

# Emerging Scholars Blog

InterVarsity's Emerging Scholars Network



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## The Meaning of Technology

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The book of Genesis opens with the creation account describing a beautiful world of sea, earth, sky, plants, fish, birds and other animals. And then God places a man in the garden. Immediately following this part of the story is a curious verse, which at first seems out of place. The verse is [Genesis 2:12](#), which parenthetically mentions that “The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.” A small footnote suggests that aromatic resin might refer to pearls. Why is this significant enough to be included in the creation account? As an engineer, I wonder whether these raw materials – latent in creation – have any implications for the role of technology.

Welcome to the  
official blog of  
[InterVarsity Christian  
Fellowship's  
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Network \(ESN\)](#)!

ESN is a national network which supports those on the academic pathway as they work out how their academic vocation serves God and others. We encourage and equip undergraduates, graduate students, postdocs, and early career faculty as they navigate each stage of their academic vocation and transition to the next step in or beyond the academy.



ESN's networking /  
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Curiously, the materials gold, onyx and pearls which appear in the second chapter of the Bible reappear in the second last chapter of the Bible. [Revelation 21:20](#) describes the Holy city, the new Jerusalem, a “city of pure gold” and one decorated with precious stones, including onyx, and with gates made of pearls.

In between [Genesis 2](#) and [Revelation 21](#) we read that these materials are not always used to God’s glory. In Genesis we read of how the “treasures of the Egyptians” were given to the people of Israel as they fled Egypt. St. Augustine wrote about how unbelievers can also uncover “gold and silver” dug up from “certain mines of divine Providence” that Christians can also take and use. However, later, in [Exodus 32](#), we read about how Aaron fashioned Israelite gold into a golden calf. Later in [Daniel 3](#) we read of how King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and forced people to worship it.

But there are other references to gold, pearls and precious stones throughout the Bible. A few chapters following the golden calf incident in [Exodus 35](#) we read about Bezalel, who was “filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts” ([Ex. 35:31-33](#)). Furthermore, Bezalel along with Oholiab were given the ability to teach these skills to others so that the tabernacle could be built. These skills were put in the service of God in the construction of the temple.

### Refiner’s fire

After the birth of Christ we read about how the wise men brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matt. 2). Here, the gold noted in Genesis is one of the materials presented as a gift to the Christ. However, Christ was later betrayed by one of his followers with another precious metal: 30 pieces of silver.

In [1 Corinthians 3:9-17](#) we read about how our works are compared to “gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw” and that they will be shown for what they are when fire tests the quality of each person’s work. If our work is built with gold it will survive the flames and we shall receive a reward, but if it is built with straw it will be burned up and we will saved but “only as one escaping through the flames.”

The mention of gold and precious materials in [Genesis 2](#) is not simply a superfluous detail of the creation account. These are the materials latent in creation with which we forge cultural artifacts, ones that may

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be directed away from God or towards him. We can use these materials to build golden calves or to build temples that honour the Lord. We can use them as a gift to the Lord or to forge our own idols. [Colossians 1:16](#) reminds us that all things were not only created through Christ, but also for him. The implications of this are significant: all things in creation, including the raw materials we fashion, have meaning and purpose (telos), and that the purpose is found in Christ. That includes technology which also has a meaning, and the meaning of technology is found in service to God.

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## Derek Schuurman

Derek Schuurman worked in industry for several years as an electrical engineer and later completed a Ph.D. in electrical engineering in the area of robotics and computer vision. His interest in computers began in his early teens with his first computer, a ZX-81. Besides his technical pursuits, he has taught and written about a Christian perspective of technology. He is the author of a recent book which explores a Christian perspective of computer technology entitled *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology* published by InterVarsity Press. He is currently an associate professor of computer science at Redeemer University College. He along with his wife and four children live in Hamilton, Ontario. You can find more on his website: <http://cs.redeemer.ca/derek/>

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