

WISDOM IS A TREE OF LIFE (PROV. 3:18): A CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

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Abstract: This article examines a proverbial saying *WISDOM IS A TREE OF LIFE* (Prov. 3:18) through the lens of conceptual metaphor. Such a metaphor works by mapping two conceptual domains. The direction goes from the *SOURCE* domain (an ancient myth of a miraculous tree that whets human's appetite for eternal youth) to the *TARGET* domain (a concept of wisdom in life). Conceptual metaphor helps us to understand that the tree metaphor in Prov. 3:18 instills in the readers' mind a kind of reward powerful enough to motivate them to pursue wisdom and to persevere in that quest. The boon will arouse their desire so that they will do anything. This article also suggests that the tree metaphor in Proverbs receives its fuller sense through Prov. 11:30; 13:12; 15:4. Conceptual metaphor, thus, enables the reader to notice a holistic presentation of the book of Proverbs, which has been all too often considered as a compilation of various self-contained sayings.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, stylistic metaphor, wisdom, tree of life, desire, boon

Abstrak: Artikel ini menganalisis ungkapan *HIKMAT ADALAH POHON KEHIDUPAN* (Ams. 3:18) dengan perspektif metafora konseptual. Metafora konseptual adalah sebuah pendekatan linguistik yang menitikberatkan pemetaan relasi yang terjadi antara dua domain yang berbeda. Pada ayat tersebut, akan dicermati arah pergerakan dari domain *SUMBER* (yakni, sebuah mitos kuno tentang pohon mujarab yang berkhasiat menghidupkan) menuju domain *TARGET* (yakni, konsep kebijaksanaan dalam hidup). Tidak seperti metafora stilistika yang berfokus pada aspek keindahan bahasa metaforis itu sendiri, metafora konseptual lebih berfokus pada proses pemahaman kognitif yang ada dalam benak si pembaca. Melalui kajian konseptual ini, akan ditunjukkan bagaimana metafora pohon kehidupan (Ams. 3:18) beserta aspek mitologisnya

menstimulasi imajinasi para pembaca tentang adanya ganjaran yang amat menggiurkan ketika seseorang mengejar hikmat. Ia akan tergerak untuk melakukan segala daya upaya dalam meraih hikmat demi memperoleh ganjaran tersebut. Artikel ini juga bertujuan menunjukkan bahwa ketiga pemunculan lain dari metafora pohon ini (pada Ams. 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) rupanya berperan menyajikan gambaran yang lebih utuh mengenai pohon mujarab ini. Apabila dilihat lebih luas lagi, keempat ayat secara bersama-sama mengikat seluruh isi kitab Amsal. Metafora konseptual tentang pohon kehidupan ini menawarkan sebuah gagasan holistik terhadap pembacaan kitab Amsal.

Kata-kata Kunci: metafora stilistika, metafora konseptual, hikmat, pohon kehidupan, ganjaran

INTRODUCTION

The book of Proverbs is pedagogical.¹ It contains various collections of sayings² which aim at a specific educational task, namely, how to turn an immature person into a wise one.³ The concern of the book is about how this person must learn, what he needs to master, and where this training leads to (Prov. 1:1-7).⁴ Reaching the point of adulthood, he needs an appropriate preparation in order to assume responsibility not only for his own life but also for the society to which he belongs. He is trained to become a leader in the society.⁵ The expected outcome of this

1 According to James L. Crenshaw, the book of Proverbs belongs to the ancient Israel educational movement that focuses on "moral formation"; cf. James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 58. Similar to this, Stuart Weeks contends that the book of Proverbs, particularly Prov. 1-9, has a genre-affinity to Egyptian instructions; cf. Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 15.

2 The book of Proverbs is divided into seven collections, each with a different heading. Proverbs of Solomon 10:1-22:16; Sayings of the Wise 22:17-24:22; Another Sayings of the Wise 24:23-34; Proverbs of Solomon transcribed by the Scribes of Hezekiah 25:1-29:27; Sayings of Agur 30:1-33; and Sayings of Lemuel 31:1-31 are all included.

3 In this regard, consult the study of Tomáš Frydrych, *Living under the Sun: Examination of Proverbs and Qoheleth* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 35.

4 Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 18A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 131.

5 Kyle C. Dunham, "Structure and Theology in Proverbs: Its Function as an Educational

program is depicted in the final chapter of the book: a qualified person whose good judgments are sought at the city gates (31:23), and who finds happiness together with his capable wife (31:11,28) in their family⁶. In order to achieve this goal, the book of Proverbs offers various pedagogical strategies. One of them is tied to one's motivation to seek wisdom, as described in Prov. 3:18. To make this particular strategy work, Prov. 3:18 links wisdom to an ancient Near East myth of a magic tree that bestows eternal youth.⁷

This article defines three tasks. The first one is to introduce conceptual metaphor as an operative approach that differs from a stylistic approach. The second is to demonstrate how the conceptual metaphor of "wisdom is a tree of life" works. The third is to explore more nuances of that metaphor by examining other three verses mentioning the tree metaphor (Prov. 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). This article proposes that all four occurrences of this metaphor carry a pedagogical purpose, namely, to encourage the reader to be perseverant in pursuing wisdom.⁸ It also encourages the reader to consider the book as a unitary and cohesive collection rather than as a compilation of self-contained sayings.

In its essence, metaphor is a mode of expression.⁹ It can be approached either as a stylistic device or a cognitive one, depending on the reader's assumption regarding the author's intention. As a stylistic

Program for Novice Leaders in Ancient Israel," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 29, no. 3 (2019), p. 372.

- 6 For a further survey on how an inexperienced person is trained to become a mature one, see the study by Bernadus Dirgaprimawan, *The Inexperienced Person and the Journey to Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs* (Analecta Biblica 237; Rome: GBPress, 2022).
- 7 The tree of life appears in the Eden narrative (Gen. 2-3) and then reappears four times in the book of Proverbs (Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4).
- 8 When the word "reader" is referred to, it includes both male and female audiences. Yet, for the sake of comprehension, the text will employ its personal pronoun and pronoun in male form.
- 9 In the Hebrew poetry, metaphor is as important as parallelism. The word metaphor originates from its Greek root which means the "carrying over" (*meta* "trans" + *pherein* "to carry"). Meaning is transferred when something familiar is changed into something different. See the study of William P. Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 258.

device, metaphor substitutes one term for another that is aesthetically more pleasing, and thus producing stronger rhetorical effects.¹⁰ For example, later it will be said so boldly toward the end of the paragraph, the psalmist proclaims, “God is my shield” (Psalm 28:7). Here, the relationship between the psalmist and God is substituted in terms of weaponry. Instead of uttering a common sentence, such as “God is protecting me from enemy attacks”, or “God is keeping me safe from hostile assaults”, the psalmist boldly declares, “God is my shield”. Such a powerful expression is short, poetic, and thus is pleasing to its audience.

As the study of metaphors progresses, another viewpoint derived from linguistic study gains prominence. More scholars recognize that metaphors are intimately connected to people’s concrete experience and have the capacity to structure human thought.¹¹ Thus, as a cognitive device, conceptual metaphor correlates one domain of experience in terms of another. The substitution of one for the other aims at a better understanding of the domain under consideration. Having profited from the pioneering work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson *Metaphors We Live By*¹² that has become a classic in the field, biblical scholars are in-

10 In his examination, Job Y. Jindo notices how rhetorical aspects have dominated the general scholarship on metaphor, prior to the cognitive one. He traces it back to writings of Aristotle, in particular *Poetics* 21, 1457b9-16 and 20-22; and *Rhetoric* III as well. He notes that even for Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher, metaphors are rhetorical embellishments that present a text aesthetically more pleasing. See Job Y. Jindo, “Metaphor Theory and Biblical Texts,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, ed. Steven. L. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

11 Paul Ricoeur, for example, emphasizes that metaphors have the power to change the reality we experience by redescribing it. Metaphors are able to change the words and even the myths that shape the world where we live. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 306.

12 The authors George Lakoff and Mark Johnson show that a common conceptual framework that is basically metaphorical governs how people think and behave. They illustrate their claim by mentioning metaphors such as “time is money” and “life is a journey” which underlie many people’s views and their behavior toward their surrounding reality. Conceptual metaphors are tools for understanding, used to help structure thought; cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, second edition 2003). See also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); cf. George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

terested in investigating how metaphors are applied by biblical authors to communicate adequately a certain understanding woven in the text. For Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphor works when it satisfies a purpose, that is, a purpose of understanding. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think*¹³ advances a further development on this conceptual metaphor. They introduce the concept of mental spaces and of blends in order to show how the mind works. This article also finds helpful the third generation in the study of conceptual metaphor by Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom* (2017).

Tilford identifies three advantages of analyzing biblical texts using the study of conceptual metaphor.¹⁴ First, compared to the traditional literary approaches, a conceptual analysis of metaphor often reveals more of the hidden connections and nuances of certain passages.¹⁵ Second, the study of conceptual metaphor allows biblical scholars to appreciate how the early Jews pondered their thoughts. Such study demonstrates that they were not typically thinkers in the direct manner of people in the modern West. They interacted physically with their surroundings and utilized images based on that engagement, to explain to the audience their thought on abstract concepts, such as faithfulness or compassion.¹⁶ Third, the study of conceptual metaphor assists biblical scholars in understanding how biblical authors communicate their religious convictions to the audience. For instance, when describing God, an author employs the metaphor of a father to speak of the close relationship between the divine and the human.¹⁷

13 See Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

14 Tilford observes that wisdom metaphors found in Psalms and Proverbs are not simply literary devices. Those metaphors, employed by the authors, are "conceptual systems that drew upon embodied experiences to structure the worldview of ancient sapiential communities and enable those communities to communicate their core values to future generations"; cf. Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), p. 209.

15 Tilford, *Sensing World*, p. 209.

16 Tilford, *Sensing World*, p. 210.

17 Tilford, *Sensing World*, p. 210.

DISCUSSION

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: WISDOM IS A TREE OF LIFE (PROV. 3:18)

עֲצֵי-חַיִּים הִיא לַמְחַזְקִים בָּהּ וְתִמְכֶּיָּהּ מֵאֲשֶׁר

She is a tree of life to those who hold her firmly;

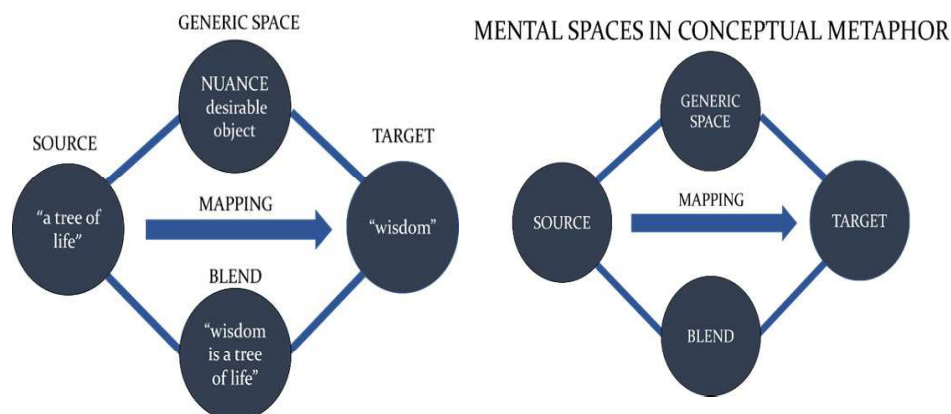
and those who lean on her are fortunate¹⁸

According to scholars mentioned above, metaphor is a mental map people use to understand their complex experiences which include abstract thoughts as well. Following such a definition, this article suggests that the author of Prov. 3:18 attempts to understand wisdom by correlating it with a magic tree that bestows an eternal youth. In composing this tree metaphor, the author depends on the available conceptual model of a magic tree, stored in the collective memory of the people, represented in the ancient Mesopotamian mythology of a sacred tree and in the Eden narrative (Gen. 2–3) as well.¹⁹ The mapping goes from the SOURCE domain in this case “a tree of life” to the TARGET domain, that is, “wisdom in life”. The mind can connect the two because there is a common ground between them, thus, the GENERIC SPACE. The eternal youth is the common ground for both SOURCE and TARGET. These three then merge into a new mental image, called BLEND, that is, “wisdom is a tree of life”, a tree metaphor. Here is the “mapping”.



18 Throughout this article, the translation of the passages from the book of Proverbs is my own translation, yet with some consideration of the translation by Fox, *Proverbs 1–9* and *Proverbs 10–31*, and that of Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999). Special cases will be noted.

19 In Egypt, the symbol of the tree of life can also be seen. It has the appearance of sycamore tree, which is regarded as a source of eternal life. This prevalent motif can be seen in the tombs of deceased kings from the Eighteenth Dynasty; cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, p. 158.



In Prov. 3:18, it appears that the author was influenced by the motif of human desire for eternal youth, which is prominent in the epic of Gilgamesh and in the Eden narrative (Gen. 2-3). The epic of Gilgamesh tells of a hero's action in pursuing the secret of immortality. At the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh, an arrogant young prince of Uruk, challenges everyone for a duel. He meets Enkidu, an equal opponent that eventually becomes his best friend. Then, both go on an adventurous journey to make their name. All of a sudden, Gilgamesh is tormented as he witnesses the death of Enkidu after their fight against the Bull of Heaven. With his own eyes, Gilgamesh sees the decay of Enkidu's corpse. He realizes that what happens to Enkidu can also happen to him. Therefore, he embarks on a journey to discover the secret of immortality that can alter his fate. He meets Utnapishtim, who may inform him of the secret of immortality. Utnapishtim challenges him to stay awake for seven days and yet he fails. Nonetheless, Gilgamesh does not give up his desire. When a second chance is given, he grasps it immediately. He is told to find a rejuvenating plant at the bottom of an ocean. He succeeds. The satisfaction unfortunately distracts him. While he is taking a bath in a pool, a snake sniffs the fragrance of that plant and steals it from him. Though he loses the magic plant, Gilgamesh eventually gains understanding instead. He is weary yet at peace. His desire has now found its channel to all things he is about to do in his homeland. He returns home to make use of all

he has learned to improve his homeland and to record all this on stone tablets for the next generation to remember.²⁰

The Eden narrative tells of a magic tree that arouses Adam's and Eve's desire for immortality, a life-status that distinguishes mortals from the divine.²¹ This tree becomes the ultimate object of human desire after the tree of knowledge, but then God bars access to it at the end of the story.²² Because Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit from the tree of knowledge, God then stops them from reaching out "their hand and taking also from the tree of life" (Gen. 3:22). He sets a flaming sword at the entrance and assigns cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). This story explains why such a desirable gift was not discussed again until it resurfaces as a metaphor in the book of Proverbs.

The tree metaphor in Proverbs bears a novel interpretation. It draws from those two sources mentioned above, all of the qualities contained within this model but then it attaches them to a new component, namely, wisdom. Presented in a such way, this tree metaphor now stands for an accessible desirable object rather than a gift locked away by God.²³ It represents longevity and fullness of life that can be gained through wisdom. This tree metaphor is designed to inflame readers' desire since wisdom is worth pursuing as a source of life (Prov. 3:18).²⁴ Longevity is already in wisdom's right hand (Prov. 3:16).²⁵ If the readers perseveres in pursuing wisdom, he will receive the boon. Something similar to this is found also in 1 Kgs. 3:1-15. Solomon asks God to grant him an understanding mind to tell the difference between good and evil. Since he requests this, God grants him his wish, together with riches and honors. Yet, there is one thing that God withholds: longevity. It is a gift that will

24 Prov. 3:18a (wisdom is a tree of life) introduces the reader to a new understanding of "a tree of life" that will be explained further in other passages (11:30; 13:12; 15:4).

25 K. Vermeulen, "The Tree of Metaphors עץ חיים in the Book of Proverbs", *Conceptual Metaphor in Poetic Texts*. Proceedings of the Metaphor Research Group of the European Association of Biblical Studies in Lincoln 2009 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), pp. 92-100. I take the same standpoint of her that the tree metaphor in the book of Proverbs stands for all the great rewards implied by the mythological models that are now attainable through wisdom.

be granted only if, in his life's journey, Solomon keeps God's statutes.²⁶ In other words, longevity is set as the desirable reward that remains for Solomon to gain.

A FURTHER EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

Prov. 3:18 introduces the reader to a concept of wisdom that is defined by its appeal, namely, its acquaintance with longevity. That boon is the object of desire. However, such a notion requires a further clarification which can be found in these three verses (11:30; 13:12; 15:4). After Prov. 11:30 speaks of the powerful energy of one's desire, Prov. 13:12 emphasizes one's perseverance in pursuing wisdom. Then, Prov. 15:4 continues the discussion on the upgraded strategy for that quest.

THE TREE OF LIFE AND THE POWER OF DESIRE (PROV. 11:30)

פְּרִי־צֵדִיק עֵץ חַיִּים וְלֶקֶחַ נְפֹשׁוֹת הַכֹּחַ:

*The fruit the righteous (picks) is (from) a tree of life,
and the one gathering nəpāšōt is the wise person.*

William H. Irwin brings the discussion of Prov. 11:30 to the image of picking fruit as found in the Eden narrative (Gen. 3:6, 3:22). Irwin links the activity of the wise person in gathering *nəpāšōt* (lives) and the reward for that activity into a single image of gathering fruit. He underlines that the desire for the fruit of the tree of life is what drives the righteous' yearning for eternal life.²⁷ If Irwin's view is correct, then this fruit is no other than a kind of reward that helps a person to focus all his energies

²⁶ With regard to 1 Kgs. 3:14, Cogan comments that longevity is not a gift given lightly. It can only be granted as long as Solomon maintains his proper conduct in obedience to YHWH's commands; cf. Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 188.

²⁷ This article benefits from William H. Irwin's interpretation. Irwin argues that the Hebrew verb *lāqah* in 11:30 is better to be translated as "to pick/to gather" as in the action of picking fruit shown in Gen. 3:6 and Gen. 3:22, instead of "to take/to capture". Furthermore, the relation between fruit and internal life is of particular interest. The fruit is connected with the eternal life. The phrase *lōqēah nəpāšōt* in 11:30b means to gather lives. William H. Irwin, "The Metaphor in Prov 11, 30," *Biblica* 65 (1984), p. 98.

on the goal.²⁸ The existence of a reward is to help this person develop a sense of direction. He trains himself in the ability to focus deeply, and with such focus comes a clarity of what he desires. Therefore, gathering *nəpāšôt* means bringing together all one's potential into one focus. In fact, the Hebrew word *nepeš* can denote one's desire, a force signaling that one is alive.²⁹ It is what God breathes into Adam to make him into a living being (Gen. 2:7). Here, the one pursuing wisdom is reminded not to underestimate the power of desire. His journey to wisdom can only be accomplished as long as he fuels himself with a fervent desire.

THE TREE OF LIFE AND ONE'S PERSEVERANCE (PROV. 13:12)

תּוֹחֶלֶת מִמְשָׁכָה מִחֵלֶּה לֵב וְעֵץ חַיִּים תִּאֲוֶה בָאָה:

A hope delayed sickens one's heart,

but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

The underlying notion of this verse is that anyone who seeks wisdom should not give up easily.³⁰ He has to persevere in that quest. As Fox argues, the tree metaphor in Prov. 13:12 represents a source of one's vitality.³¹ This person is encouraged to keep moving forward. He may

28 Vermeulen notes that with the mentioning of the fruit of the righteous, the reader is reminded of three scenes in Genesis: fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind (Gen. 1:11-12), God's commandment to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28), and the forbidden fruit that looked delicious (Gen. 2:17; 3:6). With this imaginative background, the reader may associate "the fruit" of the righteous with the one that was good and desirable, namely the fruit of knowledge and thus knowledge itself; cf. Vermeulen, "The Tree of Metaphors," p. 109.

29 H. Seebass, "נֶפֶשׁ *nepeš*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 505.

30 The same word *ta'āwā* (desire) in Prov. 13:12, also occurs in the paradise narrative. When the woman sees the fruit of the tree, she feels a desire that leads her to act: she takes, eats, and shares it with her husband (Gen. 3:6). In this sense, the word *ta'āwā* expresses the assertiveness of a person; cf. G. Mayer, "אָוָה 'āvāh," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 137.

31 For Fox, this proverb states an obvious fact of psychology. This verse recognizes the psychosomatic effects of feelings; cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 566. In addition, Waltke believes that the fruit of that tree rejuvenates energy, gives courage to live and to plan for the future, and thus to continuously extends life; cf. Bruce K Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapter 1-15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 563. Also, for Waltke, a desire (Hebrew word, *tawa*) refers to an aspiration that is ingrained in a person's character and pulls him toward a desirable state. Fulfilled by the verb *bô* "to

have moments of doubt, but it does not mean that he may procrastinate. If he moves too slowly, then the disappointment will come and take over his strength.³² Therefore, with a sense of direction fueled by a reward mentioned above, he is advancing. He maintains his focus by connecting himself to that quest. Whenever he feels connected to his mission and purpose in life, he surely experiences a profound sense of fulfillment. He is doing what he is called. The deeper he makes this connection to his calling, the more he will be able to resist any temptations.

THE TREE OF LIFE AND REFINEMENT (PROV. 15:4)

מַרְפֵּא לְשׁוֹן עֵץ חַיִּים וְסִלְף בְּהַ שְׂפָר בְּרוּחַ:

A healing tongue is a tree of life,

but a deviousness in it is a rapture³³ of the passion.

Lastly, in Prov 15:4, it says, “a healing tongue is a tree of life, but a deceitfulness in it is a rupture of the passion”.³⁴ Prov 15:4 describes the realization of the journeyer, finally, of the significance of refining his own conduct through mastering the way he leads himself. A deceitful

come/enter” which is frequently used in Proverbs to bring about the desired results for the cause; cf. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapter 1-15*, p. 563.

32 Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 566. According to Waltke, the word heart (*lēb*) refers to source from which one’s bodily, psychical, and spiritual energies are transmitted to the rest of the body. Here it means that this person is in despair, stumble in resignation. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapter 1-15*, p. 563.

33 The word *šeber* (rupture) is used concretely of a body member hurt by injury (Lev. 21:19; 24:20), of the earth rent by an earthquake (Ps. 60:24), and of a potter’s vessel broken by shattering (Is. 30:14). Waltke, 615. According to Fox, “a break in the spirit” means emotional pain, as in Is. 65:14, where “a break of the spirit” parallels “pain of the heart” (Jer. 30:15); cf. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 590. Meanwhile according to Clifford, the topic of this verse is the effect of one’s words upon others. Words can bring life and destruction. Words can heal and lift up the spirit. A spirit can be shattered. The opposite of healing tongue is a deceitful one that demoralizes others; cf. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, p. 151. According to Lucas, the use of the word “tongue” is about another example of the power of words. They can promote life or weaken it by bringing despair. The adjective (*marpē*) used to describe the tongue may mean gentle or healing; cf. Ernest C. Lucas, *Proverbs*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 117.

34 For Waltke, the metaphor of a tree of life whets the urge to restore Paradise in this ruined world through healing speech that grants eternal life to all who consume it. The Proverb makes the claim that the injured spirit generated by the twisted tongue of wicked people can be repaired by the tongue of good people; cf. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapter 1-15*, p. 615.

tongue from any seducers may break his spirit.³⁵ Therefore, he should not let his guard down. He needs to keep his desire intact, continuously refined, until the last effort. He takes pride in the excellence of the work. His energy moves him toward improvement and continual learning from experience. He will want to go as far as he can.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated how conceptual metaphor enables the reader to make sense the saying of Prov. 3:18 and its subtle nuances. The reader is informed that the tree metaphor in Proverbs highlights the constructive force of human desire. This magic tree is a reward that encourages any reader to put all of his efforts toward the wisdom, that is the desired outcome. Such “incentive” is there to give this person a sense of purpose. He develops his capacity for intense concentration, and with this focus comes clarity concerning his goals. Also, this conceptual metaphor aids every reader in perceiving how he should interpret the book of Proverbs in its unity.

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³⁵ In her comment to Prov. 15:4, Vermeulen says, “the word לשון – tongue, language – is crucial in the snake episode in Genesis. It is the talking serpent that serves as a catalyst in the story. One of the animal’s characteristics is its bifurcated tongue. Figuratively speaking this means he can tell truth and lie or as Proverbs puts it a ‘healing tongue’ and a ‘devious tongue.’ Both aspects are connected to the snake in a broader cultural setting as well”; cf. Vermeulen, “The tree of Metaphors,” p. 111.

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