

# God, the Bible, and Technology

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<sup>1</sup>In this first talk, I want to address a Biblical view of God and technology.

And if technology is the application of knowledge and tools to amplify our power, or enhance our abilities, or improve our efficiency, then the Bible gives us numerous examples. But they come from the bronze and iron ages, so they seem ancient to us - but that doesn't mean they weren't or aren't technologies.

And in looking at some of them, I want to give you 5 principles (some of which will be obvious) to help ground your thinking about technology generally, and AI in particular.

## **Principle no.1. The Same Technology Can be Used for Good or Bad**

Which, as following talks will make clear, is not the same as saying that the technology itself is neutral.

But take Noah constructing the ark. We're told in Genesis 6 that he waterproofs it with pitch - a petroleum based product. And a waterproofed ark provided a means of survival. But turn forward to Genesis 11 and the building of the Tower of Babel and the builders use bitumen - a close cousin of pitch - for mortar. Except this time it's used for the purposes of human pride and an attempt to create utopia.

Same petroleum based technology, but the motivation and goal were very different. And in one God commands the innovation, and in the other he disrupts it.

But if technology can be used for good, then it can be used for loving your neighbour. Think of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan - who comes to the aid of a Jewish man, lying robbed and bleeding in the street. And the Samaritan uses the medical, bio tech of his day to bind up the man's wounds. He uses the transport tech - the Tesla of the day - his donkey, to carry him to an inn. And he uses the financial tech - the Twint of the day - to pay for his ongoing care.

Is the use of tech the point of the parable? No. It's to love your neighbour who might just look like an enemy. And yet, one way we can do that is through the appropriate use of tech.

But go back to the Tower of Babel.

God tells humanity to spread out and fill the earth, and they clump together and start building a tower. And the narrator describes God coming down to see what the builders are up to. Now, is that God caught off guard by the technologists and innovators of the day? I mean, if you and I are stunned by the latest innovation out of Silicon Valley, is God experiencing something similar? Is he merely *reactive* to technology as we might be?

And the answer is no.

## **Principle no.2: God is Sovereign over technology and those who use it.**

Look at Isaiah 54:16-17, where God says,

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<sup>1</sup> The following two books have greatly shaped my thinking on this subject and the material in this talk is largely drawn from them: *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* Tony Reinke, 2022; *Digital Liturgies - rediscovering Christian wisdom in an online age*, Samuel James, 2023.

“Behold, I have created the smith  
who blows the fire of coals  
and produces a weapon for its purpose.  
I have also created the ravager to destroy;  
no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed.”

And the blacksmith was the innovator of the age. Today, innovators are hunched over computers, coding. Back then they stood in front of furnaces, hammering. And God is saying, the blacksmith may create weapons, but I create the blacksmith. And the Californian tech guy may develop AI, but it's God who gives him the intelligence to do so.

But... he also creates the one who uses the blacksmith's weapons - the ravager. Which means he's not just sovereign over the one who makes the tech, but the one who uses it. And uses both for his purposes.

Take David and Goliath. You could read the account of their battle, in 1 Samuel 17, as one between a giant of a man trusting in military technology, and a young boy trusting only in God. But it's more than that.

It's a clash between two different technologies, both designed to increase the user's power.

Goliath was *the* elite warrior of his day, equipped with the greatest armour and weaponry, designed to augment his natural abilities. And in the build up, and in the hope of compensating for David's inferior abilities, David was offered, and tried on, something similar. But rather than helping him the same tech hindered him.

So what does he do? What he does *not* do is simply rely on faith. He says to his opponent, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts” - in the name of the Lord of armies.

But he also comes with the tech that *will* work for him, that *will* augment his natural powers and make up for his deficiencies - a sling and a stone. And if Goliath is using military technology designed for close combat warfare, David takes up the ancient equivalent of a sniper rifle.

At close combat, David's tech would have been useless, but at range, it's perfect.

And yet, regardless of who used what, it's God himself, *the Lord of armies*, the Lord of military tech, who is sovereign over the fight. Sovereign over those who design technology and those who use it.

It's why God can say to his people, through Isaiah, “no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed” (v17). Because technology can only wield a power that is given and governed by God.

So...

**Principle no.3. Fear God Not Tech.**

Go back to Babel. Its builders have set out to use the latest in building technology - fired bricks and bitumen - to build themselves “a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.” (Gen11:4).

And God’s response? ‘And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower.’ In other words, they have grandiose ideas, they think they’re building something whose top will reach heaven. But from heaven, where God is enthroned, it’s so small not even God can see it. It’s so small he has to bend down and come down to see it.

And you may hear innovators making similar grandiose claims for what they’re building. But they pose no more threat to God than Babel. In the Book of Daniel, Daniel is told that in ‘the time of the end... knowledge shall increase.’ And the New Testament writers tell us that ever since the resurrection of Christ we’ve been in those last days, in the time of the end. And knowledge *has* increased. But it will always be a pin-prick when viewed from the throne of heaven.

And so, if at the cross of Christ, God can take the technology of wood and nails that men put to evil use, and turn it for good, he can also turn the mistaken, or evil intents of 21st century innovators for good. If he can frustrate the builders at Babel intent on playing God, then whether it is military, bio or AI tech, God can press stop any time he wants.

So fear God, not the tech or the technologists. As Paul wrote, ‘if God is for us, who can be against us?’

**Principle no 4: Put your ultimate hope in God, not technology.**

AI promises much, but so did the latest military technology in David’s day:

Ps 20:7-8:

‘Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.  
They collapse and fall,  
but we rise and stand upright.’

And if chariots and horses could help men win battles, AI promises the same - whether in the battle against cancer or chaos. But our *ultimate* hope should be in God.

And finally,

**Principle no 5: Remember where true wisdom is found**

And in the book of Job, Job describes ancient mining technology.

“Surely there is a mine for silver,  
and a place for gold that they refine.  
Iron is taken out of the earth,  
and copper is smelted from the ore.  
Man puts an end to darkness  
and searches out to the farthest limit  
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.  
He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives...  
they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro...

“But where shall wisdom be found?  
And where is the place of understanding?...  
The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’  
and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’  
It cannot be bought for gold,  
and silver cannot be weighed as its price...

“From where, then, does *wisdom* come?  
And where is the place of understanding?

“God understands the way to it,  
and he knows its place.  
For he looks to the ends of the earth  
and sees everything under the heavens...  
And he said to man,  
‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,  
and to turn away from evil is understanding.’”  
(Job 28)

And so, back then, underground mining produced precious metals and precious stones. Today, data mining produces unimaginable levels of information. But neither wealth, nor information is the same as wisdom. Wisdom is taking wealth and information and knowing what to do with it.

And to be wise, the Bible says, to take data and put it to the task of living life with skill, only comes by living in right relationship with God; in right relationship with Christ who, the Bible tells us, is the wisdom of God incarnate. Not an avatar. Not a bot. But the wisdom of God *embodied*.

So to truly flourish, pursue wisdom in relationship with the only wise God, prioritising an embodied life over a virtual one.