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RAISED HANDS IN PRAYER AS AN INDUCEMENT MOTIF IN THE PSALMS

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Abstract: Two hands raised in the air is a commonly portrayed gesture in the Hebrew Bible and broader ancient Near East. Synthesizing previous research done on the same topic, this paper will strive to examine the gesture in order to show that its purpose is to induce and elicit divine favor from a superior being—typically a deity or king-like figure. The conclusion will be reached by first generally surveying the raised hands motif in the Hebrew Bible and then specifically examining the gesture in Psalms. This study will be complemented by exploring relevant extra-biblical textual and iconographic evidence within the ancient Near East.

Nonverbal communication entails the movement and position of someone's body, which serves to communicate emotions, intentions, and commands; these gestures and postures may either be nonverbal or have accompanying speech.¹ Nonverbal communication is present in the Hebrew Bible and, as John Davies points out, "[The] fact that [nonverbal communication] is mentioned at all, particularly in a corpus of literature that is not noted for its descriptive language or unnecessary coloration, makes it a topic worthy of our careful attention."² The Hebrew Bible often utilizes gestures and postures to convey deeper and symbolic meaning beyond the written text. One of these gestures, two hands raised in the air, is common not only in the Hebrew Bible but also throughout the ancient Near East. This gesture was often employed throughout the ancient Near East in depictions—both written and visual—as humans approached some kind of deity.

1. John A. Davies, *Lift Up Your Heads: Nonverbal Communication and Related Body Imagery in the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 1.

2. Davies, *Lift Up Your Heads*, 14.

This motif of raising both hands likely served to induce divine favor from a superior being—typically a deity or king-like figure—to “increase the likelihood of a favorable response” from the superior being.³ In the Hebrew Bible, these inducement motifs are especially common in Psalms.⁴ Studying the raised hands motif in Psalms is particularly instructive in this context due to the large extent of research already done on the book itself. Additionally, due to numerous examples of inducement motifs (almost exclusively shown in the context of prayer), Psalms can serve as a case study for the Hebrew Bible as a whole to show the shared characteristics of the gesture between the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East. The purpose of this paper is to examine the two raised hands gesture, specifically used in a prayer context within the Psalms, to show that the gesture is indeed being used for inducement. This study will essentially synthesize previous scholarship done on the topic. This will be done by examining in brief the raised hands motif in the Hebrew Bible generally and then more specifically in Psalms; textual and iconographic evidence outside of the biblical text will also be displayed to show the link between this motif in the Hebrew Bible and the broader ancient Near East to strengthen its claim.

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

Various studies have addressed the topic of gestures and nonverbal communication within the Hebrew Bible. One of the earliest contributions to the study of ritual gestures in the Hebrew Bible came through Heinrich Vorwahl’s dissertation, *Die Gebärdensprache im Alten Testament*, published in 1932.⁵ Vorwahl suggests that ritual gestures relay magical power. Since that time, most scholars have disagreed with his assessment due to the seemingly self-contradictory nature of his work, but his study opened the door for further exploration of this particular topic.⁶

Since 1932, several scholars have contributed to the topic, but most of this work has been done in isolation. In 1986, P. R. Ackroyd published an entry for the Hebrew word “hand” in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, which

3. Stephen T. Sumner, “Hailing the Divine: Inducement Motifs in the Psalms and Levantine Inscriptions,” *JSOT* 43 (2019): 726–42, here 728. This same definition of inducement motif will be repeated throughout the rest of this paper.

4. Sumner, “Hailing the Divine,” 729. Sumner points out that of the 150 Psalms, 77 contain explicit inducement motifs and the other 73 contain similar rhetorical devices.

5. Heinrich Vorwahl, “Die Gebärdensprache im Alten Testament” (PhD diss., The Friedrich Wilhelm University, 1932).

6. For an example countering Vorwahl, see David M. Calabro, “Ritual Gestures of Lifting, Extending, and Clasp(s)ing the Hand(s) in Northwest Semitic Literature and Iconography” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2014), 105. See also Mayer I. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 13–14.

was one of the first studies suggesting that hand gestures as found within the Hebrew Bible can encompass a wide variety of meanings, depending on context.⁷

While approached separately, the works of Mayer Gruber in 1980 and Othmar Keel in 1997 complemented each other and furthered the idea of the same gesture encompassing various meanings. Gruber focused on Semitic philology dealing with the raised hands gesture while Keel focused on expressions and iconography, specifically on hand gestures related to iconographic exegesis.⁸

David Calabro contributed to the field with his dissertation “Ritual Gestures of Lifting, Extending, and Claspings the Hand(s) in Northwest Semitic Literature and Iconography” in 2014, where he examined Northwest Semitic textual and iconographic evidence of gestures to suggest a full range of interpretations and how these gestures functioned in ritual contexts.⁹ This study is one of the first to synthesize and build off earlier scholars’ studies of this topic. His explicit and careful methodology sets his work apart from previous contributions to the topic.¹⁰ Calabro’s study includes a geographic, linguistic, iconographic, and chronologic approach, using textual sources from the Hebrew Bible, Phoenician and Old Aramaic inscriptions, and Ugaritic texts. His study of iconography includes stelae, cylinder seals, and figurines.¹¹

With regard to assigning meaning to the two hands raised motif, Keel asserts that the gesture came as a reaction to entering the presence of a deity as the human threw up his or her hands for protection from the deity’s power.¹² In 2014, Brent Strawn built on Keel’s work; he suggests that certain postures—such as raised hands—show an attitude of adoration, but, more importantly, they display an emotional, fearful response.¹³ Calabro disagrees with this assessment and instead suggests that the gesture invites, rather than wards off, the deity’s power; he further warns that it is “[inadvisable] to make a sharp distinction between worship and supplication in the context of biblical prayer, since these functions

7. Peter Ackroyd, “גָּ,” *TDOT* 5:393–426. Three such meanings include striking hands to bargain or enter an agreement, taking an oath through raising the hand(s), and extending the hand.

8. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*, and Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury, 1978).

9. Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 15.

10. For an explanation of his methodology, see Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 278–87.

11. Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 16.

12. Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 313.

13. Brent A. Strawn, “The Iconography of Fear: *Yir’at Yhwh* (יראת יהוה) in Artistic Perspective,” in *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster and Joel M. LeMon (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 91–134, here 124.

are often intermingled in the same prayer.”¹⁴ He goes on to suggest other possible interpretations of the gesture: it serves to expose the hands and heart to “divine view,” thereby proving that the person is pure and consequently prepared to be in the deity’s presence; it shows that the hands were not holding weapons, suggesting a kind of surrender; it attracts the attention of the deity; it shows the desire for the mortal to interact with the deity; it symbolizes life, which would suggest that executing the gesture in the presence of the deity is asking for God to give life; it displays the relationship between parties, suggesting subservience on the part of the one performing the gesture; the gesture is itself part of a larger, more complex ritual; and it is a “gesture of approach” performed as a mortal approaches the presence of the deity.¹⁵ In 2019, Sumner added onto Calabro’s studies by documenting inducement motifs in the Psalms, positing that certain gestures were employed to gain the favor and attention of the deity.¹⁶

Despite their differences, where all these scholars do agree is in the idea that certain gestures performed by mortals attract the attention—intentionally or not—and potentially the favor of the deity or higher power in some way. The original motivation of these gestures may be fear or veneration of the particular superior being, as well as any number of other intentions. The purpose of this paper is, in effect, to bridge the gap between the various scholarly interpretations of the raised hands motif by showing that this gesture was principally used as an inducement motif to increase the likelihood of a favorable response and to receive divine favor and aid from a superior being. To do so, this paper will briefly examine the raised hands motif in the Hebrew Bible generally and then more specifically in the Psalms, focusing on six particular idioms. This study will then examine examples of relevant non-biblical textual evidence and iconography to demonstrate the link between this motif in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East.

RAISED HANDS PHRASES IN PSALMS

While general hand gestures are common in the Hebrew Bible, the scope of this paper will include those gestures involving both hands being raised or lifted

14. David M. Calabro, “Gestures of Praise: Lifting and Spreading the Hands in Biblical Prayer” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, David Rolph Seely, and Patty A. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 105–21, here 110.

15. Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 652–54. Calabro finds support for the claim that the gesture “served to expose the hands and heart to divine view” in Isa 1:15: “When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.” All English biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

16. Sumner, “Hailing the Divine,” 730.

up.¹⁷ To that effect, David Calabro identified eight distinct yet synonymous phrases dealing with both hands and prayer in the Hebrew Bible: *nāšā' yādayim* (“lift up the hands”), *nāšā' kappayim* (“lift up the palms”), *pāraś kappayim* (“spread the palms toward”), *peraś kappayim* (“spread out the palms”), *peraś yādayim* (“spread out the hands toward”), *šittah kappayim* (“spread forth the palms”), *heriy's yādayim* (“stretch out the hands with quick movement[s]”), and *mo'al yādayim* (“putting up of the hands”).¹⁸ The distinction of these phrases comes in the differences in language, while the synonymy of these phrases comes in their use in prayer contexts.¹⁹

Of these eight phrases, six appear within Psalms.²⁰ These six specific phrases and their accompanying passages will now be analyzed to show that they are being used as inducement motifs to increase the likelihood of a favorable response and receive divine favor from a superior being. Such analysis will in turn better help demonstrate the connection between the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East in understanding the raised hands gesture and synthesizing previous research.

The first phrase is *nāšā' yādayim* (“lift up the hands”), which is present in Ps 28:2: “Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary,” and Ps 134:2: “Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the Lord.”²¹ In these verses, the lifted hands gesture is performed toward the deity’s dwelling place: the “holy sanctuary” in Ps 28 and “holy place” in Ps 134. In these instances, the deity’s dwelling place could serve as a representation of the deity itself.

In context, both these verses are a petition to a deity. Psalm 28 is a prayer for continued blessing, and the raised hands can be seen as a “token of a heart reaching out to God in supplication.”²² The raised hands are reaching out to the deity,

17. Phrases involving individuals raising just one hand are also common in the Hebrew Bible; some instances are additionally used in prayer contexts and some are not. While researching both one and two raised hands does not fit within the scope of the current treatise, it could be an interesting topic for further research.

18. Because of Hebrew synonyms, sometimes “hand” will appear as “palm,” or vice versa, as well as “to” may be “toward,” or the other way around. For further discussion of these paradigms and their correlating scriptures, see Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 258, Table 11.

19. Davies gives several scriptural examples which strengthen this claim: Exod 9:29, 33; 1 Kgs 8:22, 38; Ezra 9:5; Job 11:13; Ps 146:3; Lam 3:41. See Davies, *Lift Up Your Heads*, 118.

20. The two idioms that will not be discussed in this section are *peraś kappayim* (“spread out the palms”), which is present in Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as *mo'al yādayim* (“putting up of the hands”), which is present in Nehemiah. For further discussion on these two idioms, see Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 528, Table 11.

21. The versification in this paper follows the English versification.

22. J. W. McKay and J. W. Rogerson, *Psalms 1–50*, CBC (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 127.

requesting favor and a response.²³ Psalm 134 acts more like a command, telling other people to “lift up [their] hands” toward the deity.²⁴ John Goldingay suggests that raising the hands in this context is “a gesture of appeal” and that it is also “a gesture of dependence on Yhwh that complements direct worship of Yhwh, and in a way constitutes worship because it connotes that dependence.”²⁵ Both of these examples show how lifted hands served as an inducement motif to try and increase the likelihood of response and receiving divine favor from the deity.

The second phrase is *nāśā’ kappayim* (“lift up the palms”), which is present in Ps 63:4: “So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.” This attestation of the lifted hands gesture is a single person praying to a deity; lifted hands accompany the prayer. The context of this phrase appears to be one of thanksgiving. J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay posit that the lifted hands in this verse exemplify a “traditional attitude of prayer expressing both adoration and expectant supplication.”²⁶ Derek Kidner adds that this action gave “the body its share in expressing worship (cf. [Ps.] 134:2) or supplication ([Ps.] 28:2).”²⁷ Examined holistically, the raised hands in this psalm serve as another example of an inducement motif as the individual seeks the attention and favor of his or her deity.

The third phrase is *pāraś kappayim* (“spread the palms toward”), which is present in Ps 44:20–21: “If we had forgotten the name of our God, or spread out our hands to a strange god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.” This psalm has an overall negative and bitter context.²⁸ It

23. Derek Kidner suggests that “the uplifted hands can be expressive of prayer in many moods; here as beseeching a favour, empty handed” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, TOTC [London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973], 123). John Goldingay states that “generally [prayer] in Scripture . . . involves standing as before a superior, raising one’s hand in appeal like a child in a classroom seeking to get the teacher’s attention, or opening the hands in readiness to receive, and opening one’s eyes to look to God” (John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, BCOTWP [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 405).

24. Psalm 134 is widely considered the last “song of ascents,” which may suggest its use during pilgrimages to Jerusalem; in this way, the psalm could be viewed as instruction to invoke divine aid. For additional discussion on this psalm as a last “song of ascents,” see J. W. McKay and J. W. Rogerson, *Psalms 101–150*, CBC (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 141; and G. Campbell Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms* (Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 1942), 264.

25. John Goldingay, *Psalms 90–150*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 572.

26. McKay and Rogerson, *Psalms 101–150*, 66.

27. Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 226.

28. John Goldingay suggests that the psalm “presupposes a situation in which the people have gone out in battle against their enemies and have been defeated” (John Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, BCOTWP [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 37). Morgan says that “it is a prayer for deliverance from circumstances of defeat” (Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 85). McKay and

is unique from the other examples from the psalms presented in this paper in that the spreading or raising of the hands is described as being performed to a “strange god” and presumably not the people’s original deity. Goldingay suggests that this could be because the people “have ignored their God’s name and ceased to call on God,” and rather than ceasing to pray altogether, they could be questioning which deity they should supplicate.²⁹ Regardless of the exact reason for the people to even consider “spreading out [their] hands” to a foreign deity, this psalm shows the power of the raised hands motif; if the people raise their hands to a different deity, their original god would likely notice. Conversely, if the people were to spread out their hands to their true deity, the verses suggest that the deity would notice and there would be an increased probability of the petition being heard, thereby serving as an inducement motif in this particular psalm.

The fourth phrase is *peras̄ yādayim* (“spread out the hands toward”), which is present in Ps 143:6: “I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.” This verse is a prayer for deliverance; the first verse of the psalm is a petition, “Hear my prayer,” to a deity because enemies were pursuing the psalmist, “crushing [his] life to the ground,” as noted in verse three. Verse seven is an additional plea for the Lord to answer quickly, and not “hide [his] face” from the psalmist. G. Campbell Morgan suggests that “in [this] situation of complete helplessness the soul prepares for its prayer, and the words which indicate the method of preparation are interesting. ‘I remember . . . I meditate . . . I muse.’ The issue of this is immediately declared, ‘I spread forth my hands unto thee.’ The earnestness of the soul is manifested in the urgent petitions which follow.”³⁰ In the psalmist’s dangerous and helpless predicament, he seeks the aid and attention of his deity by spreading out his hands in an attitude of prayer.³¹ Seen all together, these verses indicate that the stretched hands in verse six are an attempt to further petition the deity and increase the likelihood of a favorable response and divine favor in order to escape from an enemy.

The fifth phrase is *šittah̄ kappayim* (“spread forth the palms”), which is present in Ps 88:9: “My eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call on you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you.” This psalm is a prayer of one feeling forsaken and forgotten; in verses one and two the psalmist is pleading for the Lord to hear his cry, and verses three through seven describe the psalmist’s troubles, which he

Rogerson suggest that the psalm contains “real bitterness” (McKay and Rogerson, *Psalms 1–50*, 209).

29. Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 46.

30. Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 277.

31. McKay and Rogerson affirm that the action of spreading the hands is “a traditional attitude in both prayer and praise” (McKay and Rogerson, *Psalms 101–150*, 169).

compares to being in “the Pit” (v. 4) and “among the dead” (v. 5).³² Verse nine, then, serves as an indication that the psalmist’s action of spreading out his hands to the Lord was accompanied by speech as part of prayer. Goldingay suggests that prayer is not only words spoken to the deity, but also actions for the deity to see.³³ Consequently, the combination of words and actions (in this case, spreading out hands) is more powerful than just words or just actions and has a greater chance of eliciting divine aid. Verse ten is then a petition for “wonders,” or miracles. All of this shows how the raised hands in this psalm serve as an inducement motif to draw the attention of the deity to the miserable plight of the psalmist, with the hope of receiving divine attention and help.

The sixth phrase is *heriy’s yādayim* (“stretch out the hands with quick movement[s]”), which is present in Ps 68:31: “Let bronze be brought from Egypt; let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out its hands to God.” These verses essentially describe the gesture (stretched hands) that the people of Ethiopia would need to perform in a particular situation, without explaining what that particular situation could be.

Opinions regarding Ps 68 and its interpretation as a whole vary: J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay suggest that “probably no other psalm presents as many problems of interpretation as this one,”³⁴ while Kidner calls it “one of the most boisterous and exhilarating [psalms] in the Psalter,”³⁵ and Morgan proclaims it “one of the grandest of the psalms.”³⁶ Despite the differences in the perceived meaning of this particular psalm, the stretched out hands symbol is consistent with the other psalm examples presented earlier in this paper. While these verses appear to be used in a praise context and are not explicitly tied to prayer, the actions (offering sacrifice and seemingly blessing a deity) are typologically similar to prayer and other phrases of a similar context.³⁷ The hands symbolism in this verse could therefore also be included as an inducement motif as mortals interact with their deity.³⁸

32. McKay and Rogerson assert that Ps 88 is “a psalm of unrelieved gloom and anguish” (J. W. McKay and J. W. Rogerson, *Psalms 51–100*, CBC [London: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 185); and Derek Kidner suggests that there is no sadder psalm than this one (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: A Commentary on Books III–V of the Psalms*, TOTC [London: Intervarsity Press, 1975], 316).

33. Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 652–53.

34. McKay and Rogerson, *Psalms 1–50*, 82.

35. Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 238.

36. Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 120.

37. Calabro suggests this idea (Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 256), while McKay and Rogerson also propose that the hands could be stretched out “as a token of submission and worship” (McKay and Rogerson, *Psalms 1–50*, 91). On p. 66 McKay and Rogerson also argue that the lifted or stretched hands are used in contexts of both adoration (as in Ps 134:2) and “expectant supplication” (Ps 28:2).

38. McKay and Rogerson suggest that the use of Egypt and Ethiopia in this psalm

The six phrases presented in this section describe contexts of prayer and praise within Psalms where an individual or group of people intentionally raise or stretch forth both hands in the direction of either a supreme being or the being's dwelling place. All of these instances appear to be attempts by the petitioner(s) to increase the likelihood of receiving a favorable response and divine aid from the deity, either to escape a dangerous or gloomy situation or to better offer praise and worship. Whether these gestures in Psalms were performed out of fear or veneration for the deity, they all act as inducement motifs to attract the attention and favor of a supreme being. This study helps show the connection between the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East in understanding the raised hands gesture. These connections will be further explored in the section regarding other ancient Near Eastern references.

OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSE

On the other hand, as Calabro points out, "It is important to recognize the possibility that gesture phrases in Northwest Semitic languages can be used idiomatically and that they may not necessarily imply the actual performance of a gesture act."³⁹ Additionally, Davies warns that "we need to exercise a degree of caution in endeavoring to reconstruct in any detail the physical gestures of the lived experience of the Israelites or their neighbors. . . . Texts may use hyperbole, or stylize a character's actions for their own rhetorical purposes. There may be some literary conventions which take on a life of their own with little to anchor them in the social conventions of the era the texts represent."⁴⁰ Given the antiquity of these languages and cultures, it is important to exercise caution when assigning interpretation or meaning to different gestures or motifs.

While it is true that ancient gestures are hard to interpret due to displacement in time and that ancient gestures as we perceive them may have looked entirely different than imagined today, the textual and iconographic evidence do suggest some correlation between the idea of the image of the gesture (if not the gesture itself) and its current understood meaning. The consistent appearance of the raised hands gesture in texts—both in Biblical Hebrew and in other ancient Near Eastern languages—indicates that the motif does have significance and can be studied to more deeply understand the culture and practices of the ancient world.

represent even "the most remote and exotic of the ancient nations" (McKay and Rogerson, *Psalms 1–50*, 91), and Kidner believes it represents "a remote people seeking God" (Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 244).

39. Calabro, "Ritual Gestures," 133.

40. Davies, *Lift Up Your Heads*, 4.

OTHER ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN REFERENCES

Ugaritic artifacts serve as additional examples of the raised hands gesture being used as an inducement motif in the ancient Near East. This Ugaritic evidence is often used in conjunction with Hebrew Bible studies due to the relative proximity of respective lands and kingdoms, as well as similarity between languages. Mark Smith suggests that not only the similarities between the two cultures but the differences serve to “sharpen scholarly understanding of Israelite religion, in particular its differentiation from the larger West Semitic culture of which the Ugaritic texts constitute the single greatest extra-biblical textual witness.”⁴¹ He additionally argues that “[the] study of Ugaritic remains necessary for situating ancient Israel and the Bible within their larger historical contexts.”⁴² The culture of the Hebrew Bible did not occur in a vacuum, but rather was influenced by surrounding cultures, such as that of Ugarit.⁴³

One such example is found in the Ugaritic Kirta Epic, which dates to between 1500 and 1200 BCE. In the tale, Kirta receives instructions on how to approach and entreat his region’s deity, Baal: “Ascend to the top of the tower, mount the shoulder of the wall. Lift up your hands to heaven, sacrifice to the Bull, your father [El]. Bring down [Baal] with your sacrifice, the son of Dagan with your prey.”⁴⁴ Kirta’s subsequent combined gesture and sacrifice successfully induce the deity to come down and meet him later, as told in the tablet. The idiom used in the Kirta Epic to describe raising both hands in prayer is equivalent to the Hebrew *nāšā’ yādayim*, which is also used in Pss 28:2 and 134:2.⁴⁵ This text is an example of a successful inducement motif where the reader is made aware of the answer of the deity at least partly in response to the petitioner’s raised hands.

Sumero-Akkadian religious texts also contain examples of the raised hands gesture being used as an inducement motif in the ancient Near East. Scholars often call prayers in these texts *Šuillas*, which translates to “hand-lifting.”⁴⁶

41. Mark S. Smith, “Ugaritic Studies and Israelite Religion: A Retrospective View,” *NEA* 65 (2002): 17–29, here 27.

42. Smith, “Ugaritic Studies and Israelite Religion,” 27.

43. For additional discussion about benefits of studying the Ugaritic tradition to better understand the Hebrew Bible tradition, see J. J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 5–8. Some of these reasons include better understanding of Canaanite religion and culture; contributions to understanding Hebrew lexicography, syntax, and prosody; and dating early Israelite pottery.

44. This translation comes from Calabro, “Ritual Gestures,” 108.

45. This shared idiom is likely a reflection of aspects of shared culture between ancient Israel and Ugarit, suggesting the validity of comparison between the two languages and cultures.

46. This translation is from Christopher Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-Prayers of “Hand-Lifting” (Akkadian Šuillas): An Investigation of Function in Light of the Idiomatic Meaning of the Rubric* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 2.

Christopher Frechette posits that these cultures used hand-lifting reciprocally with the deity. The person approaching the deity lifts his or her hand in greeting, which binds both the person and the deity to act; this reciprocity is similar to inducement in that the raised hand serves to increase the likelihood of a response from the deity, and the deity is in turn expected to acknowledge and react.⁴⁷

This motif is also common in iconography throughout the ancient Near East. One such example is iconography displayed on a stela from Balou'a, Jordan.⁴⁸ The stela's image includes three figures and traditional Egyptian characteristics, such as the double crown representing the unification of Egypt, a sun disk, and an ankh—a symbol of life in ancient Egypt. While the exact date of this piece is not known, it is generally accepted that it originates between the beginning of the Iron Age and the Late Bronze Age,⁴⁹ meaning it likely dates to the ancient kingdom of Moab. While the exact specifications of this image are not known, its similarity in time and geographical region is compelling as a means of comparing the raised hands motif between the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East.

The middle figure on this stela is a male whose hands are both raised with the palms out towards the man on the left, who is likely a deity. The figure on the right is a female and also appears to be some type of deity. Not enough writing or other evidence exists to fully explain the meaning of the gesture displayed, but it is similar to the common ancient Egyptian attitude of prayer—arms and hands raised, with the palm out—found in other textual and iconographic evidence of the period.⁵⁰

These previous examples further demonstrate that raising both hands in prayer in the ancient Near East often served to increase the likelihood of a favorable response and receive divine favor from a superior being—a deity or a king—either while in an attitude of prayer or while simply approaching the being. Due to the overlap of culture and ideas in the region, these examples consequently strengthen the claim that the image of two raised hands used in the Psalms is also an inducement motif.

47. Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-Prayers*, 2.

48. Representations of these stelae can be found in Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 311; Calabro, "Ritual Gestures," 527; and G. Horsfield and L. H. Vincent, "Une Stèle Égypto-Moabite Au Balou'a," *RB (1892-1940)* 41 (1932): 417-44, here 423. This stela is currently housed in the Archaeological Museum of Jordan in Amman.

49. Calabro, "Ritual Gestures," 526.

50. Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 311. For additional examples of ancient Egyptian iconographic evidence, see Brent A. Strawn, "'The Fear of the Lord' in Two (or Three) Dimensions: Iconography and *Yir'at Yhwh*," in *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster, Brent A. Strawn, and Ryan P. Bonfiglio (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 295-312.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While much study concerning gestures and nonverbal communication within the Hebrew Bible has been done up to this point, much study still remains regarding this topic. Such research could include a more comprehensive look at surrounding cultures in the ancient Near East and the correlation between how subjects were expected to act before a king or king-like figure and how mortals were expected to act before their particular deity or deities. Additionally, the study of each Hebrew phrase containing two raised hands could be expanded beyond Psalms within the Hebrew Bible. A study of gestures involving just one hand could also be conducted to synthesize findings and potentially strengthen the idea of the inducement motif within the Hebrew Bible.

CONCLUSION

The image of two raised hands is common throughout the ancient Near East in many contexts, but especially in situations where mortals, in a prayer-like attitude, are approaching a deity or otherwise superior power. As Gruber put it, “Each verbal language tends to be accompanied by a well-developed language of postures, gestures, and facial expressions operating in consonance with verbal language to effect communication. One should expect, therefore, that communication with deities should likewise be accompanied by characteristic postures, gestures, and facial expressions.”⁵¹ The raised hands image is one such characteristic posture employed by mortals.

Most scholars agree that the motif serves on some level either to attract a deity’s attention in some way or as a reaction to the deity’s response, but scholars do not agree beyond that as to the motif’s meaning and purpose. This paper has examined both language—biblical and non-biblical—and iconography within the ancient Near East to show that, when paired with prayer, the raised hands gesture serves as an inducement motif to increase the likelihood of a favorable response and divine favor from the deity toward the mortal performing the gesture, regardless of the petitioner’s original perceived emotion or intention. While this paper focused specifically on Psalms, this same pattern exists in the broader ancient Near East as evidenced in ancient texts and iconography.

51. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*, 22.