



Biblical Theological investigations into the attribute of God's wisdom



Authors:

Albert J. Coetsee¹ 
Francois P. Viljoen¹ 

Affiliations:

¹Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Albert Coetsee,
albert.coetsee@nwu.ac.za

How to cite this article:

Coetsee, A.J. & Viljoen, F.P., 2024, 'Biblical Theological investigations into the attribute of God's wisdom', *In die Skriflig* 58(1), a3132. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3132>

Copyright:

© 2024. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

'Biblical Theological investigations into the attributes of God' is a research unit of the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS). The aim of the unit is to investigate how biblical texts from the Old and New Testament portray specific attributes of God as part of the developing, unfolding, and progressive storyline of the text. The research unit originated in 2020–2021 (during the coronavirus disease 2019 [COVID-19] pandemic) and started by investigating and defining Biblical Theology as a hermeneutical discipline. In subsequent years, different attributes of God were investigated one by one from a Biblical Theological viewpoint. In 2022, the research unit investigated the attribute of God's righteousness, and a selection of these papers were published in the volume *Biblical Theological Investigations into the Righteousness of God* (eds. Viljoen & Coetsee 2024). In 2023, the research unit investigated the attribute of God's wisdom. A selection of the papers, which were read during the 2023 EABS conference (10 July–13 July) at the *Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose San Metodio* in Siracusa, Italy, was prepared for publication for the special collection 'Biblical Theological investigations into the attribute of Gods wisdom' in *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*.

The wisdom of God is a divine attribute frequently found either explicitly or implicitly in the text of the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament, references to God's wisdom are found, inter alia, in statements of his being (Jb 12:13; Is 28:29; Dn 2:20), descriptions of the way in which he created heaven and earth (Ps 104:24; Jr 10:12; 51:15), and references to the distribution of his wisdom to individuals (1 Ki 3:28; Ezr 7:25). In the New Testament, references to God's wisdom are found, among others, in songs of praise (Rm 11:33; Rv 7:12), descriptions of his conduct (Eph 1:8), and arguments concerning Christ as the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24, 30). Usually, studies on the *wisdom of God* are limited to dogmatological investigations. The research unit, however, investigated how different texts from the Old and New Testament portray the attribute of God's wisdom as part of the developing, unfolding, and progressive storyline of the text.

In this issue, readers will find eight peer reviewed articles on several themes and topics related to the attribute of God's wisdom. Broadly speaking, these articles can be grouped together under the following four headings:

The Old Testament

In her article 'God's gift of wisdom in words, actions, and practical skills', Robin Gallaher Branch examines wisdom as a gift from God. Employing a canonical approach and literary methodology, she presents Old Testament character studies of selected Hebrew Bible characters who broadly illustrated God's gift of wisdom in words and actions. This includes Joseph (Gn 41:37–41), the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah (2 Sm 20:14–22), Solomon (1 Ki 3:9–12), Daniel (Dn 2:19–23), Lady Wisdom (Pr 8–9), Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex 31:1–11), and the wise-hearted women who participated as spinners for the Tabernacle furnishings (Ex 35:25–26). She concludes that all forms of wisdom come from the bountiful Giver, require a recipient's maintenance, namely the lifelong pattern of seeking God and walking in his ways (Pr 2), and that wisdom's objective, like all God's gifts, is God's glory.

Chris van der Walt investigates the contrast between human and divine wisdom in the book of Isaiah in his aptly called article 'The foolish wisdom of humans versus the wise wisdom of God in the Book of Isaiah'. He notices that the concept 'wisdom' in Isaiah is most often used ironically for unwise people, and that this type of wisdom is juxtaposed to the *wisdom of God*. The book of Isaiah (esp. Is 1–39) consequently highlights facets of God's wisdom and advocates a theocentric understanding of wisdom in terms of covenantal fidelity.

Note: Special Collection: Biblical Theological investigations into the attribute of God's wisdom.

The Gospels

Francois P. Viljoen's article, 'Jesus as the personification of God's wisdom in Matthew', explores how the Gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus as embodying divine wisdom. Identified as 'Immanuel' or 'God with us', Jesus is depicted through various wisdom motifs found in Jewish tradition. Viljoen examines statements in Matthew that reflect these motifs, arguing that understanding them requires the recognition of their Jewish context. The article highlights parallels between Jesus's ministry and wisdom in Jewish literature, noting similar reactions to both. This investigation underscores a significant aspect of Matthew's Christology, presenting Jesus not only as a wise teacher but as the very personification of God's wisdom. For the Matthean community, Jesus's wisdom justifies his acceptance and vindicates him against opponents.

In his article, 'Double vindication, collective rebuke: Examining (Divine?) wisdom in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:35', Matthew Watson delves into the theological implications of wisdom [σοφία] as presented in these Gospels passages. The study explores the parallel narratives of Matthew 11:2–19 and Luke 7:18–35, focusing on the concluding wisdom statements. Watson argues that these passages collectively rebuke the generation's rejection of both John the Baptist and Jesus, while simultaneously vindicating divine wisdom. The article examines the presence of Wisdom Christology, suggesting that the wisdom statements serve as a divine endorsement of Jesus's and John's ministries.

Paul Creevey explores the concept of realised eschatology in the Gospel of John in his article, 'John's realised eschatology as an expression of the wisdom of God'. Realised eschatology suggests that eschatological events, traditionally viewed as future occurrences, are already being fulfilled in the present through Jesus's ministry. The article argues that John's Gospel presents this eschatological perspective as an expression of divine wisdom, emphasising the immediate and ongoing presence of God's kingdom. By examining key passages and theological themes, Creevey highlights how John's portrayal of Jesus's life and teachings reflects a present reality of salvation and divine wisdom, rather than a distant future hope. This approach challenges traditional eschatological views and offers a fresh understanding of the interplay between divine wisdom and eschatological fulfilment in the Christian faith.

The Epistles

Dirk G. van der Merwe's article, 'Lived experiences of the 'Wisdom of God' according to 1 Corinthians 2', explores the theological concept of the *wisdom of God* as presented by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. The study focuses on the second chapter, contrasting the *wisdom of God* with the *wisdom of the world*. Van der Merwe contextualises the Corinthian

circumstances and conducts a discourse analysis of the Greek text to uncover semantic networks. The article examines Paul's role as a communicator of this wisdom, the reception of the *wisdom of God*, and the role of the Holy Spirit in its revelation. It highlights how this wisdom is received and experienced in Christian life, emphasising the presence of God in Christ as righteousness, redemption, and sanctification.

In his article, 'With regard to persons: Divine election of the poor in James and Paul', Pieter Dirk Dekker challenges both the traditional Reformed view of divine election without regard to persons and advocates of prosperity gospels who consider wealth as a marker of election. Dekker argues that certain New Testament texts, specifically James 2:5, 1 Corinthians 1:27–29 and Romans 9–11, indicate that God indeed, in a way, elects regarding persons by choosing the poor and otherwise marginalised. He argues that this is an expression of divine wisdom in opposition to the so-called 'wisdom of this world'. Overall, his article contributes to the debate concerning divine election and the discussions on divine wisdom as an attribute of God.

Intertextual investigations

Albert J. Coetsee investigates a possible conceptual background of the well-known and important Hebrews 4:12–13 ('... the word of God is living and active ... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart ...') in his article, 'God knows all: An intertextual study of Hebrews 4:12–13 and Deuteronomy 29:28'. He indicates that while most scholars view Hebrews 4:12–13 as the author's own composition, which contains various parallels with Old Testament language and thought, very few consider Deuteronomy 29:28 (29:29 ET) as one of the possible conceptual backgrounds of the passage. Coetsee, in turn, argues that Hebrews 4:12–13 contains a conceptual echo of Deuteronomy 29:28. His investigation focuses on the phrase *the hidden things* known to God in Deuteronomy 29:28, which he argues from the wider context of Deuteronomy 29:15–27. It refers to 'the hidden intentions' of the human heart, which are known to God. Coetsee finds support for this interpretation of Deuteronomy 29:28 in Philo's *De Cherubim* 16. Returning to Hebrews, he indicates how viewing Deuteronomy 29:28 as one of the conceptual backgrounds of Hebrews 4:12–13 enhances the interpretation of the passage, and what the passage then reveals about the wisdom and knowledge of God.

We trust that readers will find these articles stimulating, and that they will lead to a greater understanding of the marvellous attribute of God's wisdom.

Reference

Viljoen, F.P. & Coetsee, A.J. (eds.), 2024, *Biblical theological investigations into the righteousness of God*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.