# CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



Was Solomon
Truly Wise?
-Charley Dewberry

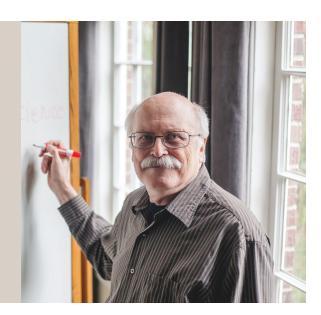
The Business of Education
-Chris Swanson

7 Alumni Spotlight: Sam Hobbs, Class of 2009

# **Was Solomon Truly Wise?**

# **Charley Dewberry**

Charley Dewberry is a tutor and the dean at Gutenberg College, a practicing scientist and stream ecologist, and the author of Saving Science: A Critique of Science and Its Role in Salmon Recovery (2004) and Intelligent Discourse: Exposing the Fallacious Standoff Between Evolution and Intelligent Design (2006). He has a M.A. in fisheries and wildlife and a Ph.D. in philosophy with an emphasis on philosophy of science.



olomon has always been an enigma to me. If he were the wisest man of his time, why couldn't he have avoided the poor choices that caused his life to take such a bad turn? Whether he was even righteous in God's eyes is also not clear. Wisdom appears to have been of little value to Solomon. While studying 1 Kings, however, I discovered a narrative that makes sense of Solomon's life and his wisdom.

# **Recapping Solomon's Life**

I will begin by recapping the major events in Solomon's life, as described in 1 Kings, and then develop and explore the narrative. When Solomon was a young man, he loved the Lord and walked in the statutes of David his father (1 Kings 3). While sacrificing at Gibeon because the temple was not yet completed, God came to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask what I shall give you," and Solomon chose wisdom. God commended Solomon's choice, rewarded him with riches and honor, and told him that He would "lengthen his days" if Solomon walked in His ways. Solomon's wisdom was made known when he discerned which of two women was the mother of a baby (1 Kings 3), and it was also described in terms of his vast creative output (proverbs and songs) and his vast knowledge of nature (1 Kings 4).

In the fourth year of his reign (1 Kings 6), Solomon was blessed with the opportunity to begin building the temple, which took seven years to build, and also to build an elaborate house for himself and his family, which took thirteen years to build (1 Kings 7). When the temple was complete, Solomon presided over its dedication and Israel's sacrifices to God (1 Kings 8). After the construction of the temple and the king's house, God came to Solomon a second time and told him again that if he would walk in the ways of the Lord, then He would establish Solomon's throne over Israel forever. If not, then Israel would be cast out and the temple destroyed.

1 Kings 10 describes the visit of the Queen of Sheba. Having "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions." She acknowledges Solomon's wisdom after he answers all her questions. One chapter later in 1 Kings 11, Solomon, who had become very wealthy, is described as having acquired 700 wives and 300 concubines. Many of these women were foreign, even though this was prohibited by God, and Solomon built altars and offered sacrifices to his wives' foreign gods. As a result of his not walking in the ways of the Lord, God became angry and took the throne of a united Israel away from Solomon's son. (God did not take the throne away from Solomon because of His promise to David). The last event in Solomon's life that 1 Kings records is his attempt to kill Jeroboam, whom God had chosen to receive the tribes He would take from Solomon's son (1 Kings 11).

## **Exploring the Narrative**

Solomon's life story is very disturbing. Reconciling his "wisdom" with the events of his life is difficult. Why did

his life go so wrong if he were so wise? Looking more closely at the narrative of his life may help provide an answer. We'll start with Solomon telling God what gift he desired:

"And you shall give to your servant [Solomon] a heart to hear and to judge your people in righteousness, to discern between good and evil, for who will be able to judge the weighty things of your people?"

And it was pleasing before the LORD that Solomon requested this thing. And the LORD said to him, "Because you have requested this thing from me and did not request for yourself many days and did not request riches and did not request the souls of your enemies but requested for yourself understanding to listen to cases, behold, I have done according to your word; behold, I have given you a wise heart and skill. There has not been a man like you nor a man like you to come." (1 Kings 3:8-12, Septuagint, translation mine)

What Solomon had in mind was the ability to be a discerning king, one who had the ability to make difficult judgements. The example of Solomon discerning which of two women was the mother of a child is a paradigm case of this type of discernment (1 Kings 3:16-28).

We also have another description of Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kings 4:29-33:

And the LORD gave to Solomon judgment and great wisdom and a large heart, as the sands along the sea. And Solomon's wisdom was being multiplied

beyond the ancient wisdom and beyond the wisdom of Egypt.... Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 5,000, and he spoke of wood from the Cedars of Lebanon and when the hyssop comes out through the walls, and he spoke concerning animals: winged animals, creeping animals, and fish. (Septuagint, translation mine)

Here Solomon's wisdom is described in terms of his vast creative output (proverbs and songs) and his vast knowledge of nature. This seems strange, however, as if the Bible is only saying that Solomon was smart—that is, he knew a lot. But how was that knowledge considered wisdom?

So far, we've seen that Solomon's wisdom consisted of knowledge and the ability to discern and make judgements in court. Apparently, this wisdom did not serve him well, however. He took hundreds of foreign wives and concubines, built altars to their gods, and sacrificed to their gods. Clearly, he was not walking with God, and both he and the nation of Israel suffered greatly.

The key to putting together the narrative is to recognize that Solomon's life paralleled Israel's history. Both were given commandments and statutes and asked to walk in the ways of the Lord. Both did not, and God punished them.

Throughout the Torah, we see a recurring theme in the history of Israel. God gives them commandments and statues to follow, and they do not follow them. Then God punishes them. They particularly succumb to marrying foreign wives and sacrificing to foreign gods, both of which were strictly prohibited.

In Deuteronomy 30:11-14, after Moses had finished reading numerous commandments to the people, he anticipates the people's reaction:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so

that you can do it." (ESV)

Moses knew the people believed that what he had laid out was really complicated. In their minds, they needed someone to remind them of it all. They believed that if they could remember all of it, then they would do it. Moses was telling them, "You know what God is asking. You are either oriented toward God or you are not. If you are oriented toward God, then you will keep the law." Soon after, just before he died, God told Moses that Israel would go after foreign gods and break the covenant with Him (Deuteronomy 31:16-17). And they did

Like Israel, something other than knowledge of the law was necessary to keep Solomon walking in the ways of the Lord. He was a Davidic king, David's son, and the wisest man alive, but that was not enough to keep him walking in the ways of the Lord. While he started out walking in the ways of the Lord, later we find him with hundreds of wives and concubines and sacrificing to their gods. Clearly, his wisdom was not enough to keep him walking in the ways of the Lord. Something else was necessary.

The fundamental point of Solomon's narrative, I think, is this: knowledge and wisdom are not enough to ensure that the wisest man alive walks in the ways of the Lord. Solomon even acknowledged this in his dedication of the temple when he prayed that God would incline his and the people's hearts to Him, to walk in His ways (1 Kings 8:58). Solomon and Israel are supposed to realize that it is God who authors each person's history, who changes each person's heart, for His purposes.

The "something else" that both the people of Israel and Solomon needed was for God to orient their hearts towards Him. Only then would they keep the commandments. Even though the people of Israel continued to fail again and again, God promised them that one day he would write the commandments on their hearts, and they would keep them. But what about Solomon? While the parallel between Israel's and Solomon's narratives makes sense of many of the various descriptions of Solomon's life, it does not address him as an individual,

Continued on page 4



•-----

SPRING 2019 • VOLUME 1, NUMBER 3

**Editor** Robby Julian

Colloquy team Chris Alderman, Eliot Grasso, Erin Greco, Walter Steeb, Chris Swanson

Cover Photograph Carina Crabtree (GC alumna, 2012)

Other Photography Carina Crabtree (photo of Hobbs family); Kate Grasso (designed Summer Institute and workshop posters); Erin Greco (photos of Charley Dewberry, Katherine Dewberry, Audrey Barton, Chris Swanson, Sam Hobbs, community class, residence room); Elizabeth Steeb (photo of GC building).

Layout Robby Julian

Proofreaders Karen Peters, Walter Steeb

Colloquy [kol-uh-kwee] is published quarterly by Gutenberg College.



Gutenberg College offers an outstanding four-year liberal arts education in the Great Books tradition in an environment respectful of biblical Christianity.

President Chris Swanson, Ph.D. Provost Eliot Grasso, Ph.D. Dean Thomas (Charley) Dewberry, Ph.D.

Website www.gutenberg.edu

© 2019 Gutenberg College, Inc.

Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided the following credit line is used: "Reprinted by permission from Colloquy, a publication of Gutenberg College, www.gutenberg.edu."

### Subscription free upon request.

Visit www.gutenberg.edu/home to subscribe.

Gutenberg is supported primarily through individual, tax-exempt contributions.



**Katherine Dewberry** 



**Audrey Barton** 

# Farewell and Welcome

In April, Gutenberg bid a sad farewell to Katherine Dewberry, who is moving on to a new position after serving the college for four years as its administrative assistant. We would like to thank Katherine for all of her hard work and dedication to Gutenberg and its students and supporters. We will miss her, and we wish her all the best!

We would also like to welcome Audrey Barton, Gutenberg's new administrative assistant. Audrey is a senior at Gutenberg. She will work part time in the office until she graduates in June, after which she will join Gutenberg's administrative team full time.

# Was Solomon Truly Wise?

Continued from page 3.

nor does it address the role of wisdom in his life. It would appear that he failed to continue walking with the Lord until he died. If so, then his wisdom did not play much of a role in his ultimate destiny; it did not serve him well. While I find this narrative of Solomon's life possible, something seems lacking. Another possibility is worth considering.

A more plausible narrative entails a richer concept of wisdom than we have discussed so far. The young man Solomon asked for wisdom, and God granted him both a sharp mind that accumulated lots of knowledge and a high level of discernment. What Solomon lacked, however, was life experience. Wisdom is a lifelong process, but that aspect is missing from the 1 King's account. Maybe Solomon came to a fuller understanding of wisdom in his old age by reflecting on the life he had lived and, as a result, saw that both he and Israel had suffered greatly because of his choices. Maybe he turned toward God instead of continuing to be a rebel. That would be a mark of true, mature wisdom.

Many songs and stories have been written in this vein. In Bob Dylan's song, "Trying to Get to Heaven," an old man reflects on his life:

I've been to Sugar Town, I shook the sugar down Now I'm trying to get to heaven before they close the door

The man in this song strikes me as someone who has lived a lot of life, trying to grab it for all it was worth, but who has not been satisfied by what it had to offer. However, the process of grabbing and failing to find satisfaction has led the man to wisdom about what is valuable and what is not.

Maybe Solomon's life went similarly. After all, Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, and it looks like an old man's book. Solomon is clearly reflecting on the life that he has lived and the decisions that he has made. Ecclesiastes certainly contains an element of regret, but is Solomon turning to God instead of away from God? The last two verses of Ecclesiastes seem to be the key:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, ESV)

In his old age, Solomon had at least concluded intellectually that the whole duty of man is to fear God and to keep His commandments, which is ironic since, probably as a younger man, he wrote in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (ESV). Even though Solomon's wisdom was partially described in terms of his authoring many proverbs and songs, I suspect that when he authored Ecclesiastes he had a much deeper knowledge and understanding than when he wrote Proverbs 1.

There are two possible conclusions for Solomon: one, that while he regretted the decisions of his life, he remained a rebel against God; or two, he not only regretted his life decisions but also repented and turned toward God. 1 Kings 3:8 gives us an additional clue: God said that he was giving Solomon a "wise and discerning heart" (NASB). The term wise here is ambiguous, but I would like to believe that God meant truly wise. In the end, only God can judge Solomon's heart and determine his destiny, but I would like to think that Solomon ultimately did become truly wise and repented.

In this article, I have endeavored to present a plausible narrative to account for Solomon's life and wisdom. The key to understanding his life is to see that wisdom was not enough to keep him walking with the Lord. Rather, God is authoring history, and He authored Solomon's life, which paralleled Israel's history of failing to walk in the ways of God. The parallel, however, does little to make sense of Solomon's wisdom as an individual. Solomon's "wisdom" may have been a lifelong process that culminated in his writing Ecclesiastes. Gaining true wisdom entails suffering and bowing the knee to one's Creator. Whether or not Solomon repented, I cannot say with any certainty. That is in God's hands.



# The Business of Education

# **Chris Swanson**

In the few years I have been president of Gutenberg College, I have slowly come to an important realization about higher education: Most of the other institutions of higher education are businesses. This has come as a bit of a surprise since, on the face of it, universities and colleges do not appear to be businesses. They look like nonprofit organizations devoted to their educative missions. Under the surface, however, and in fundamental ways, their missions are subservient to their business goals. While students and families are understandably interested in purchasing the product offered by these businesses, they should understand what they are buying—and what they are not.

By "business," I do not mean that these universities and colleges are profit seeking. I mean that many colleges and universities have adopted the attitudes and mindset of a business, for instance, the following:

- 1) Businesses structure their operations around the most efficient means to earn profit. Businesses may also have other goals, but for the large majority, these goals are subservient to profit. So, for instance, a business may have the goal of excellent customer service, but this goal is a means to an end: profit.
- Businesses are market-oriented. They try to respond to market demand and to influence that demand. They engage in advertising. They are constantly analyzing their sales and modifying their product lines to generate the most profit.
- 3) Businesses are transactional with customers and employees. Relationships are for the sake of business, not the other way around.

Higher education shares all these characteristics. Colleges and universities describe themselves as nonprofit teaching and research organizations. And, of course, this is true. But fundamentally they are businesses with products: degrees. What takes the place of "profit" in higher education is growth and reputation. Their customers are students. Their sales team is Admissions. Their corporate executives are the chief administrators. To be clear, nothing is wrong with colleges improving efficiency or advertising. We at Gutenberg also do these things. The issue is goals. In a business, products and customers serve the profit interests of the business. In a college, it should be the other way around; a college should serve the interests of its students. But when students exist for the sake of the college instead of the college existing for the sake of the student, the college's goals are inverted. Such an inversion has a profound impact on all aspects of higher education.

Numerous telltale signs reveal this business orientation. Consider costs. In an article about the rising cost of college, the New York Times reported, "while the total number of full-time faculty members in the C.S.U. [California] system grew from 11,614 to

(Continued on page 6)



Friedrich Nietzsche On the Genealogy of Morals A new translation by Douglas Smi OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

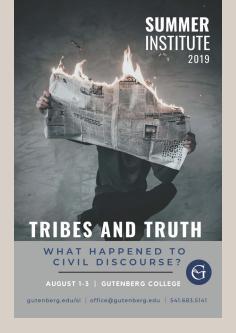


# by Chris Alderman

How did we come by our moral values, and of what value are they to us? These are the unusual questions posed at the outset of Friedrich Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals, which Gutenberg students read in the winter of their junior or senior year. Nietzsche's whole body of work continues to exert a profound influence on thinkers today, but it is the Genealogy, with its sustained critique of conventional morality, that presents his most controversial ideas most systematically.

Nietzsche's training was as a linguist, and on the basis of linguistic analysis he argues that the terms good and bad, originally applied by the ruling classes to themselves and their subjects, were replaced at a certain point in history by good and evil ... and then reversed. This bait-and-switch was the work of a particularly resentful people—the Jewsas they grasped for the power that their political weakness had denied them. The "bait," according to Nietzsche? Jesus of Nazareth.

Nietzsche has been called an anti-Semite, the Antichrist, even a lunatic. It behooves us, however, to resist the temptation to dismiss his work solely on the basis of what he would call its "smell." After all, such a reading would be no different from the one he himself gives in the Genealogy: a reading that refuses charity to its subjects. Nietzsche's great achievement was to remind philosophers of history, and at the end of his most famous work, one is left with a renewed sense of the importance of the old question: What really happened?



# Summer Institute

We've all witnessed how incivility and disparagement are increasingly dominant in public discourse. Whether it be news, social media, or personal conversations, the rhetoric is ratcheting up. This summer Gutenberg would like to explore why this is happening and how a Christian might respond. We will not try to convince you of a particular political viewpoint or offer the definitive solution. Instead, together we will dig under the surface to gain a fresh understanding of the social and philosophical forces at play so that we can answer this question for ourselves: Where do our loyalties lie, with tribe or truth?

### When

Thursday night, August 1, 5:30 to 9:00 PM Friday night, August 2, 4:45 to 9:00 PM Saturday, August 3, 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM

### Cost

(Includes dinner on Friday night, continental breakfast on Saturday morning, and lunch on Saturday):

Before July 1: \$85 (Individual); \$115 (Family); \$40 (Student)

July 1 and after: \$100 (Individual); \$130 (Family); \$45 (Student)

Summer Institute is an enjoyable and informative time to experience Gutenberg by sharing meals, discussing the works of influential thinkers, and listening to speakers from the Gutenberg community. Come join us!

Visit gutenberg.edu/si for details.

# The Business of Education

Continued from page 3

12,019 between 1975 and 2008, the total number of administrators grew from 3,800 to 12,183."1 The growth in numbers of administrators is coupled with growth in salaries and bonuses. A report on salaries in The Washington Post said, "What higher education is doing is mirroring the behaviors of the corporate world." Some of this administrative growth is no doubt due to changes in state and federal regulation and oversight—but not all. Most is due to the increasing business orientation toward advertising, non-academic services, alternative revenue generation, and strategic planning. The rise in costs of higher education has far outpaced inflation, but those increases have not improved the education.

Campus construction also indicates a college's business orientation. The University of Oregon, for instance, has been engaged in major building projects for at least twenty-five years without a break. But few of these building projects improve the teaching of foreign languages, for instance. They are more like the leather seats and stereo systems in upscale cars than the engines or suspension systems. They increase the UO's curb appeal and enhance brand desirability to attract students and increase market share.

Consider also how reputation is measured in higher education. What makes one school a "good school" and another second-rate is largely based on nebulous cultural beliefs circulated by word of mouth. The complexity and variety of institutions makes it difficult for a student or family to make an independent, informed judgment. Students and parents are left in a position similar to that of a car buyer trying to compare the mechanical quality of Ford and GM engines. In both cases, reputation is a decisive factor, and reputation is cultivated through advertising and brand awareness. Winning a PAC 12 football championship is probably one of the best means of obtaining growth and reputation because it enhances the brand.

Colleges and universities exhibit a wide variety of other business orientation indicators as well. For instance, they are ever broadening their degree and course offerings to cater to consumer demand while abandoning a core curriculum in liberal arts. Student consumers purchase the degree "product" because of its usefulness in the marketplace. Academic demands on students are curtailed to improve the "customer experience" at the expense of learning. Faculty and administrators are often hired and promoted for their potential to improve reputation and growth (profit), not for their educative benefit. Athletics is an enormous independent subsidiary corporation providing income and advertising, not an activity to enhance health and build character. Student retention is pursued as a key indicator for college ranking, not with the good of the student in mind.

The business model has "worked" for many institutions. Colleges and universities devote resources and talent to increase applications and reputation, and they make gains in these areas. But in the process, central, traditional goals of college have been devalued. To help students mature in character and wisdom, to help them gain an understanding of themselves, to help them know what is true—these are the casualties of business. A college's proper business should be serving students. This is the model that Gutenberg subscribes to. For, as former president David Crabtree has said, "A student is not a customer. A student is a soul. And a soul is a precious thing."

Chris Swanson is the president and a tutor at Gutenberg College, where he teaches science and leads discussions in Microexegesis, Western Civilization, and the Great Conversation. He holds a Ph.D. in physics from the University of Oregon.

Campos, Paul F., "The Real Reason College Tuition Costs So Much." New York Times, April 4, 2015. Accessed March 28, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/opinion/sunday/thereal-reason-college-tuition-costs-so-much.html?\_r=0.

Svrluga, Susan, "As college costs keep rising for students, so does presidential pay. Could that change?" The Washington Post, Grade Point blog, January 5, 2018. Accessed March 28, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2018/01/05/as-college-costs-keep-risingfor-students-so-does-presidential-pay-could-that-change/?noredirect=on&utm\_term=.385e4f18085e.  $\Theta$ 

# **Alumni Spotlight:** Sam Hobbs, Class of 2009

Sam Hobbs likes to work with his hands. He makes his living as a licensed building contractor and calls his business "Craftsman Hobbs." Some might wonder, then, why he chose to come to Gutenberg and whether the education he received here helps him in his work.

Sam was raised in the Ozarks, where his father runs a welding business. After he graduated from high school, someone suggested that he was not a good candidate for college, especially since he had not done well in math. But his mother heard about Gutenberg from a friend, and she took Sam to visit. Sam says he was impressed with the friendliness of the students and how the tutors responded to questions.

"The tutors gave thoughtful answers that fit the questions rather than giving prepared answers that kind of fit the questions. When an ignorant eighteen-year-old asked an ill-formed question, instead of belittling, the tutors gave honest and intriguing answers, as though the student had asked something important—which even eighteenyear-olds manage to do sometimes."

Sam graduated in 2009. While at school and afterward, he did a variety of jobs, mostly working with his hands. Several people in the community recognized his natural abilities and encouraged him to become a contractor. Now that Sam is a licensed contractor, how does he feel about his liberal arts edu-

Sam says, "I'm very glad I came to Gutenberg. I learned a lot about how to think and how to ask questions." He adds, "A Gutenberg education is not without its advantages in the workplace. One must read contracts very carefully, and careful reading is taught at Gutenberg. One must listen with a view to hearing what people are saying, and that





can be learned at Gutenberg. And until Gutenberg, I never understood geometry, and now I employ geometry as a carpenter." But more important to Sam is this: "Gutenberg's education has been incalculably useful in orienting me and many other students toward the value of the projects that our Western Civilization has been engaged in for 2500 years and the project that mankind has undertaken since the Beginning, that is, dealing with God."

Looking back on his Gutenberg education, Sam says, "I couldn't have asked for a better education. Sure, I could have pursued other options to make more money. But I'm quite sure that I would be very confused about what the world

is about—the same way I was when I graduated from high school. Now as a contractor, I go about my business with some confidence that I have examined who mankind is and what is required of me. I have oriented myself toward God and can pursue in peace the mundane concerns of money and reputation."

We at Gutenberg are glad that Sam and his wife, Bryn, who is also a Gutenberg graduate, continue to be part of the Gutenberg community. They live nearby in Springfield, Oregon, where they are raising their son and daughter, Alasdair and Irene, and employ Sam's skills on their own house.



COLLOQUY Spring 2019



1883 University Street Eugene, OR 97403

541.683.5141 | office@gutenberg.edu

www.gutenberg.edu



NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
EUGENE, OREGON
PERMIT NO. 594



Community Classes gutenberg.edu/cc

These free classes meet at Gutenberg on Wednesday evenings, 7:00 to 8:30 pm. Spring quarter's topic is "Intersections: Christianity and the Great Books."



Residence Program gutenberg.edu/rp

Gutenberg's Residence Program also welcomes young adults who either attend other colleges in Eugene or work in the community and who are interested in participating in Gutenberg community activities. Apply now for summer and fall 2019.

