IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

BIBLICAL STUDIES IN HONOUR OF ARCHBISHOP DONALD ROBINSON

Edited by
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LANCER

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LANCER BOOKS are published by
ANZEA PUBLISHERS
3–5 Richmond Road,
Homebush West, NSW 2140
Australia

ISBN 0 85802 516 8

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Cover design by John Windus

Typeset by DOCUPRO, Sydney

Printed in Australia by Southwood Press

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THE LORD IS NEAR (Philippians 4:5b)

Allan Chapple

Biblical theology is a bifocal enterprise. The biblical theologian must, like a traveller negotiating unfamiliar terrain, both watch his footing and also keep his eye on the landmarks. He must ensure that he is treading on solid ground and that he is heading in the right direction. In other words, his work must be both rooted in the text and structured by the text; he must pay close attention to both the contents and the shape of the Bible's unfolding revelation. While he must work to develop a clear overview of the biblical landscape, he must also be a sure-footed exegete, grounding his work in an accurate, detailed understanding of the Bible, text by text and passage by passage. A constant return to the biblical text is thus an essential part of the task of biblical theology. The biblical theologian must engage in a constant probing and pondering of the text, seeking to arrive at an understanding of it that is as accurate as possible.[1]

This essay is an attempt to do just that. Its focus is the brief statement *ho kyrios engys* ('the Lord is near', Phil 4:5b). What did Paul mean by these words? The answer seems very obvious to most interpreters: the overwhelming consensus is that this is an abbreviated way of saying, 'the Lord's coming is near'. This interpretation is espoused by the great majority of commentators

in the modern period[2] and by many standard works of New Testament scholarship.[3]

An obvious justification for this interpretation is the fact that *engys* (near) and its cognate verb *engizein* (to approach, come near) are an important part of the eschatological vocabulary of the New Testament. John assures the seven Asian churches that the *kairos* (time), the end of history, is *engys* (near, Rev 1:3; 22:10). Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that their salvation is nearer (*engyteron*) than when they first believed the gospel (Rom 13:11). While its precise meaning has been the subject of much debate, there is no doubt that the verb also often has an eschatological sense. The *ēngiken* (it has come near) which characterised Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom (Matt 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 10:9, 11) is used by the New Testament writers of the Lord's coming (James 5:8), the end of all things (1 Pet 4:17), and the 'day' (Rom 13:12; cf. Heb 10:25).

This eschatological flavour of the terminology Paul uses is matched by the eschatological tenor of the previous section of the letter.[4] There Paul had warned the Philippians that the final destiny of the enemies of the cross is destruction (3:18–19) and reminded them that Christians are people of hope, waiting for the Saviour to come from heaven (3:20–21). In addition, an eschatological interpretation of the words fits the immediate context: it is not difficult to see how Paul would have regarded the imminence of the Lord's return as an incentive for rejoicing (4:4), for gentleness or forbearance (*to epieikes hymōn*, 4:5a), and for confident, persevering prayer (4:6).

There seems little doubt that Paul could have used these words in this way, but is this the most natural interpretation of the words in this context? Calvin did not think so. For him, the interpretive key that unlocks Paul's meaning here is Psalm 145:18: 'The LORD is near to all who call upon him'.[5] The Lord's nearness has to do with his providential care: 'He promises that he will be with us. He is prepared to give help to his people'. This both enables believers to exercise forbearance in the face of hostility (v. 5a) and provides an incentive for their confidence in prayer (v. 6).[6]

Only a few commentators have shared Calvin's non-eschatological interpretation of our text.[7] Writing in 1924, H C G Moule

regarded *ho kyrios engys* (the Lord is near) as an allusion to Psalm 119:151, and thus claimed that it must be understood 'in the sense of *presence*, not of *coming*...' Although conceding that the latter concept is not excluded, Moule maintains that the use of Psalm 119 'decides for the other as the leading truth'.[8] More recently, G B Caird argued that Paul is quoting Psalm 34:18 and 119:151 and referring to 'the abiding presence of the living Lord...'[9] In addition, there are several commentators who acknowledge the possibility of this non-eschatological interpretation, but leave the exegetical issue unresolved.[10] G F Hawthorne goes furthest in this direction, claiming that Paul traded on the ambiguity of *engys* to make both points: 'the Lord who will come again is presently very near in his Spirit'.[11]

It is significant that for Calvin, Moule and Caird alike, a decisive factor in the adoption of this non-eschatological interpretation is the conviction that Paul is here quoting or alluding to the Psalms. Three passages (Ps 34:18, 119:151 and 145:18) are suggested as the likely source of our text. The first of these affirms that 'the LORD is near (*engys kyrios*, 33:19 LXX) to the broken-hearted...'; in the second the Psalmist says, '...you are near, LORD' (*engys ei su, kyrie*, 118:151 LXX); and the third declares that 'the LORD is near (*engys kyrios*) to all who call upon him' (144:18 LXX). A comparison of these texts with Philippians 4:5b (*ho kyrios engys*) shows that Paul is not directly quoting any of them. However, the wording is similar enough to suggest that he may be alluding to one or more of them. Is it likely that Paul intended such an allusion?

In general terms, the possibility that he did is quite high. Four considerations support this view. In the first place, study of the way the New Testament uses the Old has demonstrated how widely and frequently the Psalms were known and used by the early Christians.

> Anyone who explores the nuances of the ways in which Old Testament Psalms are used in the New Testament will be amazed at the ways in which Israel's songs of prayer and praise were alive and present in the early church. Characteristic phraseology from the widest variety of psalms suddenly appears; sometimes only a few words are found, but they are unmistakeable allusions

> to the Psalter.[12](The New Testament has been influenced by Psalms more than by any other book of the Old Testament[13]).

Secondly, what holds for the early Christians in general is true of Paul to a notable degree:

> if one had to point to any single book in the Scriptures on which Paul relied more than on any other, one would have to point to the Psalter.[14]

Thirdly, Paul's use of the Old Testament shows a marked preference for the Septuagint, despite his evident ability to use the Hebrew text when he chose.[15] Fourthly, Paul's language is steeped in the Old Testament. The

> style and vocabulary of the apostle are such that it is often difficult to distinguish between quotation, allusion and language colouring from the Old Testament ... [which for Paul] ... is not only the Word of God but also his mode of thought and speech...[16]

There is thus an *a priori* likelihood that Paul's letters will often prove to contain allusions to the Greek Old Testament in general and to the Psalms in particular. Nevertheless, despite this, and despite the interpretation of our text advocated by Calvin, Moule, and Caird, Philippians 4:5 is not mentioned in any of the studies of Pauline use of the Old Testament available to me.[17]

How justified, then, is the claim that Paul is dependent here on one or more of these passages in the Psalms? And how valid is the non-eschatological interpretation of our text, which is largely dependent on this claim?

The similarity in the wording makes such an allusion possible, as we have seen. I want to argue that this possibility becomes a probability when we compare the meaning as well as the words. What links these Psalm-texts and Paul's words is not merely a shared vocabulary, but a shared outlook, a common conceptual framework. In order to make this comparison, we must first examine the immediate context of the three 'the Lord

is near' texts. What message would they have conveyed to Paul as he pondered them?

In each of the three passages,[18] the dominant theme is the assurance that Yahweh will come to the aid of his people when they call upon him in trouble. What is the nature of that trouble? In general terms, it is the 'afflictions' (*thlipseis*, Ps 33:18, 20) the righteous experience. More specifically, it is the opposition of those who hate them (*hoi misountes*, 33:22) or pursue them (*hoi katadiōkontes*, 118:150). The activity of sinners (*hamartōloi*, 33:22; 144:20), those who do evil (*poiountes kaka*, 33:17), is a significant feature of the environment in which God's people live. In such an environment, they will often face persecution.

How do his people respond to these troubles? They cry out to Yahweh (*ekkrazein*, 33:18; 118:145–147) or call upon him (*epikalein*, 144:18). Then they find that he both hears them and saves them. He hears their prayer (*deēsis*, 33:16; 144:19) and delivers (*rhyesthai*, 33:18, 20) or saves (*sōzein*, 33:19; 118:146; 144:19) or protects (*phylassein*, 33:21; 144:20) them. Yahweh's nearness is thus correlated in these passages both with his faithfulness as a deliverer and protector and with the confidence of his people's prayers.

To say that Yahweh is 'near' is, on the one hand, to affirm how readily and reliably he intervenes to save. Note the parallelism of 'The LORD is near' and 'The LORD...saves' in Psalm 34:18. Again, 'The LORD is near to all who call upon him' (Ps 145:18) is closely related to 'he hears their cry and saves them' in the following verse. By speaking of his proximity, the psalmists express their confidence in God's saving intervention. To say that Yahweh is near is not to imply that he is not quite present;[19] on the contrary, it is the psalmists' way of affirming that he is 'an ever-present help in trouble' (Ps 46:1). His nearness is his presence as saviour.[20]

To say that Yahweh is 'near' is, on the other hand, to affirm how certain he is to hear and answer prayer. Their conviction of his nearness, his presence as saviour and protector, undergirded the confidence with which his people prayed: 'The LORD is near to all who call upon him ' (145:18). It is because they knew him to be near in this sense that they were confident

of being heard when they called upon him or cried out to him. By speaking of his nearness, the psalmists express their confidence that Yahweh's ears are attentive to their request (*deēsis*, 33:16 LXX).

Such fundamental convictions of Israelite piety are not confined to these three passages in the Psalms, of course. What Paul read here he would have seen not only elsewhere in the Psalms but widely throughout the Scriptures. Before we return to Philippians 4, it is important that we note some of the key features of this wider context.

The strong sense of personal relationship—of being heard and answered, protected and delivered—embodied in these passages about Yahweh's nearness, reflects the privilege Israel enjoys as his elect people: 'What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them (*engizōn autois*) the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray (*epikalesōmetha*) to him?' (Deut 4:7). What is true corporately for Israel as a people is true for all pious Israelites: the LORD is near to all who call upon him (*pasin tois epikaloumenois auton*) in truth (Ps 144:18 LXX). Moreover, Israel's election and covenant-relationship with Yahweh means that this nearness is reciprocal. As he is near them, so they are permitted to be near him. Israel is a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6), a people that draws near to Yahweh (*laōi engizonti autōi*, Ps 148:14).[21]

Yahweh's nearness to his people means, in particular, that they are confident of vindication and deliverance. This confidence is expressed with great clarity in the third of Isaiah's 'Servant songs', in a passage which is echoed in Romans 8:31–34. In the face of violence and rejection, the Servant declares, 'He who vindicates me is near (*engizei*). . .It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me' (Isa 50:8–9).[22] This is not merely a pious hope, however. It is a tested conviction, as we see in the remarkable testimony found amidst all the grief and pain expressed so vividly in Lamentations (3:51–58). The writer tells how he had suffered greatly through the hostile activities of his enemies (*echthroi*, v. 52), and how in this situation of great extremity he called upon Yahweh (*epekalesamēn*, v. 55). He asked Yahweh not to shut out his request (*deēsis*, v. 56)—and his prayer was heard. He testifies, 'You drew near (*ēngisas*) to help me on the

day I called upon you (*epekalesamēn*)' (v. 57). There is an obvious similarity, of both theme and terminology, between this passage and the three Psalm-passages we considered above. They all agree that Yahweh is near when his afflicted people call upon him: he hears them and rescues them. Yahweh's nearness means that salvation is near (Ps 85:9).

Yet this nearness of Yahweh is not constant and unvarying. It is not a natural continuum, a fact that can be taken for granted. Nor is it a right or possession, something to which his people are entitled. This is made clear in several ways in the Old Testament.

First, the Old Testament writers often refer to Yahweh as being far away. Sometimes this reflects their conviction that Yahweh rejects the ungodly: 'The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayers of the righteous' (Prov 15:29). This does not mean, of course, that the wicked have succeeded in banishing Yahweh from his world. The distance spoken of is moral and personal: 'the proud he knows from afar' (Ps 138:6). It is also (like his nearness) reciprocal: Yahweh is far from the wicked because they are far from him ('Those who are far from you will perish ...' (Ps 73:27)). What is meant by his distance is best seen by considering how we might have expected Proverbs 15:29 to conclude. The logical counterpart to its first half is '... but he is near to the righteous'. Yet the proverb speaks of Yahweh's hearing prayer rather than of his nearness, implying that his readiness to hear and answer is the chief import of that nearness. His distance is therefore to be understood as his refusal to hear and to help. Thus, as Yahweh's nearness means that salvation is near, to say that he is far from the wicked is to say that 'salvation is far from the wicked' (Ps 119:155).

More often, reference to Yahweh being far away reflects the experience of his people. The psalmists often ask him not to remain distant, but to save them: 'O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O LORD my Saviour' (Ps 38:21–22).[23] To experience Yahweh as distant is to be without help: 'Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?' (Ps 10:1). The problem is not that Yahweh doesn't care for his afflicted people; their prayers clearly stem from a deep conviction that

he does. Rather, he has not yet intervened to deliver them from trouble. What these prayers request of Yahweh is not a new attitude, but renewed activity.[24] Along with other expressions often used in conjunction with it (asking Yahweh to awake, to cease being silent, to rouse himself or arise[25]), to ask him to cease being distant means to request his help. Thus the converse of Yahweh's distance, his 'nearness', means his saving intervention. If Yahweh's distance means that prayer is not heard and help does not come,[26] then his nearness means that he hears his people's prayers and intervenes to deliver them from trouble. And this means that his nearness is a demonstration of his mercy; it reflects grace not nature.

There is a second way in which Yahweh's nearness, his saving presence, is seen to be a gift. The Old Testament writers show a profound awareness that he is 'the high and lofty one' (Isa 57:15). One way of giving expression to his transcendent greatness and holiness was to speak of heaven as his 'dwelling-place': 'From heaven the LORD looks down. . .from his dwelling-place he watches all who live on the earth. . .' (Ps 33:13–14).[27] Yet, although heaven is his dwelling-place, he has chosen to dwell among his people: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite. . .' (Isa 57:15). His gracious condescension to his chosen people includes his choice of Zion as his dwelling-place: Yahweh's 'tent is in Salem, his dwelling-place in Zion' (Ps 76:2).[28] Yet Israel cannot presume upon Yahweh's presence in the Temple. As he displayed his love by manifesting his presence there (so, as Jeremiah 7:1–15 and Ezekiel 8–11 show so emphatically), he can display his judgment by withdrawing his presence. Heaven, not the Temple, is his proper dwelling place.

To say that Yahweh is near does not imply, therefore, that he is confined or localised. He is both near and far, here and in heaven: 'Am I only a God nearby (*engizōn*) and not a God far away? Do I not fill heaven and earth?' (Jer 23:23–24). His presence is both extensive and intensive, both distributed and focused.[29] As Creator and Ruler, the God of sovereign power, he is present throughout his creation (Ps 139:7–10), sustaining it and filling it. In this sense, he is present everywhere—and yet he is not always present! As Saviour and Judge, the God of holy

love, he approaches and withdraws, comes near and goes away.[30] When the Psalmists speak of Yahweh's nearness, they are referring to a presence that is dynamic rather than static, personal rather than natural, saving rather than sustaining.

When the psalmists express their confidence in Yahweh's presence with them, they never lose sight of the fact that this is the presence of the God of heaven. If he is at the believer's right hand (Ps 16:8), he is also on his heavenly throne (Ps 11:4). The God who is present with his people looks down from heaven (Ps 14:2, 5). His nearness means that he hears his people's prayers, yet it is from heaven that he hears (1 Kings 8:30). His presence does not compromise his transcendence. So 'Yahweh is near' says that he is full of grace, not that the world is full of his presence. The confidence that he is present to hear and to save is not based on their understanding of the nature of the creation but on their understanding of the nature of Yahweh as 'the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness' (Exod 34:6).

We have been attempting to determine whether Philippians 4:5b ('the Lord is near') is an intentional allusion to one or more of Psalms 34:18, 119:151 and 145:18. We have, therefore, explored the meaning of the phrase in its immediate context in the three Psalms, and then considered some important related features of the wider context of Old Testament piety. We have seen that the expression 'Yahweh is near' voices an expectation of being heard and saved, an expectation that is based ultimately on Yahweh's election of Israel as his people and confirmed by previous experience of his help and deliverance. The psalmists make this affirmation of faith in the face of testing and affliction: they are experiencing hostile opposition. Their response to these trials is to cry out to Yahweh, to call upon him. He hears their prayer and comes to their aid. He shows himself to be present, with them to hear and to help. He delivers and protects them. Yet he hears from heaven, for he who is with his people as saviour is also above them as sovereign.

When we turn to Philippians 4:5, after considering the meaning of the three Psalm-texts in context, the similarities are very striking. There is a significant degree of conceptual and terminological 'fit' between the two. Note the following similarities

between Philippians 4:5b in its context and Psalms 34:18; 119:151, and 145:18 in their context.

First, Paul urges the Philippians to show forbearance (*to epieikes hymōn*) to all (4:5a). In the context of the letter as a whole, the most likely reason for this exhortation is the trouble facing the church.[31] There is not only internal dissension (4:2–3) but external opposition. Like the psalmists, the Philippians live in a hostile environment. They are experiencing suffering (1:29), facing the same conflict they had seen Paul endure and which they knew him to be facing still (1:30). As he had endured hostility and rejection in Philippi (1 Thess 2:2), and was still being opposed (1:15–17), so they too are facing opposition (1:28). Their faith in the gospel is under threat: Paul has to warn them against the 'dogs' (3:2), and against those who are hostile to Christ's cross (3:18).[32] As we have seen, the godly person in Israel had to contend with those who do evil (*poiountes kaka*, Ps 33:17 LXX) and with enemies (*echthroi*, Lam 3:52); now we see that the Philippians must beware of those who are evil workers (*tous kakous ergatas*, 3:2) and the enemies (*echthroi*) of the cross of Christ. Yahweh's nearness was an encouragement to the psalmists as they experienced intense opposition. The Philippians face the same problem, and, in saying *ho kyrios engys*, Paul offers them the same encouragement.

Secondly, Paul urges the Philippians to pray with gratitude and without anxiety (4:6). He has already indicated that their response to his sufferings was that they prayed for him (1:19). Now he reinforces the point: suffering (whether theirs or his) should lead to confident, grateful prayer, rather than anxious concern.[33] Like the psalmists, they should call upon God in their troubles. The right response to affliction and opposition is *deēsis* (prayer, petition). That was so for Israel (Ps 33:16 LXX; 144:19 LXX; Lam 3:56); it is true also for the Philippians (4:6). The fact of Yahweh's nearness was the foundation of the confidence with which they prayed. The same direct connection the psalmists make between God's nearness and their prayers is evident here: 'The Lord is near. . .in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'

Thirdly, Paul assures the Philippians that they will be heard. When they pray, they will find that God's peace will protect

them (4:7). As we have seen, the psalmists found that when they called upon Yahweh, he heard them and saved them. They could rely on him to protect them (*phylassein*, Ps 33:21; 144:20). The Philippians too will be protected: God's peace will guard (*phrourēsei*) their hearts. The words used are different, and the forms this divine protection took varied, but the basic concept is the same—the Lord saves those who call upon him.

When God's people are opposed and persecuted, they cry out to him in the confidence that he will hear their prayers and come to their aid. That was the conviction that led the psalmists to speak of Yahweh's nearness (Ps 34:18; 119:151; 145:18). Paul uses the same expression to voice the same conviction in the same circumstances. There is, however, one striking and important difference: what the Israelites expected of Yahweh, the Philippians are to expect of Jesus.

There is a fourth point of correspondence to be observed. As we have seen, the psalmists did not understand Yahweh's nearness, his saving presence, in a restrictive way. He who was near them to hear and to save was also in heaven. The same is true of the Lord of whom Paul speaks. He who is near (4:5) is also in heaven (3:20). Just as the *kyrios* (the Lord, Yahweh) was in heaven and yet with his people, so Paul believed that the *kyrios* Jesus is both in heaven[34] and also present with and in his people.[35] His present reign in heaven does not preclude his presence with his people on earth; his nearness does not diminish expectancy about his coming from heaven.

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions. Although *ho kyrios engys* is normally understood as an eschatological statement, Calvin, Moule and Caird appealed to the Psalms to argue that Paul was referring to the Lord's presence rather than his parousia. Our study has confirmed their interpretation, by showing that the connections between our text and the three Psalm-texts in question are much deeper than a mere similarity of wording. What 'Yahweh is near' meant to the psalmists is also, *mutatis mutandis*, what Paul meant by *ho kyrios engys*: the Lord is ready to hear and protect his suffering people when they call upon him. Our comparison of Philippians 4:5b and Psalms 34:18, 119:151 and 145:18 in their respective contexts has therefore shown that *ho kyrios engys* should be seen as an

intentional allusion to one or even all three of these Psalm-texts.[36] In Philippians 4:5b Paul is using the language, not of Christian eschatology, but of biblical piety.

These findings have two important implications that deserve to be noted. In the first place, *ho kyrios engys* is another instance of a Yahweh-text being applied to Jesus.[37] Paul had already done this in 2:10–11, where he applied to Jesus a passage (Isa 45:23) in which Yahweh asserts his uniqueness and exclusiveness as Saviour. *Ho kyrios engys* provides another example of the early Christian tendency to give a Christological interpretation to *kyrios*-texts in the Septuagint. This has obvious theological implications: as the *kyrios* (2:9–11), Jesus was seen as exercising divine prerogatives, displaying divine powers, and dispensing divine blessings. What Scripture says of Yahweh can now be said of Jesus.

Yet this does not mean that Jesus is seen as the totality of deity: grace and peace come from God our Father *and* Jesus our Lord (1:2). For us, says Paul, the Father is the one God and Jesus is the one Lord (1 Cor 8:6). His divine status and functions do not rival the Father's. On the contrary, his divine lordship is to the Father's glory (2:11). So the nearness of the *Lord* (4:5) encourages believers to bring their petitions to *God* (4:6) and thus to experience the peace of *God* (4:7). Believers experience both the nearness of the Lord (4:5b) and the presence of God (4:9b).

Secondly, our text provides a reminder of the living piety embodied in both Old and New Testaments. This piety is very evident in both the Psalms and Paul's letters. Yet it has not always received the scholarly attention it deserves. Pauline scholarship has tended to concentrate too narrowly on Paul's theology, and has not always recognised the extent to which that theology was forged in mission and focused on mission. Likewise, it is often his piety which gives us access to his theology. His letters are expressions of piety as well as instruments of mission. His most basic convictions surface not only on the horizontal plane, as he engages with the issues created by his mission and his churches, but also on the vertical plane, as he reveals the nature of his response to God. Moreover, his concern

for all his churches relates not only to their continuing unity and stability, but also to their deepening piety.

Our continuing study of Paul's letters needs to give greater attention to the personal devotion they reveal. That may well bring his theology into focus in a new way. It will also face us with the challenge not only to believe what he did, but to believe as he did. Believing the gospel led him to face opposition; believing in the *kyrios* Jesus, reigning in heaven and present with his people (*ho kyrios engys*, 4:5b), led him to respond to others with forbearance (4:5a) and to God in confident, grateful petition (4:6). He clearly believed that all who confessed Jesus as *kyrios* should live and pray like that.

Notes

1 All of this is well-exemplified by Archbishop Robinson, to whom I owe a great deal as a teacher. In both the classroom and the pulpit, as an exegete he modelled a determination to let the text speak for itself without ever losing sight of the wider biblical-theological horizons. This essay is offered as a token of my gratitude for that teaching and example; and also for the many Sunday lunches that sweetened my exile in the far east!

2 H Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. 3 (London: Rivington's, ^{5}1871), p. 189; K Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: SCM, 1962), p. 122; F W Beare, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A & C Black, ^{3}1973), p. 146; G. Friedrich, *Der Brief an die Philipper* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), p. 124; J. Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, ^{2}1976), p. 169; W Hendriksen, *Philippians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1962), p. 194; J L Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (London: SCM, 1977), p. 110; H A A Kennedy, 'The Epistle to the Philippians' in W R Nicoll (ed.), *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 3 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), p. 466; H A Kent, Jr, 'Philippians' in F E Gaebelein (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 151; J B Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan,^{4} 1879), p. 160; I Loh and E A Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (United Bible Societies, 1977), p. 128; R P Martin, *Philippians* (London: Oliphants, 1976), p. 155; J H Michael, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 197; J J Müller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1955), p. 141; A Plummer, *A Commentary*

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3 Of those I consulted, the following interpreted our text eschatologically: W Bauder and H G Link, *engys*, *NIDNTT* 2. 54; G Bornkamm, *Paul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), p. 206; H Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1969), pp. 90, 185, 256; W D Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, ^{3}1970), p. 319 n. 8; W Foerster, *kyrios*, *TDNT* 3.1091; D Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), p. 810; W G Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1974), p. 143f; A Oepke, *parousia*, *TDNT* 5.868; H Preisker, *engys*, *TDNT* 2.331; H Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 489f; E P Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977), p. 448; H J Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (London: Lutterworth, 1961), p. 101.

4 As this statement indicates, I am assuming the unity of Philippians, on which see D E Garland, 'The Composition and Literary Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Factors', *NovT* 27 (1985), pp. 141–73; D Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Leicester: IVP Apollos, ^{4}1990), pp. 555–559; M Silva, pp. 14–16.

5 Bible quotations are normally taken from the NIV, although I have occasionally made my own translation.

6 *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 11, 'Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians' (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 289. In his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Calvin links Ps 119:151 with our text; vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 28.

7 Vincent (p. 134) indicates that Ende, Calovius, and Rilliet interpreted our text in this way. I have no access to these works.

8 *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians* (Cambridge: CUP, 1924), p. 112. See also his *Philippian Studies: Lessons in Faith and Love* (London: Pickering and Inglis, n. d.), p. 228 n. 1, where he says: 'I think the Apostle has in mind Ps. cxix.151. . .He is thinking of the secret of *the Presence* (Ps xxxi.20). We need not shut out the

calming thought of the Lord's approaching *Return*; but it does not seem to be the leading thought here.'

9 *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Oxford: OUP, 1976), p. 151.

10 F F Bruce, *Philippians*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 117f; J F Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians*, (London: Epworth, 1979), p. 144; G Johnston, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), p. 46; E Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929), pp. 168–9; R P Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 21987), p. 170f.

11 *Philippians* (Waco: Word, 1983), p. 192. See also p. 182.

12 H J Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1986), p. 194.

13 H M Shires, *Finding the Old Testament in the New*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), p. 126.

14 A T Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 171.

15 See Hanson, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–200; E E Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957), pp. 12–14; D M Smith, 'The Pauline Literature' in D A Carson and H G M Williamson (eds.), *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 265–91 (at pp. 272–3). Smith observes that Paul's agreement with LXX wording is greatest in his use of Genesis and Psalms (p. 272).

16 Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

17 This is true even of Shires, who argues that there are 1604 New Testament passages that are directly dependent on the Old Testament (*op cit.*, pp. 15, 72).

18 All the references in this next section are to the LXX version of the three Psalms concerned.

19 Note how nearness and presence are equated in Deuteronomy 30:14: the word is near (*engys*), being in mouth and heart and hands. To be near is obviously not to be at even a slight distance!

20 Referring to Psalms 34:18 and 145:18, Kraus states that 'his presence is promise and assurance to the poor and helpless ' (*op. cit.*, p. 39). He also speaks of Psalm 145:18 as 'the pledge of the presence of God ', *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), p. 548. Note also A A Anderson (commenting on Ps 10:1): 'when God manifests his power by saving the afflicted, he is near to the needy person.' *Psalms*, vol. 1 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), p. 114.

21 This access to his presence was an awesome and even dangerous privilege. It was therefore a mediated access, mediated especially through the priesthood and the sacrificial system. The priests are those who approach Yahweh (*hoi engizontes kyriōi*) (Exod 19:21–22; see also Lev 10:3; Ezek 40:46; 42:13; 43:19; 45:4).

22 H. Preisker claims that *engizein* (to draw near) is temporal here, referring to 'the approach of the time of salvation' (*TDNT* 2.330). But the context shows that Yahweh's nearness is not a future coming that is awaited, but his presence to help and vindicate. The Servant is not expressing his hope of future vindication, but his 'certainty that God is on his side (corresponding to the 'certainty of being answered' in the Psalms)...' C Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, (London: SCM, 1969), p. 231.

23 See also Psalms 22:19; 35:22–24; 71:12.

24 'God's being at a distance points to his inactivity, not his disposition.' C G Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), p. 78.

25 See, for example, Psalms 3:7; 7:6; 10:1; 17:13; 35:22–23; 44:23; 59:4–5; 80:2; 83:1.

26 Yahweh's distance means 'his refusal to be with them and to act in their behalf.' W I Wolverton, 'Psalmists' Belief in God's Presence', *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 9, 1963, pp. 82–94 (at p. 86).

27 See especially 1 Kings 8:27–51. The same truth is expressed by speaking of Yahweh as being 'on high': see, for example, Job 16:19; 31:2; Psalm 113:5; Isaiah 33:5; Jeremiah 25:30.

28 See also Psalms 46:4; 132:13; 135:21; Isaiah 8:18; etc.

29 Compare Emil Brunner's distinction between the extensive presence of God and a presence 'which is intensive and qualitative.' *The Christian Doctrine of God*, (London: Lutterworth, 1949), p. 258.

30 In addition to the passages cited above dealing with Yahweh's absence or distance, see, for example, Hosea 5:6, 15; 6:3; 9:12; 10:12.

31 See Bruce, p. 117; Martin (1976), p. 155; Michael, p. 195; Silva, pp. 223–4. The use of the cognate *epieikeia* in Wisdom 2:19 provides further support for this interpretation. There the ungodly propose to attack the righteous man, testing his forbearance (*tēn epieikeian autou*) and putting his faith on trial: will God rescue him, as he believes? *epieikeia* is thus an important element in the godly person's response to suffering and opposition.

32 It is not necessary for our purposes to consider the vexed question of the number and nature of these groups.

33 For the link between v. 6 and the opposition facing the church (and Paul), see Barth, p. 122; Beare, p. 146f; Bruce, p. 118; Martin (1976), p. 155; Michael, p. 197; Silva, p. 226.

34 See, for example, Eph 1:20; 2:6; Col 3:1; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:16; 2 Thess 1:7.

35 See, for example, Rom 8:10; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27; 2 Thess 3:16. Note also Paul's experiences of the Lord's presence (Acts 18:20; 23:11; 27:23; 2 Tim 4:17).

36 If one had to choose, the closest thematic and terminological links are with 34:18 and 145:18, rather than with 119:151, the text on which H C G Moule relied in arguing for a non-eschatological interpretation of *ho kyrios engys*.

37 On this phenomenon in the New Testament and its implications, see O Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, ^{2}1963), p. 234f; D. R. de Lacey, '"One Lord" in Pauline Christology', in H H Rowdon (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Leicester: IVP, 1982), pp. 191–203 (at pp. 197–199); C F D Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), pp. 41–43; R. L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New Testament Witness* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1990), p. 241; D F Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Westchester: Crossway, 1984), p. 76.