Such a Mind as This: A Biblical-Theological Study of Thinking in the Old Testament
Richard L. Smith
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Reviewed by John L. Marshall, Instructor in Christian Studies (Ret.)
Eastern University, St. Davids, PA, USA

C. S. Lewis observed that thinking is hard work. Few people know this better than those who make their living by using their minds constantly—doctors, lawyers, professors, and teachers, to name some of the most obvious examples. Actually, everyone thinks, even if we don't all belong to what is known as the 'learned' professions. We use our minds in demanding ways on a regular basis. We work to figure out why a family member or a friend or we ourselves suffered a major, inexplicable loss. We look for ways to strengthen our marriages or our parenting skills. We struggle with family budgets, trying to discern how to save money and spend it wisely. In short, our minds are chewing throughout any given day on any number of issues that are important to us.

Richard L. Smith is concerned about one sphere of thinking that should be important to every serious evangelical Christian but is all too often overlooked or ignored altogether. That sphere of thinking is God himself. Of course every Christian thinks of God on some level. Often, on Sunday mornings, we look forward to hearing sermons that will help us feel good about ourselves, but not cause us to have to work to grapple with the text being presented to us. (As Smith points out, insipid sermons don't help either.) And as for the rest of the week, we are often too preoccupied with the daily grind of life to spend mental energy thinking much about the One who made us, saved us, and sustains us.

Rather than trying to motivate us through guilt into using our minds more, Smith nudges us instead into considering a better motive—love. Jesus commands us to love God not only with all our heart and soul, but also with our mind. If God not only made and sustains us but also sacrificed his only Son to enfold us to himself forever, then our love for him should draw our mental energies to enfold God as the one who is to surround and permeate what and how we think about him and about everything else.

Thinking is an act of the intellect. But thinking is not the unique property of intellectuals. Many evangelicals might be put off by the word intellect, suspecting an underlying attitude of snobbery motivating the author. But as Smith (a senior advisor with Global Scholars) is careful to point out, the Old Testament—the focus of his study—'overflows with intellectuality. It contains a vast vocabulary and numerous idioms associated with thought and argumentation' (p. xxiii). He adds that 'the Old Testament calls us repeatedly to what we could call intellectual piety—loving God with our minds, not just our emotions' (p. xxiii).

As noted, Smith's focus is the Old Testament. He wants to show the ways it teaches that 'we will not honor God with our minds or reflect his glory if we lack knowledge and discernment.' 'Indeed, the Old Testament shows that we are *designed* for thinking' (p. xxi, emphasis in the original).

Smith breaks his study down into four categories. First, how did Adam think before the fall? He calls this the Edenic mindset. After the fall and humanity's expulsion from Eden, a new way of thinking set in, which he calls Exilic, involving foolishness, pride, and a quest for knowledge and understanding that is ultimately disruptive and destructive. This latter stage results in Punitive epistemology, namely, 'permanent inability to understand revelation as a form of divine judgment' (p. xxv).

Finally, into this bleak scenario the author inserts the mindset he calls Redemptive, which includes 'a heart to understand' (Deut. 29:4) and the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7). This redemptive epistemology is embodied fully in God's covenant with Israel. It shows us not only how to think correctly about God and his creation but also how to engage with the exilic mindset that is still very much with us in this fallen world.

Most of the chapters focus on a single book, with detailed analysis of Deuteronomy, Job, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, and Daniel, for example. One book the author finds especially valuable is Deuteronomy. He calls it 'the Rosetta stone of redemptive epistemology. It situates human beings as epistemological agents. It provides an infrastructure of knowledge for the individual, community, and culture' (p. 219). He sees it as a kind of epistemological Global Positioning System that keeps Israel on the right path amid the challenges of idolatry from other nations.

Smith includes a helpful postscript suggesting ways believers can use their minds in learning communities that he calls 'community gardens,' focusing on repentance, learning, service, and stewardship.

Because Smith's work centers on the Old Testament, it might be a bit unfair to criticize him for not interweaving more of the New Testament into this study, showing how it brings to fulfillment what the Old Testament foreshadows. He does reference many New Testament passages, giving us tantalizing hints of an even greater fullness yet to come and of how to think about it. One might wish that he will think (!) about producing a companion volume that will add to the insights of this one.