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THE PROVERBIAL AFTERLIFE:  
REPHAIM AS POLEMIC IN PROVERBS

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There is debate over the sages' horizon in the book of Proverbs. On the one hand, scholars argue that the sages only looked as far as the end of this life in their instruction. On the other, the horizon is extended to some sort of ongoing existence after clinical death.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars who support an implicit afterlife in Proverbs appeal not to internal evidence but to reading Proverbs in light of the whole OT and especially the NT.<sup>2</sup> However, it is important to acknowledge some internal evidence for the positive view to be credible. This paper seeks to demonstrate that Proverbs has an implicit foundation for the continuing existence of the wicked after clinical death, i.e. an afterlife, by arguing for a polemical sense of the word Rephaim as it is found in Proverbs. As corroborating evidence for a general concept of the afterlife in Proverbs, an example of positive continuing existence is briefly considered.

The arc of this paper follows a path from the general to the specific. First, the two views on the afterlife in Proverbs are laid out in a general fashion. Then, a specific analysis of Rephaim is conducted, starting with its general usage in the Hebrew Bible and then narrowing in on its figurative usage in Isaiah. Insights gleaned from its usage in Isaiah are then applied to its use in Proverbs in order to sustain the argument that Rephaim is used as polemic in both books of the Hebrew Bible for the purpose of communicating a continued impotent existence of the wicked after clinical death. One example of the positive continued

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<sup>1</sup> For representative views, see the discussion below under "Views on the Afterlife in Proverbs."

<sup>2</sup> Temper Longman is representative of this view. See, e.g., his comments in *Proverbs*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 87.

existence of the righteous is then briefly considered to corroborate the central claim. Finally, a few thoughts on canonical connections to Proverbs with regard to the afterlife are made.

### **Views on the Afterlife in Proverbs**

This section summarizes the three views on the afterlife in Proverbs. Bruce Waltke serves as the representative of the view that there is an implicit foundation for continued existence, whether blessed or cursed, in Proverbs. Roland Murphy flatly denies it. Tremper Longman appeals to external evidence, particularly NT evidence for viewing the sages' instruction as having implications for life after clinical death.

#### **An Implicit Foundation of the Sages**

Representing the point of view that Proverbs is suffused with references to eternal life over against "temporal life terminating in clinical death" is Bruce Waltke.<sup>3</sup> While Waltke acknowledges that not all of the 33 references to life in Proverbs have eternal connotations, he argues that "most often" this is the case and that it is something "added to clinical life" and is "wisdom's reward, a reward never said to be tarnished by death (4:22; 6:23; 10:17; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14; 15:31; 19:23; 22:4)."<sup>4</sup> Two disclaimers should be noted, though. First, Waltke argues that Proverbs speaks of eternal life, immortality, over against resurrection of the dead.<sup>5</sup> Second, he admits that the primary focus of Proverbs is on "health, prosperity, and social honor in this life."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Waltke argues that with respect to rewards, eternal life is always what is in view. His logic flows out of three premises.

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, vol. 1, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 104.

<sup>4</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:104–5.

<sup>5</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:106.

<sup>6</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:107.

First, Waltke accepts that Proverbs has a "heavy dependence" on Egyptian wisdom literature. Since Egyptian wisdom literature included belief in an afterlife, "it would be surprising if 'life' meant less with the living God than the Egyptian hope of life with a 'no-god' (Deut 32:21)."<sup>7</sup> Setting aside the issue of how and in what direction Israel and its ancient Near Eastern neighbors interacted, the general point that arguing for a concept of eternal life in Proverbs would not be unique to Israel is helpful.<sup>8</sup> The burden of proof is on those who deny implicit support for some concept of eternal life in Proverbs given the cultural milieu.

Second, Waltke argues that in Proverbs "the clinically alive wicked ... are in the realm of darkness and death, a state of already being dead because they have no relationship with the living God."<sup>9</sup> By this he means that these individuals can already be considered "dead" while they walk the earth, for "such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors" (1:19). On the other hand, the righteous are delivered from death (10:2), the snares of death (13:14; 14:27), and Sheol (15:24).

Such a view is not novel to Waltke or Proverbs. Jon Levenson argues that the Psalms reflect the same idea in that the disjunction between life and death is not one's clinical state but one's present condition. "In passages that deal with the biblical netherworld, the difference between being dead and being almost dead—can *we* imagine a larger difference than that?—often evaporates before our very eyes."<sup>10</sup> That this representation, seen especially

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<sup>7</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:106.

<sup>8</sup> In reality, the issue is more complicated than dependence. Not only must the issue of the direction of dependence or influence be considered, so also must the reason for any given allusion. The idea of polemical theology will come up later in this paper, but for now it is worth noting that allusions to words, concepts, or stories in one culture are not necessarily adoptions of that word, concept, or story wholesale but a polemical tool. Notably, this is not unique to Israelite literature. See, John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), esp. 97-110.

<sup>9</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:105.

<sup>10</sup> Jon Douglas Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 46.

in Psalm 88, is not merely a fleeting subjective feeling but rather an existential reality is seen in the psalmist's own recognition that, as Levenson says, "No one moves naturally up from Sheol. When such a movement occurs, it does so because of God's surprising grace and in defiance of the way of all flesh."<sup>11</sup> Apart from God's grace, the psalmist's existential reality is objective reality. There is a case to be made for a Hebrew conception of the walking dead.

Third, Waltke appeals to the context of many Proverbs which cannot be interpreted appropriately without understanding "life" to mean "eternal life." By way of example, Waltke references Prov 12:28 and 23:18. In the former reference, this doublet of synonymous parallelism equates the "life" found in the "path of righteousness" with "no death."<sup>12</sup> That is to say, the life that is spoken of in Proverbs is at least in some respects a life without death, immortality. Since this verse is the culmination of a section of proverbs, it serves as the summary of the prior teaching and therefore colors the prior teaching by its structural connection.<sup>13</sup> While eternal life may not be the explicit, or even central, focus as the reward of the righteous, it is the foundation for the ethical teaching.

Along the same lines, Prov 23:18 takes a view that seems to look beyond clinical death toward eternal life. After warning against envy of sinners living with seeming impunity and focusing on the fear of Yahweh in 23:17, there is a shift to focusing on "a future" and "your hope." This hope "will not be cut off," which Waltke argues "signifies that the hoped-

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<sup>11</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Waltke does acknowledge a text-critical issue with this interpretation. Since אֶל-מָוֶת is a *hapax*, it is read instead as מָוֶת-מָוֶת in many manuscripts (which is a form seen earlier in Prov 2:18). Moreover, the LXX construes this verse as antithetical parallelism by inserting *μησικάκων* to smooth out the sense [*Proverbs*, 1:544]. To this can be added the Vulgate's further interpretative changes to reinforce the antithetical parallelism. Whereas the LXX makes no distinction between אָרַח and דֶּרֶךְ נְתִיבָהּ, the Vulgate translates the second phrase in a negative sense as *devium*, i.e. a side street leading *away from* the *semita iustitiae*, thereby confirming the alternate reading of the Hebrew. However, "competent text critics much prefer the MT over the ancient versions" [*Proverbs*, 1:544].

<sup>13</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:544–45.

for abundant life will not be annihilated." Moreover, given the eschatological connotations of בָּרָת, "the promise that God will fulfill the hope of the righteous for an abundant life both for time and for eternity" seems to shine through in this proverb.<sup>14</sup>

### An Explicit Denial

On the other hand, there are those who argue that Proverbs has nothing to do with life or death beyond clinical death. Roland Murphy asserts, "In the context of Proverbs deliverance from death has nothing to do with personal immortality beyond death." It is important to note that Murphy does not deny a "fuller meaning" for "later readers."<sup>15</sup> However, contrary to Waltke, there is no basis for an afterlife in Proverbs. Using Waltke's examples as test cases, Murphy repeats his position when commenting on Prov 12:28. "In any case, one is not to seek for immortality in this verse."<sup>16</sup> When commenting on 23:18, Murphy argues, "This of course has nothing to do with the next life; rather, it is a life well lived in the here and now and celebrated by an honorable death which is not foreshortened, or marked by adversity."<sup>17</sup>

### An Appeal to External Evidence

While decidedly more charitable to the idea of an afterlife in Proverbs, Tremper Longman ultimately appeals to a NT reading of the book to defend his position. "Though we cannot answer this question with regard to the intention of the human composers and ancient

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, vol. 2, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 255 and n. 64.

<sup>15</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, WBC 22 (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 73.

<sup>16</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 92. It should also be noted that Murphy agrees with the alternate readings of this verse [88]. However, given that the MT is the *lectio difficilior* and the alternate reading requires emendation elsewhere for Murphy to make sense of it, the force of his argument seems to rely more on a presupposition that there is no afterlife in Proverbs than a firm text-critical foundation.

<sup>17</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 176.

speakers of these proverbs, those who read the same texts in the light of the fuller revelation of the NT do so with more confident teaching on the nature of the afterlife."<sup>18</sup> The real challenge, though, is finding evidence within Proverbs to suggest a promotion of the concept of the afterlife. Otherwise, any exposition of the afterlife in Proverbs is open to the charge of eisegesis.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is important to establish from the context of Proverbs that some sort of afterlife was at least an implicit assumption of the sages. The balance of this paper addresses the topic from the perspective of polemical theology to prove the point.

### **Rephaim as Polemic Outside of Proverbs**

This section reviews the use of Rephaim first in historical narrative and then in wisdom literature, poetry, and prophecy. A particular interpretation of the word as polemic in Isaiah is then considered.

#### Instances of Rephaim in the OT Outside of Proverbs

Before considering Proverbs specifically, it is worth noting the usage of Rephaim outside of Proverbs. The word occurs 18 times in historical narrative (Gen 14:5; 15:20; Deut 2:11, 20 (x2); 3:11, 13; Josh 12:4; 13:12; 15:8; 17:15; 18:16; 2 Sam 5:22; 23:13; 1 Chron 11:15; 14:9; 20:4). These references roughly break into two categories. First, the Rephaim are a people group (Gen 14:5; 15:20; Deut 3:13) who are considered giants (Deut 2:11; 2:20; Josh 17:15; 1 Chron 20:4) and are related to Og, king of Bashan (Deut 3:11; Josh 12:14; 13:12). That they are a people group who did not last is indicated by Joshua's discussion of them as "the

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<sup>18</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Longman roundly criticizes Dahood's approach which relies on Ugaritic parallels. See, e.g., *Proverbs*, 87 n.117; 280 n.13. However, appealing to NT theology does not place Longman above the same criticism that when you're a hammer everything looks like a nail. These scholars are just using two different hammers.

remnant of the Rephaim" (12:4; 13:12). Second, the word is used as a geographical reference for "the valley of Rephaim" (Josh 15:8; 18:15; 2 Sam 5:18, 22; 23:13; 1 Chron 11:15; 14:9). Thus, the early instances indicate that this people group were giant, formidable adversaries.

Outside of historical narrative, Rephaim takes on a macabre connotation. It appears once each in wisdom literature (Job 26:5) and poetry (Ps 88:11). In both instances, explicit connections with the netherworld are made. In Ps 88, Rephaim is in synonymous parallelism with "the dead." In Job, it is closely linked with Sheol and Abaddon. With the exception of one instance, the remainder of the references to Rephaim, which are all in Isaiah, carry the sense of "the dead" or "departed spirits" (Isa 14:9; 26:14, 19). The final reference in Isaiah is a geographical reference to "the Valley of Rephaim" (Isa 17:5).

Given the disjunction between the two meanings of Rephaim, it could be that the latter references are derived from a root different than the former.<sup>20</sup> However, it is also possible that these meanings are linked and that there was a shift toward using the term with an explicit polemical sense in later Hebrew writings. Matthew McAfee argues that the Ugaritic parallels of rapa'uma is proof of this in Isa 26:13-19. His work will be the basis for applying a polemical understanding to the use of Rephaim in Proverbs.

### Rephaim as Polemic in Isaiah 26

In his analysis of Isaiah 26, McAfee seeks to demonstrate that certain Ugaritic parallels in which the rapa'uma are mentioned clarify a difficult passage. Of particular interest are the

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<sup>20</sup> For an etymology of Rephaim and analysis of its ANE cultural context, see Philip Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 128–42. Johnston denies any Ugaritic parallel, primarily because that connection would require importing the idea of healing into Rephaim. Johnston concludes that "no biblical text attributes a healing function to the dead in general or the Rephaim in particular. Nor indeed is such a function explicit at Ugarit" [130]. McAfee disagrees. See, especially "Rephaim, Whisperers, and the Dead in Isaiah 26:13-19: A Ugaritic Parallel," *JBL* 135.1 (2016): 83–84. McAfee's analysis is the basis for connecting Rephaim and the Ugaritic parallels.



references to the "shades" and "the dead," or Rephaim, in 26:14 and 19 respectively as well as the surrounding context.<sup>21</sup> It is important before that, though, to recall the larger context of these verses. These verses fit within an extended section of judgment oracles against the nations (Isaiah 13-27). This section moves from concrete prophecies against Babylon (13:1), Philistia (14:29), Moab (15:1), Damascus (17:1), and Egypt (19:1) to less specific prophecies against or concerning "the wilderness of the sea" (21:1) and "the valley of vision" (22:1). Eventually, the prophecy concerns the entirety of creation (24:1ff). Within these prophetic utterances, the constant refrain is "that day." This phrase is synonymous with judgment, and it usually indicates a future final judgment by God of all the nations (cf., e.g., Amos 8:3, 9, 13; Zeph 1:9, 10). Thus, the context of Isaiah 26 is a song "sung in the land of Judah" (26:1) at some future time of judgment against the nations. That is to say, Isaiah 26:13-19 is couched in an eschatological section.

Within this context, there is an apparent contradiction regarding the fate of "the shades" (Rephaim) who are said not to rise in 26:14 but also to be birthed by the earth in 26:19 (where "the dead" is also Rephaim). The association of "the shades" is with lords other than Yahweh in v.14 and it carries a negative connotation. In v.19, though, a positive note is sounded, and the Rephaim are included in the group who will live. The issue is whether Rephaim ought to be considered a synonym for "the dead" or as a special class.

McAfee argues that Isaiah 26 uses Rephaim as a special class of the dead. Noting the importance of the *rapa'uma* in Ugaritic texts as deified dead ancestors who were invoked for favor, McAfee sees "a polemic against a popularized variety of Yahwism that apparently shared notions about the Rephaim resembling aspects known from their earlier counterparts

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<sup>21</sup> McAfee, "Rephaim," 77.

attested at Ugarit."<sup>22</sup> Of particular interest are Ugaritic parallels in which blessings for wellbeing were invoked from the rapa'uma for a new king as well as for snake handling.<sup>23</sup>

These parallels demonstrate a continued existence for at least some portion of mankind after death, but more than that indicate the possibility of interaction with the netherworld.

In light of these parallels, McAfee argues that this prophecy turns on its head a syncretistic flavor of Yahwism by explicitly calling out one aspect and denying its reality. He gives four reasons for his view. First, the explicit mention of Rephaim not rising in 26:14 is directly contrary to "the ritual summoning of the rp'um in the funerary ritual." Second and related, their remembrance, which would be important for summoning them, is prophesied to be wiped out by Yahweh who alone will be remembered (26:13-14). Third, another parallel with the rapa'uma exists in Isa 14:9 which increases the likelihood of an explicit parallel in the present passage. Fourth, it best understands a differentiation between a general category of "the dead" and the special category of the Rephaim in 26:19.<sup>24</sup>

As polemic, Isa 26:13-19 fits well within one strand of Israel's interaction with its ancient Near Eastern neighbors. For polemics are strewn throughout the Hebrew Bible in all genres. In his primer on the polemical theology of the Hebrew Bible, John Currid gives the following definition: it is "use by biblical writers of the thought forms and stories that were common in ancient Near Eastern culture, while filling them with radically new meaning."<sup>25</sup> In the case of Isaiah 26, the common ANE thought form is deified dead ancestors and their

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<sup>22</sup> McAfee, "Rephaim," 85.

<sup>23</sup> McAfee, "Rephaim," 80–84.

<sup>24</sup> McAfee, "Rephaim," 87. Consistent with a polemical view of the Rephaim, McAfee renders Isa 26:19b: "but the underworld will make the Rephaim fall." He argues that rendering נָפַל as "give birth" strains the meaning of the word too much. It is simpler to acknowledge the negative connotations associated with the Rephaim. "It is not that the underworld allows the Rephaim some kind of rebirth; rather, the Rephaim as introduced in v. 14 are cast down never to rise again" [93-94].

<sup>25</sup> Currid, *Against the Gods*, 26.

continuing interaction with the world of the living. The radically new meaning found in Isaiah's coopting of the thought form is that these deified dead ancestors are not deified even though they are still dead. These Rephaim are impotent when compared to Yahweh, whose name alone will be brought to remembrance by those dwelling in the land of Judah in that day. For the polemic to have maximum value, the continuing existence of these impotent shades must be kept. It is important that the polemic be understood to be teaching that the Rephaim are continually impotent. Thus, the thrust of 26:19b must carry the idea of a continual ruin of the Rephaim in the netherworld.<sup>26</sup>

### **Rephaim as Polemic in Proverbs**

Given the polemical connotations of Rephaim in Isaiah—and the plausibility of this idea when applied to Job 26:5 and Psalm 88:11—it is worth looking at Proverbs with this in mind. Since it has the same number of references to the Rephaim as Isaiah outside of the notion of a people group or geographic location, it plays a crucial part in confirming the validity of this interpretation. With that in mind, the three instances of Rephaim in Proverbs, 2:18, 9:18, 21:16, will be considered within their contexts.

#### Rephaim in Proverbs 1-9

While there is debate about the structure of the book of Proverbs beyond the first nine chapters, it is recognized that the first chapters serve as a well-structured prologue to the

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<sup>26</sup> While not accurately reflecting the grammar of the Hebrew, the LXX gets close to the same idea: ἡ δὲ γῆ τῶν ἀσεβῶν πεσεῖται, "but the land of the impious will fall." The Vulgate makes the subject either "you who dwell in the dust" or Yahweh (due to the ambiguity of the verb form, the subject could be 2<sup>nd</sup> personal masculine singular—although that does cause problems with two accusatives not in construct) and is subject to the same grammatical error, but it too gives a more illustrative sense that comports with the notion of polemical theology: terram gigantum detrahes in ruinam, "you will drag down the land of the giants into destruction."

whole book.<sup>27</sup> These opening chapters are absorbed with the matter of wisdom and its excellence over against folly in its manifestations. For example, the opening chapters extol wisdom as something to be valued (3:14) whereas death is the end of those who spurn wisdom (1:32). Within these chapters, the opening and closing instruction serve as bookends. Proverbs 1:8-19 and 9:13-18 address the enticement of sin and folly personified. Proverbs 1:20-33 and Proverbs 9:1-12 lay out the call of wisdom that she be heeded, thus setting up an *inclusio*. This *inclusio* not only informs the reader of the perspective of the verses within, but also sets the agenda for the remainder of the proverbs. Thus, Proverbs 1-9 are the thesis statement of the whole book, which is that there are only two paths for any man to consider, the way of wisdom or the way of folly; *non tertium datur*.<sup>28</sup>

Given this thesis statement, it is significant that the word Rephaim is found twice in this context. Whatever the interpretation, it sets the tone for the remainder of the book. The first instance comes in what Waltke describes as the "first janus poem in the prologue."<sup>29</sup> Within Prov 2:12-18, the strict dichotomy between the way of wisdom and of folly is highlighted. Wisdom offers a two-fold deliverance from "the way of evil, from men of perverted speech" (2:12) and from "the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words" (2:16). It is the forbidden woman's house that is the subject of v.18. There, death is in parallel with Rephaim. Her house sinks to death and her paths to the Rephaim. Regarding the import of Rephaim in this context, Murphy notes, "The 'shades' ... are to be identified with the inhabitants of Sheol who have no real 'life,' but only a shadowy

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<sup>27</sup> For a sample of views and structural organizations, see Longman, *Proverbs*, 36–42; Murphy, *Proverbs*, xxviii–xxx; Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:9–28. Regarding the first nine chapters, Waltke's comment is representative: "In the book's final form, Collection I [i.e. the first nine chapters] sets the context for all the collections that follow (10:1-31:31)" [1:10].

<sup>28</sup> "It is our contention that the latter [Proverbs 10-31] was meant to be read in the context of the former [Proverbs 1-9]" [Longman, *Proverbs*, 58.].

<sup>29</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:218.

existence."<sup>30</sup> Longman comments, "Though the word is much discussed, there is really little agreement about its meaning."<sup>31</sup> However, when considered as a polemic, Rephaim advances Murphy's view. It is the very impotence of the Rephaim that should be highlighted. Whereas the rapa'uma *do* come back on a regular basis to give blessings, "none who go to her [the forbidden woman] come back" (2:19). It is not merely a synonym for the inhabitants of Sheol, but a negative evaluation of those who follow the forbidden woman.<sup>32</sup>

The second instance of Rephaim in these opening chapters comes at 9:18. Again there is a portrayal of folly, this time a general female personification, and the house into which she calls passersby. Again, as in 2:18, this house is the abode of the dead, but this time Rephaim and Sheol are in parallel. This verse has added importance because it is the last word before the book of Proverbs switches to more general teaching. Longman keys in on the hinge nature of this verse by noting how it gives a theological meaning to the very next verse, "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother" (10:1). Longman notes, "To be wise means that one acts like one who is in relationship with Yahweh. On the contrary, those who bring sorrow to the mother ... show themselves to be fools, and that means they are acting like worshippers of pagan deities."<sup>33</sup> It ought not to be surprising that if Longman is correct the term Rephaim was purposefully used in this hinge verse. This word would conjure up the pagan worship of rapa'uma in connection with the way of folly. This reinforces the likelihood that Rephaim is used as polemic in Proverbs.

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<sup>30</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*, 116 n. i.

<sup>32</sup> One complicating factor is one's understanding of how the Hebrew Bible portrays the afterlife in general. This paper assumes that not all who die go down to Sheol. For a summary of the evidence along this line of thinking, see T. Desmond Alexander, "The Old Testament View of Life after Death," *Them* 11 (1986): 41–46.

<sup>33</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*, 223.

### Other Corroborating Evidence

In the final instance of Rephaim in Proverbs, 21:16, there is little to add to the above discussion. The "good sense" away from which one wanders is a synonym for wisdom, so the same notes are sounded here as elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> Waltke makes reference to Isa 26:14 in his comment on this verse. "Isaiah sharply contrasts the death of the Rephaim, who while living were tyrants, with the death of the Lord's saints."<sup>35</sup> This special class of the dead, who were once potent tyrants, are now impotent shades limping along in their own congregation. This use of Rephaim in Proverbs reinforces the polemical theology of Isaiah's usage.

It should be briefly noted that Proverbs does not merely see an impotent continuing existence of the wicked, but also a vibrant continuing life after clinical death for the righteous. Contrary to this, Levenson argues for asymmetry in the ends of these groups.

The biblical Sheol is the prolongation of the unfulfilled life. There is no equivalent prolongation of the fulfilled life precisely because it is fulfilled. The prolongation of those who die fulfilled comes, rather, not in the form of residence in a place, the joyful antipode to the miserable Sheol, but in the form of descendants[.]<sup>36</sup>

Rather than understanding the time after clinical death for the righteous as the beatific vision, Levenson argues that the continued existence of the righteous is found in their progeny.

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<sup>34</sup> So, Longman, *Proverbs*, 394. Longman then raises an interesting question that cannot be answered sufficiently without a concept of the afterlife. "One might respond by saying that everyone, wise and foolish, ends up at death. At a minimum, this proverb suggests that fools are more likely to die early as a result of their foolish decisions." Qohelet would beg to differ, and he is no respecter of the length of days, for man ultimately has no advantage even over the beast (Eccl 3:18-21). When Rephaim is seen as polemic, the strongly negative connotations resolve the tension, especially given the Hebrew understanding of death's beginning, as noted above.

<sup>35</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 2:180. Waltke also affirms the majority reading of Isa 26:19, but see the discussion above for a better understanding that fits with the polemical nature of Isaiah's use of Rephaim.

<sup>36</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, 78.

On the other hand, besides Waltke's understanding of "life" as having connotations of eternity in certain passages, other evidence suggests a continued existence for the righteous after clinical death. The primary one is "tree of life" (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) imagery which harkens back to the only other references in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 2:9; 3:22, 24).<sup>37</sup> Not every instance neatly fits into the paradigm of eternal life, but there is enough evidence to suggest its plausibility. For example, Prov 3:18 associates "tree of life" directly with wisdom, thus augmenting the connection between the way of wisdom and eternal life when "tree of life" is understood in the context of the instances in Genesis.<sup>38</sup> In Prov 11:30, the "tree of life" concept is attached to the righteous, who walk in the way of wisdom, and has distributive life-giving properties. "The metaphor connotes a source of healing and of abundant, eternal life to all who eat of it."<sup>39</sup> The "tree of life" imagery thus provides the counterpart for the righteous to the continued negative existence of the wicked as imagined as the impotent Rephaim.

### **The Proverbial Afterlife in Canonical Context**

While it is inappropriate to read into Proverbs a view of the afterlife based on external evidence wholly apart from any corroborating internal evidence, once it has been established

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<sup>37</sup> It is by no means settled as to how "tree of life" in Proverbs relates to the instances in Genesis. This is complicated by translation issues in Proverbs, particularly in Prov 11:30. For views on translating this verse, see Lee M Fields, "Proverbs 11:30: Soul-Winning or Wise Living?," *JETS* 50.3 (2007): 517–35; William H Irwin, "The Metaphor in Prov 11:30," *Bib* 65.1 (1984): 97–100; Daniel C Snell, "'Taking Souls' in Proverbs 11:30," *VT* 33.3 (1983): 362–65. For the view that "tree of life" has this-worldly connotations only, see Ralph Marcus, "The Tree of Life in Proverbs," *JBL* 62.2 (1943): 117–20.

<sup>38</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:259–60.

<sup>39</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:513. Marcus argues that "tree of life" should be seen as a source of health as he views it in eschatological literature (cf. Ezek 47:12) rather than of life in the eternal sense (cf. Gen 3:22) ["The Tree of Life in Proverbs," 119–20.]. However, the distinction between healing and eternal life, especially in an eschatological sense and especially when the imagery in Ezekiel is evocative of the Garden of Eden, seems to be a small one. If Levenson is correct that the disjunction in the Hebrew mind is between life and illness rather than illness and death, as noted above, then the distinction is removed. The healing property of the trees in Ezekiel 47 are another way of envisioning the eternal life-giving properties of the tree of life in Genesis 2 and 3.

that Proverbs has an implicit foundation for continuing existence after clinical death the proper connections can be made to the rest of the canon. First, the OT hints at continued existence of some form in some places (Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:11) but is more explicit in others (Dan 12:2). While Proverbs cannot support a view of resurrection tied up with life after death as in Daniel 12, it does add shape to the OT hints of a continued existence in some form. Importantly, it balances out the view by adding the wicked to the number whose existence continued. There is no concept of an annihilation of the wicked in Proverbs.

When considered in light of the NT, this continued existence takes firm shape. Though the scope of this paper does not include arguing for a connection between the impotent existence for the wicked hinted at by Rephaim with the weeping and gnashing of teeth in the "outer darkness" (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) or the "fiery furnace" (Matt 1:42, 50), it cannot be denied that Jesus' teaching follows the decidedly negative evaluation of the continued existence of the wicked. In that sense, the NT enriches the polemical force of Rephaim as found in Proverbs. On the positive side, abundant life for the righteous found in the "tree of life" metaphor is given much firmer shape in Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14. So it is that, with respect to the afterlife, the new is in the old concealed.



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