the Tree of Life. Access to the fruit of that tree would sustain life (3:22).

2:9 God planted “the tree of the knowledge of good/ beauty and evil/ rottenness/ destruction” in the garden too.

2:10-14 Eden was a land rich in gold and precious stones.

2:16-17 God forbad man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good/ beauty and evil/ rottenness/ destruction. The consequence would be death.

2:18 The man was designed with an inherent inadequacy that is not the result of the fall. Men are designed to need the contribution of the woman. Men and women are designed to operate together. (NB. The word “helper” means “ally,” not slave. In eighty percent of the occasions when the word “helper” appears in the Old Testament, it is God who is our helper.)

2:20

2:19-20 The man had the authority to name Eve.

2:21-22 The first woman was created out of the flesh of the man – two sexes but one flesh.

2:23 Adam and Eve were the first human beings and they are historical persons.

2:24 God created marriage between a man and a woman.

2:24 Marriage involves the establishment of a new and separate household giving priority to the relationship between husband and wife over that between parent and offspring.

2:25 The naked human body was beautiful. Until Adam and Eve sinned there was no shame.

## From Genesis 3 we know that

3:1 God made the snake. In Revelation 12:9 we find out that this was an appearance form of Satan.

3:5 The knowledge of evil/ rottenness/ destruction was the prerogative of God alone.

3:6 The sequence of the temptation reversed God’s order of authority – the beast of the field spoke and the woman obeyed, then the man, who then stood in defiance of the word of God.

3:6 Adam failed to fulfil his responsibility to rule by his inaction during the temptation.

3:7 The human body was now a matter of shame, requiring the covering of buttocks and genitals.

3:8 God appeared to Adam and Eve in tangible form, walking in the garden.

3:8 Hiding from God doesn’t work.

3:9-15 God worked his way down the order of authority questioning first the man who blamed the woman, then the woman who blamed the beast, and finally the beast.

3:15 God delivers judgement on the snake first. Before delivering judgement on the woman and the man, God promised to bring man and woman back on his side of the line dividing enemies, leaving the snake as the enemy.

3:15 This would be accomplished by a boy born of a woman who would kill the offspring of the snake, and be struck by the snake’s offspring in the process.

3:16 As a consequence of sin, the woman would suffer more pregnancies, and increased pain in childbirth. Her relationship with her husband would be damaged. They would fight.

3:17-19 As a consequence of sin, the ground would be damaged; the man’s work would be frustrating and less productive; the effort required would be painful. His body would fall apart and become dust again.

3:20 Eve was the mother of all human beings (this would include Jesus). She was an historical individual.

3:21 God killed an animal to provide skins to cover their shame.

3:22 Because the man and woman had disobeyed God and ingested the fruit which gave them the knowledge/ experience of evil/ rottenness, they died.

3:23 Being sent into exile from the garden where they had access to God and the tree of life, there was no way that they could regain that access.

## NB:

Death is separation not annihilation.

The word translated “evil” means rottenness or destruction. It isn’t a moral category. Sin is destructive. God has the right to destroy. People don’t.

The word translated “good” also means beautiful. In Genesis 1 God described only the visible things that he created as good/ beautiful. The atmosphere (day 2) is invisible and he did not call it beautiful/ good.