

John A. Davies. *Lift Up Your Heads: Nonverbal Communication and Related Body Imagery in the Bible*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018. 152 pages. \$26.

The body can communicate “status, relationships, attitudes, emotions, intentions” and more, both by itself and in conjunction with speech (1). Biblical writers exhibit an awareness of this contribution of the body in communication, including copious references to the body and its members, to provide and clarify meaning. John A. Davies notes, however, that when seeking help from biblical commentaries to understand the meaning of a movement, gesture, posture, or metaphorical idiom that references the body or its members, the reader is often left wanting. Davies brings together biblical and extrabiblical references to similar movements in ancient contexts of close “geographical proximity, hegemony, and linguistic milieu”—iconography from ancient Western Asia and the Mediterranean, and movements from modern-day Western Asia (in which one may cautiously note some possible continuity with the ancient world)—to begin filling this gap and to encourage further reflection and research (12). His work is intended to be “accessible to the general reader” and keeps references to Hebrew and Greek to a minimum in the main text, while ensuring that the footnotes are adequate for those wanting to dig deeper (14).

Davies limits his focus to “conventional and stylized” movements that are meaningful in multiple contexts, including movements in which clothes or props function as an extension of the body (2). Every page is covered with biblical references in which each movement is found. Of particular interest might be the attention given to how translations handle these movements. For instance, Davies notes where translations tone down physical movement (lit. “fall on their face” becomes “bow down” [1 Cor 14:25]), and where the reader might fail to recognize physical movement (Pharisees’ “elaborate greetings in the marketplaces” [Matt 23:7] are said to involve lengthy physical displays of deference) (78). He also points to translations that provide an interpretation of the movement with or in place of the movement (lit.: “who will shake [the head] at you” becomes “who will bemoan you” [Jer 15:5]) (21–2).

Chapters are organized according to the body part mentioned, starting with “The Head.” Raising the head, readers are told, can signal “joyful confidence” or “proud exaltation,” lowering the head indicates “shame or grief,” nodding the head points to “assent or signal to proceed,” and shaking the head from side to side suggests “sympathetic grief” or “derision” (21–2). Specifics involving ears, forehead, mouth, hair, nose, and more are also included. A full chapter is devoted to “The Eyes” because of their expansive use in communication. Since regular eye contact in conversation is customary, the reader is told to interpret explicit mention of eye contact as “reinforcing” the communication in some way (“But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible’ [Mark 10:27]) (57). Other points of discussion include the meanings of particular attitudes and emotions manifested in the eyes.

“The Neck, Torso and Whole Body” chapter reveals that the neck can “stand for the whole person,” represent “the vulnerability of human life,” and is often translated as “soul” (68). While discussing the chest, Davies notes that in Luke’s crucifixion account, it often goes unnoticed that the crowds “beat their breasts” on their way home. This communicates “humiliation and mourning” and, as a gesture associated with women, is notable here for its attribution to men (71–2). Loins, bowing, kneeling, prostration, and more are also given attention. “The Arms and Hands” states that while the right hand is associated with traits such as power and honor, the left is associated with their opposites. It is thus significant that Jesus says in Matt 25:33–34 that “sheep” will be directed to his right hand and “goats” to his left (100). Hand signals, reaching, touching, holding and more are also discussed. In “The Legs and Feet”

readers see that reference to “standing still” indicates the “heightened significance of any following action” and specifically shows respect for the dead (134). Knees, the feet and footwear, walking and running, and more are also addressed.

Lift Up Your Heads serves as a welcome resource to introduce readers to the richness of meaning communicated nonverbally in the Bible. The book reveals the ubiquity of nonverbal communication such that its presence can no longer be passed over or seen as inconsequential for understanding. I was left desiring more sustained attention to particular texts and a more rigorous discussion of the implications of this recognition of reading bodies as vital for faithful interpretation. Behold, Davies achieved what he set out to do! He hoped to “stimulate further reflection” (152) and he certainly has accomplished his goal for this reader of the Bible.

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