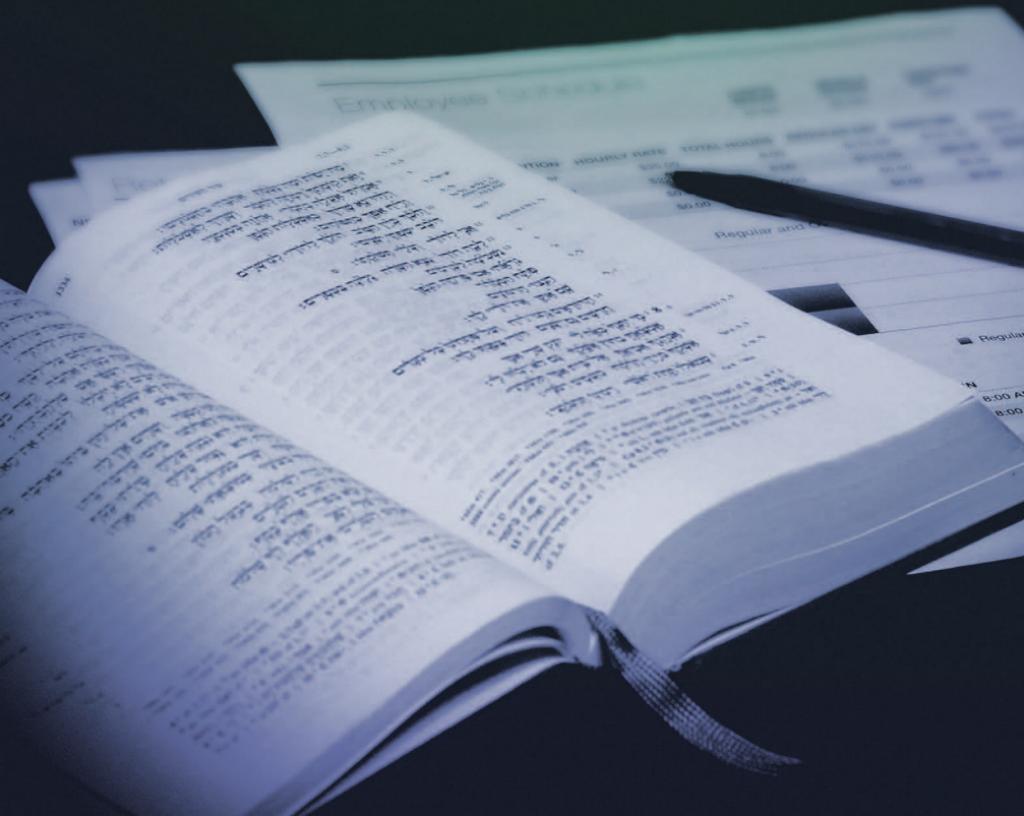


ECCLESIASTES FOR MANAGERS

Maarten Verkerk & Jan Hoogland

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Worldly Wisdom for Executives and Professionals



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MANAGERS AND PROFESSIONALS

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DORDT COLLEGE PRESS

Cover by Rob Haan
Layout by Carla Goslinga

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This book was translated from the Dutch – *Prediker voor Managers: Levenswijsheid voor bestuurders en professionals* (Kampen: Ten Have, 2010) – by Henry Baron. The translation was edited by John H. Kok.

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Printed in the United States of America.

Dordt College Press
498 Fourth Avenue NE
Sioux Center, Iowa 51250

www.dordt.edu/DCPcatalog

ISBN: 978-1-940567-18-1

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018942822

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FOREWORD

The second half of the twentieth century was an era in which it appeared that we would finally be able to take control of our own destiny. More than ever we defined our own conditions of life, particularly in the West. Furthermore, after the collapse of communism and the rise of neo-liberalism the optimism about the blessings of the worldwide propagation of the free market system grew. Then the setbacks set in: the attacks of 11 September 2001, the failed wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the credit crunch that was to become an economic crisis. These are some of the realities that confront us with the spirit of our times and with the basic principles of our culture based on technical control and economic progress. This is why it is a good thing that we are made to stop and ask ourselves what our lives should really be about. What is the purpose of our lives? Why do we let certain things worry us? What will remain of all our efforts? And what is in it for ourselves and our fellow man?

These questions are quite difficult to answer. We are swayed by the issues of the day. We are trapped in the fast rhythm of our culture. Is it possible to escape those misapprehensions and dynamics? One way to achieve this goal is to return to ancient sources. The book of Ecclesiastes is such a source, one of the wisdom books in the Bible; a scroll that used to be read at the Feast of Tabernacles. The speaker is a teacher of wisdom who critically questions the notions of his time. In literary fashion he gave his pupils (then) and his readers (now) food for thought. He teaches them to see their lives and everything that happens in a different light.

It turns out that this scripture, which is over two thousand years old, offers a surprising perspective on current issues. It deals with joy and sadness, fairness and injustice, life and death, and a meaningful and fulfilled life. It makes us reflect on the vulnerability of our existence, the unpredictability of the future, and the impossibility of controlling our lives. It defines us with respect to the value of rhetoric, the pitfalls of rational planning, the falsehood of new man-

agement approaches, the limited value of a proper strategy, and the importance of a receptive life.

We wrote this book with managers, entrepreneurs, leaders, executives, and professionals in mind. They, after all, hold positions where wisdom of life can make the difference in our society. For stylistic purposes we generally refer to this group with the words “manager” and “he.”

Our book largely follows the message of the biblical book Ecclesiastes. Each chapter discusses a theme from this book by means of a few verses.

The Teacher teaches us to put the wisdom of our times into perspective; a lesson that also relates to the “wisdom” of this book. He ends his book with these fitting words: “Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body” (Chapter 12 verse 12, hereafter referred to as 12:12).

Jan Hoogland
Maarten Verkerk