

Proverbs, Session 12: The Tree of Life (Proverbs 10–15)

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Session 12

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Abstract

In this teaching session on the Book of Proverbs, Dr. August Konkell explores chapters 10 through 15 with a focus on the recurring biblical metaphor of the "Tree of Life." He demonstrates that true wisdom is not a transactional formula guaranteeing worldly success, but rather the internal cultivation of godly character, values, and righteous living. Highlighting the power of speech and human interactions, the lecture illustrates how healing words and soft answers nourish community life while foolishness and deceit bring destruction. Ultimately, the session emphasizes that living righteously builds a lasting legacy and honors God regardless of outward circumstances.

Outline

I. Introduction to Solomon's Collection (Proverbs 10–15)

- A. Overview of chapters 10–15 within Solomon's 375 proverbs
- B. Antithetical structure and thematic motifs
- C. The recurring motif of the Tree of Life

II. The Metaphor of the Tree of Life in Cultural Context

- A. Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical background
 - 1. Universal concept of trees representing life and rejuvenation
 - 2. Cultural contrast: Asherah in Canaanite religion and cultic sites (e.g., Kuntillet Ajrud)
 - 3. Biblical and Temple symbolism (Solomon's temple engravings)

III. Tree of Life Motifs in Proverbs

- A. Proverbs 11:30 – The Fruit of Righteousness
 - 1. Righteous character as sustenance and benefit to community
 - 2. Understanding "one who saves souls" (Hebrew nephesh vs. Greek psuche)
 - 3. Linguistic flexibility and Tyndale's translation context
- B. Proverbs 13:12 – Fulfilled Desire and Hope
 - 1. Disillusionment of deferred hope versus encouragement of fulfilled desire
 - 2. Critical importance of maintaining hope and timely words of encouragement
- C. Proverbs 15:1–4 – Power of Words and Healing Speech

1. Soft answers vs. painful, anger-stirring retorts
2. Wise tongue vs. foolish babbling in daily life and academia
3. Proverbs 15:4: A healing tongue as a Tree of Life

IV. Motivation and Character in Wisdom Literature

- A. Refuting strict retributive determinism (critique of Klaus Koch)
 1. Doing right does not guarantee automatic external success
 2. Internalizing virtue: focus on becoming the right person
- B. Personal and Community Benefits
 1. Personal legacy, reputation, security, and joy in God
 2. Community impact: righteousness exalts cities; slandering destroys neighbors

V. Conclusion

- A. Wisdom as internalizing values and seeking godly character
- B. Leaving a lasting, transformative legacy through righteous living