

Notes on Romans 11.1-36

This is a synopsis with some modifications and additions of the relevant section of NT Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*: New Interpreter's Bible, Volume X (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2002).

D. God's Unbreakable Promises and the Salvation of 'All Israel' 11.1-36

The final section of Rm 9–11 is one of the most majestic and sustained arguments in all of Paul's writing— and yet at the very point where he wants to bring his readers to the mountaintop and show them the glorious view, centuries of misreading have filled the landscape with fog. To cut through it, we need to keep in mind that Paul's questions all along have had to do with God's covenant faithfulness toward Israel-according-to-the-flesh. By and large, Israel has not believed the good news of Jesus the Messiah, and so it looks as if Israel— *Israel!*— is forfeiting salvation. But if that's true, then God's own credibility, competence, wisdom, and glory are in doubt.

In 11.1, Paul begins by asking, 'So I'm saying, Hasn't God rejected his people?' and answering, 'Not at all', pointing to himself as an example of 'Abraham's seed', even if, like Elijah, he might seem like 'the only one left' (11.3). God has reserved for himself a 'remnant according to the election of grace' (11.4-5). This remnant has attained by grace— by God's choice, cf the whole argument of 9.6-29— what Israel sought; but the rest have been hardened. Why?— because 'God has given them the spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this day' (11.8, quoting Dt 29.4, Isa 29.10).

The chapter opened with a solemn 'Therefore, I say' (*legō oun*), and followed with a question: 'Has God perhaps rejected his people?' (11.1). This same structure occurs again at 11.11, 'Therefore I say, Have they stumbled that they should fall [for good]?' Or, in positive terms, 'Can any Jews be saved?' (11.1) and 'Can any more Jews be saved?' (11.11)— the answer to both being, 'Yes, and here's how...'.
With 11.11, Paul takes up the motif of 'jealousy', already introduced in 10.19 by his quotation of Dt 32.21, in order to

develop his central point: that the Gentiles' coming to share the blessings of Israel is designed to make Paul's 'flesh' jealous and so bring them to salvation (11.14). The way to that salvation for the Jews is the one mapped out in 10.1-13 on the basis of Deuteronomy 30: It is faith (10.8; 11.23), by which Paul continues to mean confession that Jesus is Lord and trust in the God who raised him from the dead.

The Gentiles were grafted in because this is simultaneously a warning to Paul's Gentile audience (11.17-24): By Israel's fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles (11.11), but if the Gentiles start thinking they've done something special (11.20), they won't be spared either (11.21). It's all about God's righteousness and God's choice, not theirs. The mystery is that Israel's obduracy is for the Gentiles' salvation, and the Gentiles' salvation is for the salvation of 'all Israel', that is, the worldwide family promised to Abraham, which includes both Jews and Gentiles (11.25-32). God doesn't take back his gifts or his call (11.29), but he has 'closed up all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all' (11.32).

This vision of the salvation of 'all Israel' then leads to a paean of praise to the all-wise God, balances the cry of anguish with which Rm 9–11 began (9.1-5).

The chapter thus has the following structure:

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| 11.1-10 | God has not rejected Israel |
| 11.11-32 | 'All Israel' will be saved |
| 11.11-16 | Israel provoked to jealousy |
| 11.17-24 | Gentiles grafted into the olive tree |
| 11.25-32 | Explanation: Israel's 'hardening' and the Gentiles' 'coming in' are God's means of saving 'all Israel'. |

11.33-36 Praise to the all-wise God.

1. God has not rejected Israel 11.1-10

a. The remnant chosen by grace 11.1-6

Rm 11.1-4 asks whether, after the sorrowful opening of 9.1-5 and conclusion of 10.19-21, God's people according to the flesh has failed completely and God has finally just rejected and replaced them with believers from the Gentiles.

That is certainly not Paul's view.

'Did God reject his people?' Paul cites his own case. He is an Israelite, from the seed of Abraham (and in view of 9.7-8, 'seed' is a meaningful word); he's of the tribe of Benjamin— one of the few that could trace their ancestry back before the Exile.¹ He himself is part of the 'remnant' spoken of in 9.27, and part of the means by which God will increase the size of that remnant.

he can therefore personally attest, in 11.2, that—

1Sm 12.22a 'God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew'²—

and the context then goes on to say that this is because of—

1Sm 12.22b 'his great name's sake, for it pleased YHWH to make you a people for himself'—

which is what Paul had been saying 9.6-24 (see esp. 9.17). In the wider context of the saying that 'God has not rejected his people' (11.2), Samuel was promising that he would never stop interceding for Israel, despite their sin and folly. Samuel thus stands in the tradition of Moses interceding for Israel; and Paul has stood in the same tradition in 9.1-5 and 10.1.³

And like Elijah, who complained against Israel that he alone was left, Paul can say,

1Kg 19:10,14 O Lord, they have killed your prophets, and dug up your altars; and I am left (*hypeleiphthein*) alone, and they seek my life.

Yet also like Elijah, Paul has assurance by God's 'oracle', that he actually is not the only one left (11.4)—

1Kg 19.18 I have left (*katelipon*) for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal—

¹ For more on Paul's sense of his own Jewishness and its privileges, see 2Co 11.22; Ga 1.13-14; Ph 3.4-6.

² On God's 'foreknowledge,' see 8.29.

³ Also, in context, 1Sm 12.22 is about God providing for Israel by his choice of King Saul. This humorously suggests that just as God provided for Israel through by choosing Saul the Benjaminite a thousand years ago, so now he's doing the same by choosing another Benjaminite Saul.

because there is a 'leaving' (*leimma*, a 'remnant') according to the election of grace (11.5).

Going back to the the initial quote in 11.2, we also recall—

Ps 94.14-15 For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he leave (*egkateipsei*) his inheritance; until righteousness return to judgment, and all the upright in heart shall follow it.

which also makes us recall 9.29, which quoted Isaiah:

Isa 1.9 LXX 'If the Lord of armies had not left (*egkateipen*) us a seed, we would be like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah'—

and 9.27, also quoting Isaiah:

Isa 10.22-23 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant (*hypoleimma*) shall be saved'.

So from this tissue of cross-references, we see that the 'remnant' (*leimma*) is the 'seed' (*sperma*) promised to Abraham (9.7-8).

This 'remnant' of Israel is not a small minority for whom Torah-works is after all effective. It is 'a remnant according to the election of *grace*,' that is, according to the principles enunciated in 9.6-29, and its negative side is the 'hardening' spoken of in that same passage, of those who did not recognize God's righteousness, but were trying to establish their own (10.3).

11.5-6. Who then is the 'remnant' which the 'oracle' pointed to in Paul's day, and how have they escaped the fate of the rest of the nation portrayed in 9.6-10.21? They are the ones God has 'selected' or 'chosen' (*eklogē*, 11.5; cf 9.11); he will return to this them in his summary at 11.28. The point is, he emphasizes, this is 'not according to [Torah-]works', otherwise the whole principle of 'grace' would be violated. There is not, then, a small number for whom Torah-works were after all effective.

Is God being unfair, though, in choosing some over others? No; he has answered already and will say again that his choice of some is so that all might be saved. But for now, Paul continues to explore the meaning of the 'remnant' itself.

It's worth noting that Paul's idea of a 'remnant' is significantly different from that of some of his contemporaries. In the Dead Sea Scrolls sect we find a small minority which regarded itself as having remained true when all others had fallen away, an elect or elite who were still holding their candles as the night got darker and darker. For Paul, those who believe in Jesus, who are called by God's grace, are a small but increasing number who are awake, and lighting their lamps, before the coming dawn (13.11-14; 1Th 5.5-10).

And part of the point is that if some are waking up even now, there will be even more to come. If Paul and the other Jewish Christians are a new kind of 'remnant,' called by God's grace in the gospel of Jesus, there is no reason why others should not join them.

b. The situation of Israel-according-to-the-flesh 11.7-11

Paul pauses one more time to describe the situation of Israel-according-to-the-flesh. This isn't a new point, but merely amplifies and underlines what has already been said in 9.25-10.3 and 10.19-21. 'What Israel sought— didn't it obtain it? Well, the election has obtained it, but the rest were hardened' (11.7).⁴

Jewish tradition commonly asserted that when God delays judgment, those who do not use this delay to turn back to him will be hardened, so that their final judgment, when it comes, will be seen to be just. This *eschatological-apocalyptic context* of 'hardening' is vital; ignoring it leads either into abstract discussions of predestination or into the idea of a temporary 'hardening,' which is then somehow reversed as if by magic. Neither is Paul speaking of predestination, nor is he saying that everyone will be saved in the end.

The analogy with Pharaoh in 9.17-18 indicates that this 'hardening' is a temporary suspension of judgment, so that some may escape. In the case of Pharaoh, the result was the exodus from Egypt (9.17). In the present case, the Gentiles come in (11.11-15), and more Jews like Paul recognize that the risen Jesus is indeed Israel's Messiah and serve him in 'the obedience of faith', but like Pharaoh, those who persist in obduracy will eventually face destruction.

For indeed, the Jewish Scriptures themselves declare God's judgment, as Paul shows in 11.8-10. In 11.8, he quotes both Dt 29.4 [29.3 LXX] and Isa 29.10:

Dt 29.4 Yet the Lord God has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, until this day.

Isa 29.10 For the Lord has made you drink a spirit of deep sleep; and he shall close their eyes, and the eyes of their prophets and of their rulers, who see secret things.

In Dt 29, a long list of curses fall upon disobedience and idolatry, and Moses is looking sorrowfully at Israel, and seeing nothing but rebellion. Isa 29.10 is closely related to Isa 6.9-10 ('Go and tell this people, Listen indeed, but do not understand; and look indeed, but do not perceive'), one of

⁴ Most translations have a declarative rather than a question. Cf KJV: 'Israel hath not obtained what he seeketh for.' KJV also has 'were blinded'. This is just wrong. The verb is clearly 'hardened' (*epōrōthēsan*).

the most quoted words of judgment from Isaiah,⁵ and part of the warning about the potter and the clay (29.16). This is part of what God had said all along, part of what Israel already should have known (10.19). The unbelieving Israel will be hardened permanently; there are no promises of a reversal except in the context of coming to faith (see 11.23). This does not mean that particular individuals can't come to faith; like Paul, some have already done so and many more will follow.

The psalm quotation that follows in 11.9-10 (Ps 69.22-23 [68.23-24 LXX]) is linked to the combined quotation from Deuteronomy and Isaiah by the reference to 'eyes that do not see'. Elsewhere in this letter, though, and frequently in the NT, this psalm is taken to predict the Messiah's sufferings.⁶ *The judgment that is called down upon impenitent Israel in this passage is the same as the central gospel events concerning Jesus.* The sufferings portrayed in the psalm fall upon those who have mocked and tormented him. This judgment is simply the other side of the coin of ethnic Israel's rejection of the crucified Messiah. It will not be reversed; as long as ethnic Israel refuses to see the crucified one as Messiah and Lord, their eyes will be darkened (11.10) and their back bent (cf. 2Co 3.14-15) 'for ever' (*dia pantos*). The next passage will make clear that Paul is not thinking that particular ethnic Jews are subject to this condemnation; they can always come to faith. But perpetual condemnation lies upon rejection of the crucified Messiah— not on this or that person who acquiesced in that rejection. 'God condemned sin' (8.3), not 'sinners'. Granted all that Paul has argued so far, not least in 3.21-4.25, if God's covenant faithfulness has been revealed in the death of the beloved son, we should not expect the covenant to be effective for any who reject that son and his death as the long-awaited unveiling of God's saving plan.

2. 'All Israel' will be saved 11.11-24

Rm 11.11-32, the major section of the chapter, forms one sustained argument in three closely interrelated sections (11.11-16, 11.17-24, and 11.25-32), leading into a final doxology (11.33-36).

Granted that Israel-according-to-the-flesh has 'stumbled', has this stumble meant a permanent 'fall'? Certainly not, Paul replies. Each of the three stages of his reply depends on, and expounds further, ideas already set out both in Rm 9-11 and in Romans as a whole:

It's worth recalling here Dt 32.21, because Paul will be talking about 'provoking Israel to jealousy' in this sense:

⁵ Quoted frequently in the NT: e.g., Mt 13.14-15 and par.; Jn 12.40; Ac 28.26-27.

⁶ E.g., Rm 15.3 quotes Ps 69.9; Mt 26.37 and Hb 12.2 quote Ps 69.20; Mt 27.34,48 and par. quote Ps 69.21; Jn 2.17 quotes Ps 69.9; Jn 15.25 quotes Ps 69.4; Ac 1.20 quotes Ps 69.25.

Dt 32.21 They have provoked me to jealousy with what is not God, they have exasperated me with their idols; and I will provoke them to jealousy with those who are no nation, I will anger them with a nation void of understanding.

a. Israel provoked to jealousy 11.11-16

What has happened to Israel has been for the good of the Gentiles, so there is every reason to suppose that Israel itself will become 'jealous', in accordance with Dt 32.21, and some of Paul's kinsfolk will thereby be saved (11.11b-16). At this point, Paul applies to Israel-according-to-the-flesh what he said earlier of Adam and the Messiah, notably in Rm 5.

Rm 11.11-12 picks up the language of 'stumbling' from 9.32-33 (the 'stone of stumbling'); the words are different but the idea closely related. Has Israel tripped so as to fall down for good? Certainly not. The counterargument advances in two stages, 11.11b-12 and 11.13-16. Each stage further subdivides; 11.11b is the basic statement, with 11.12 as a further conclusion; then 11.13-14 are his major statement, explained and elaborated by 11.15 and, in turn, 11.16.

Rm 11.11b— 'through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy'— looks back to 10.19, which quotes Dt 31.21 ('Didn't Israel understand? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous by those who are not a nation; with a senseless nation I will provoke you to anger'), and on to 11.14 ('If somehow I might provoke my flesh, and save some of them'). It adds an element that was hidden in the argument of 9.6–10.21 all along: that Israel's stumble over the stumbling-stone didn't just happen *at the same time* as the Gentiles' coming in, but was actually part of *how* it happened. Israel's hardening relates to Gentile salvation somewhat as Pharaoh's hardening relates to the Exodus (9.17); this is what 9.22-24 was about— and the point is confirmed in 11.12 by the mention of God's 'riches', for God's patience with the 'vessels of wrath' was part of his intention to bring these 'riches' to the Gentiles (9.23). So, 'through their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles' (11.11).

This is what will make ethnic Jews 'jealous' (10.19). The background within Romans is clear from the indictment of the Jews in 2.17-29— and from the sequence that runs from the major statement of Christian identity in Rm 5–8 into the sorrowful rehearsal of the same privileges— Israel's— in 9.1-5. But, whereas in Dt 32.21 and its quotation in 10.19, 'jealousy' seemed purely negative, it will be turned to positive effect in 11.14; and Paul is already preparing for this. They (Israel) have 'transgressed,' and the world has been enriched; they have been 'diminished',⁷ and God's riches given

to the Gentiles. How much more, then, if they are brought back up to fullness (*plērōma*)?

Before we explore this 'fullness', let us note what the 'jealousy' theme presupposes. It assumes (as argued above) that when Gentiles come to Christian faith they do indeed come to share in the blessings God promised to Israel-according-to-the-flesh (though not, of course, the land of Palestine; see 4.13; 8.18-27; the whole world is now God's holy land, the site of his new creation). Gentile Christians have a path to salvation that joins with the Jewish one, and Jews are saved just as Gentiles are saved— by God's grace, through faith in Jesus as Messiah, apart from Torah works.

What then might their 'fullness' (*plērōma*), their complete number, be? 'Fullness' is itself a rare term in Paul; in Ep 1.23, 3.19, 4.13, and Col 1.19; 2.9 it refers to the ultimate, eschatological fulness of God's plan, brought to its conclusion. So is he saying that all Jews will somehow be found in the Kingdom? In 11.25, the 'fullness of the Gentiles' means 'the total number of those Gentiles who believe the gospel of Jesus'. Large numbers of Gentiles do not believe, and never will, but the 'fullness' consists of all who eventually will. There's no reason to suppose that 'the fullness' of Israel will mean anything more than that: the complete number of Jews, not all the Jews, but all who eventually will have come to faith.

We should note at this point how in 11.11-12, Paul describes Israel's 'stumble' as a 'transgression' or 'trespass' (*paraptōma*), echoing the key term used six times in 5.15-21. What is more, the 'trespass' there formed the first half of a 'how much more' argument celebrating God's grace which overcomes human stumbling. 'If, by the trespass of the one, the many died, how much more has God's grace... abounded to the many' (5.15). 'If, by the trespass of the one, death reigned... how much more will those who receive the gift of righteousness reign in life' (5.17). Paul's brief statement in 5.20 ('the law came in so that the trespass might abound'), set out at length in 7.7-25, and developed to its final stage in 9.30-33 where the 'stumbling' metaphor is crucial, indicates that through Torah *Israel has recapitulated the sin of Adam, has acted it out on a grand scale. But, whereas the trespass of Adam brought sin and death to the world, the 'trespass' of Israel has brought salvation and 'riches' to the world!* How much more, then— this is the force of 11.12— should Israel now receive 'fullness.' Paul's two simultaneous guiding lights for understanding Israel-according-to-the-flesh are these: Israel, like everyone else, is 'in Adam'; but Israel is also, according to the flesh, the *Messiah's* own people. Rm 11.11-12 developed the Adam connection. The following verses will develop the Messiah connection.

⁷ *Hēttēma*— 'defeat' (NRSV), 'loss' (NIV), 'diminishing' (KJV)— is a rare word (only here and 1Cor 6.7 in the NT). The verb *hēttamai* means

'to be defeated,' 'be inferior,' 'be weaker.' Since it serves here (like 'trespass' earlier in the verse) to sum up the whole sequence of 9.6–10.21 and directly contrasts with *plērōma*, 'diminishing' seems plausible.

In 11.13-16, Paul moves a little closer toward his rhetorical aims in 11.17-24 and 11.25. He is speaking to 'you Gentiles.' This does not mean that all Christians in Rome were Gentiles. Nor is he necessarily necessarily turning to them specifically at this point. Rather, he is arguing against Gentiles arrogantly assuming a kind of superiority, like the one that the Jews have fallen into. Paul does not want Gentile Christians to think is that God cannot and will not save any more Jews; that although remnant has been saved, including Paul, there won't and needn't be any more.

After this personal address to what is perhaps the majority part of the Roman church, the argument has three moves:

In 11.13b-14, his aim is to exploit the 'jealousy' of which Deuteronomy 32 had spoken. His mission to the Gentiles is aimed at making 'his flesh' jealous and so saving some of them. In 11.14 he calls Israel 'my flesh', not 'my people according to the flesh' or whatever, but simply 'my flesh'. This picks up from 9.3,5, where he does say 'my people according to the flesh', and 'from them, according to the flesh, is the Messiah'. 'My flesh' echoes the whole argument of 7.1-8.11, where 'flesh' was the place where Adam's sin was worked out through the Torah itself, and where Paul grieved over the situation but announced that God would give resurrection life to the 'mortal body'. Here, echoing Romans 5-8 in various ways, he sees his 'flesh' in rebellion against the good news, following Adam's 'trespass'; and he intends to make this 'flesh' jealous, and thus provoke it to salvation—by the route sketched in 10.1-13—faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Rm 11.15 is the explanation (*gar*): Israel truly is the Messiah's people according to the flesh; the Messiah's death, his 'casting away' (*apobolē*, literally, a 'throwing away') achieved 'reconciliation' for the world, and his risen life now provides salvation (5.10; see 11.21 || 8.32). Likewise, the casting away of the Messiah's fleshly people has accomplished reconciliation for the world, and their reacceptance will mean 'life from the dead.' This is a striking way of attributing redemptive, saving significance to the tragedy that has befallen Israel. Israel's 'throwing away' is indeed God's own rejection of Israel, not Israel's rejection of God. Israel has acted out its Messiah's death, and the Gentiles are the beneficiaries. Paul returns to the same point from yet another angle in 11.30b: You Gentiles received mercy 'by their disobedience.' He doesn't envision Israel 'dying' for the sake of the world, as the Messiah himself has done; the Messiah's work is unique, over against Jew and Gentile alike. But the 'hardening' that has come upon Israel, as in 9.14-24, was the context for the Messiah's death, and as such has become part of the saving plan. That is one of the main points of 9.6-10.21. Israel's 'hardening' was the means of suspending the sentence that might otherwise have fallen, creating a breathing space in which Gentiles can be brought in (9.24, 30). In that sense,

Israel's 'casting away' has been instrumental in the salvation of the Gentiles.

Israel's 'receiving back again' (*proslēmpsis*) must then be explained in terms of 11.12,14. If Jews do come back into the family, hearing and believing the good news as in 10.6-13, then, says Paul, this will be like a kind of resurrection. At least since Origen, this has been taken to indicate—anticipating one reading of 11.25-26— that Israel's return will be the signal for, or perhaps the result of, the general resurrection. But 11.15 is introduced as an explanation (*gar*), not a new point. Their 'casting away' was like the Messiah's death, their 'bringing back' will be like Pascha— so celebrate! In 4.17 he has already indicated that Abraham's family will consist of those who are brought back from the dead (i.e., Jewish converts) and those who are created out of nothing (i.e., Gentile converts). The 'now' of 11.31 strongly suggests that Paul is not postponing this hoped-for salvation to some distant future.

Rm 11.16 provides the conclusion:⁸ The point of this verse is that the whole is sanctified by the part: the lump by the first fruits, the branches by the root. 'All Israel'— the family promised to Abraham— is 'holy,' because Israel-according-to-the-flesh, the 'first fruits' and the 'root', is holy. The first image relates to the Feast of Weeks (Nm 15.20): 'Of the first of your dough you shall offer up a cake as a heave offering'; the point being that once the first part of the dough has been offered to God, the entire batch is then holy, consecrated and ready for Israel to use.⁹ The second image (roots and branches) has no particular biblical background, but is introduced by analogy with the first and leads to the extended metaphor of the olive tree that then follows. The 'whole lump' and the 'branches' are of course Israel-according-to-the-flesh, Israel which has not as yet recognized its Messiah.¹⁰ But who or what is the first fruits? Who or what is the root?

The answer to these two is not necessarily the same. The argument so far, and some of Paul's other uses of the same image, would lead us to assume that the 'first fruits' refers to the 'remnant' chosen by grace, including Paul himself (see particularly 16.5; 1Co 16.15; 2Th 2.13). Some Jews according to the flesh have already been converted; that is, part of the lump of dough has already been offered to God. The rest must therefore be treated as sanctified, not as common or disposable. (By 'holy' here Paul clearly does not mean 'au-

⁸ For *ei de*, 'and if' or 'but if', as signaling a conclusion, see 8.10-11.

⁹ Paul also uses the image of 'first fruits' in, e.g. 8.23, (see the note there); 16.5; and elsewhere. For the Jewish context see also, e.g., Philo *Special Laws* 1.131-44.

¹⁰ It is striking that the word for 'lump' (*φύραμα phyrāma*) is the same as in the 'potter and clay' illustration in 9.21. The point here is not the same— there the lump was clay; here it is dough— but the two passages are thematically quite close. God can and will refashion the 'lump' into something that at present it is not.

tomatically saved,' but rather something like 'sanctified by extension' or 'by their relationship'; the closest parallel is in 1Cor 7.14, referring to the non-Christian partner and the children in a mixed marriage.) In other words, Gentile Christians, recognizing the fact of a 'remnant' of believing Jews, must regard other Jews as holy by extension.

But in the 'root and branches' image, the remnant consists not of a root that has always been there, nor yet of branches that were never broken off, but of branches that were broken off for a short while and then grafted back in again. Otherwise, the remnant really would be a permanent part of God's people, a small group for whom ethnic membership and Torah-observance really had proved valid. However, the Messiah has been at the center of the argument for much of Rm 9–11, and the messianic pattern of casting away followed by life from the dead has just been the topic of the preceding verses. The olive tree is Israel, Abraham's true seed, into which wild branches have been grafted but into which, far more easily, natural branches can be regrafted. And the crowning privilege of Israel, the human and historical focus of the nation's long story as God's people, is the Messiah (9.5). *The 'root' that 'bears' both Gentile and Jewish Christians (11.18), then, is the Messiah himself.* The word 'and' (*kai*) that starts 11.16b has the sense, then, of 'moreover'.

By lining up Israel-according-to-the-flesh with both Adam and the Messiah, as Rm 5–8 did, Rm 11.11–16 begins the argument that God still wants and intends to save more Jews. Israel has acted out both Adam's trespass and the redemptive 'casting away' which happened to the Messiah. Within this, Paul warns the Gentile Christians in Rome that even the Gentile mission in which he exults has as its oblique purpose, to bring more Jews to faith and so to salvation. For Jews to embrace the gospel now, after all they have gone through, is like resurrection from the dead. They are, after all, the relatives according to the flesh not only of the remnant (including Paul), but those of the Messiah himself.

This image opens up into the central argument of the passage, 11.17–24.

b. Gentiles grafted into the olive tree

11.17–24

Unbelieving Jews are like branches broken off God's cultivated olive tree, while Gentiles are like wild branches grafted in; how much more can God graft the natural branches back in 'if they do not remain in unbelief' (11.23)? This argument (11.17–24) is aimed specifically against Gentile arrogance, the point to which Paul has been working around: do not, he says, suppose that you can boast against the branches without yourself becoming at risk.

Of course the metaphor is 'contrary to nature' (11.24). A gardener doesn't graft wild branches on to a cultivated stock, but the other way around, directing the energy of the wild plant toward the focused fruitfulness of the cultivated one.

The main OT reference for the olive tree is Jer 11.16–17: Israel as an olive tree whose branches are broken off in judgment (see also Ps 52.8; Hos 14.6). The olive tree here is God's people stretching back to Abraham that now includes both Gentiles and Jews. The Messiah is the 'root' through whom the tree now gets its life (11.17), the one who holds the whole thing in place, enabling Gentile members to gain life (11.18). The force of the illustration is to make the Gentile Christians realize their place within God's saving purposes; they are not a new aristocracy, they are the wild country cousins brought in, to everybody's surprise, to share the inheritance. They have no business giving themselves airs over the original family members who have for the moment been ousted. God is, after all, well capable of bringing them back again.

In 11.17–18, Paul's first main point is: Do not boast. In 3.27–30, he ruled out any Jewish boast based on possession of Torah and performance of its 'works'. He balances this now with this stern warning to Gentile Christians. They must remember who the Messiah is, and who they themselves are as his utter dependents. They do not support the root, as though Jesus Christ were now the private possession of Gentile Christians. He, Israel's Messiah according to the flesh, supports them. Paul's sudden use of the second person singular throughout 11.17–24 (contrasting with the plural in 11.13,25–32) makes his point all the more sharply.

In 11.19–21, Paul then imagines a conversation between himself and the newly ingrafted branches. The Gentile branches will say that the other branches were broken off to make room for them—the very point, they might say, that Paul himself has made in 11.11–12,15: the Gentiles came in when Israel 'stumbled' or 'trespassed'. Paul does not disagree, but sharply draws attention to the circumstances: what counted then, and counts now, is faith: the natural branches were broken off because of unfaith; you stand firm by faith. The accusation of unbelief or unfaithfulness (*apistia*, 'untrustworthiness, disloyalty'), goes back to 3.3; this was the basic charge leveled against Israel in the beginning of Paul's argument. Abraham was specifically contrasted with this: he did not waver in 'unbelief' (4.20). So Gentile Christians must not just avoid boasting; they must also maintain their faithfulness. They must not permit themselves an attitude of superiority, but must keep humble, in fear of God. Rm 11.21 explains why, in terms of the picture that becomes explicit in 11.24: God is quite capable of doing to a Gentile church what he has done to 'the natural branches.' Here, too, there is a strange echo of an earlier passage, 8.32: God did not spare the beloved son. Once again, Paul is thinking of the

Jews as the Messiah's people according to the flesh; but this time their fate is held up as a warning to Gentile Christians. This is what happens if you regard yourself as automatically part of God's people, instead of continuing by faith alone. Faith remains the only valid badge of membership; anything else will lead inevitably to 'boasting.'

In 11.22-24, Paul sums up the argument by drawing attention to two balancing attributes of God: 'goodness' or 'kindness' (*chrēstotēs*) and 'severity' (*apotomia*, literally, 'cutting-off'). Paul has already spoken of God's 'kindness' in 2.4, describing how God's patience and forbearance were meant to lead to repentance, and warning that a hard and impenitent heart that refused God's generosity would lead to wrath. Now, with a not dissimilar point about to emerge in 11.25, he is warning that God's kindness and severity apply to Israel-according-to-the-flesh and to Gentile churches as well. This is backed up with a reminder of God's 'power' (11.23b), echoing the same point earlier in the letter (1.16,20; 4.21; 9.17,20).

But the climax of the passage and of the whole chapter so far is not what might happen to arrogant Gentile churches, but what can happen to presently unbelieving Jews if they will abandon their 'unbelief'. Rm 11.24, explaining how God can graft them back, provides this climax, and shows that Paul knows it's near-impossible to re-graft old branches; so as in 4.17 and 11.15, what he describes is a kind of resurrection. The emphasis of the whole chapter so far falls, apparently quite deliberately, on words that stress what Paul had said in 9.1-5: Israel remains God's cultivated olive tree; Jews, even unbelieving ones, belong to it by nature; it is 'their own olive tree.' That is the point Paul most wants the Gentile Christians in Rome to grasp. It is the point that the following, decisive subsection will then explain fully and finally.

Paul continues throughout this section to address Gentile Christians; when he says 'you' in 11.28,30-31, he means them specifically. There he outlines a scheme of mutual obligation between Gentile and Jew that looks forward to 15.7-13 (which concludes the letter's theological exposition) and also to 15.27, where the Gentiles who have shared in the 'spiritual things' of the Jews, must minister to them in 'fleshly things.' This interchange is grounded in the very plan of God, as Jews and Gentiles play out their unexpected roles, bringing all the human race into 'disobedience' in order to have mercy upon all (11.32). ('All', again, does not mean 'all individuals' but rather 'the whole human race, that is, Jew and Gentile alike'.)

c. Israel's present unbelief is for your salvation 11.25-32

Since 11.25 begins with 'because' (*gar*), we should assume that it and 11.26a ('and so all Israel will be saved') are an explanation of what has gone before, not a new and radically different point.

God's dealings with Israel and the Gentiles are now unveiled. The 'hardening' of Israel, and the 'coming in' of Gentiles, is God's means of saving 'all Israel', which includes both Jews and Gentiles. The covenant will be fulfilled in the way God always intended, that is, by being renewed through the Messiah for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever Jewish people come to faith in Jesus as Messiah, this is a further sign that God is faithful to the promises made to the patriarchs (11.25-32). The end of this specific argument is thus the end of the whole discussion that began with 9.6.

11.25-27 Before his final summary (vv. 28-32), Paul pulls together his long argument into a succinct statement that consists of—

11.25a Introduction, with its own explanation;

11.25b Statement of what has happened to Israel;

11.26a Statement that 'all Israel shall be saved'; and

26b-27 Composite scriptural quotation.

Rm 11.25a *explains* what has already been said, even though most translations ignore the opening 'for' (*gar*). 'For I do not want you to be ignorant' is somewhat formal; this is a tone Paul adopts when he wants special attention (cf. 1.13; 1Co 10.1; 12.1; 2Co 1.8; 1Th 4.13)— and once more insists that the Gentile Christians not become conceited. Note a distant echo of Pr 3.7, a warning against trusting one's own judgment rather than God's.

There is nothing to indicate that Paul is making a new point, except that he speaks of 'this mystery'. Elsewhere he uses this word to refer, not to a hidden truth open only to initiates (as in the 'mystery religions' of antiquity), but to the long-range purpose of God, which has now been unveiled and proclaimed through the good news of Jesus the Messiah.¹¹ Referring to his summary statement here as a 'mystery' indicates that it is part of God's previously hidden plan that Paul wants his readers to understand.

What, then, has happened to Israel? A hardening has come upon them, as Paul has been saying, esp. in 11.7, summing up 9.14-24. To this, Paul adds two phrases: The first is 'in part' or 'for a while' (*apo merous*).¹² The phrase is normally adverbial, not adjectival: not 'a partial hardening has happened', but 'a hardening has partially happened'. Part of 'Israel' now constitutes a 'remnant', while 'Israel-according-to-the-flesh'— the great majority— has been 'hardened'. As at the very beginning of the discussion there are, two categories of Abraham's children (9.7-8), and indeed two categories of 'Israel' itself: 'not all who are of Israel are Israel' (9.6).

¹¹ See 16.25; 1Co 2.1,7; Ep 1.9; 3.3-9; 6.19; Col 1.26-27; 2.2.

¹² 'In part', cf 15.15; 'for a while', 15.24.

The second modifying phrase indicates how long this 'hardening' will last. Judgment is held back while the Gentile mission happens, but will be complete when 'the fullness of the Gentiles' has come in. Paul doesn't imagine that all Gentiles everywhere will believe the good news, but that there is a mode of 'completion' in God's mind.

Whole theories have been built around Paul's statement that 'and so all Israel shall be saved' (11.26a), varying on the basis of answers given to the questions, Who is 'all Israel', and when and how will this 'salvation' occur? The usual options are:

'Who'—

- (a) all the elect, Jews and Gentiles alike;
- (b) all the elect of the nation of Israel;
- (c) the whole nation of Israel, including every individual;
- (d) national Israel as a whole, but not necessarily every individual.

'When'—

- (a) during present history;
- (b) just before the second coming;
- (c) at the second coming.

'How'—

- (a) through the Jews' conversion;
- (b) through their own faith, whatever that might be;
- (c) through some direct divine intervention, perhaps through Christ at his second coming; and this may or may not involve Christian faith.

But strong arguments yield (a), (a), and (a): God will save 'all Israel'— that is, Abraham's whole family, Jew and Gentile alike, during present history through their coming to Christian faith.

If (as many seem to believe today) 11.26a teaches a special kind of salvation for all or most Jews, with or without Christian faith, awaiting them at the end of time, then it is exegetically out of step with the passage before it (11.1-24) and, as we shall see, with the one that follows (11.28-32); it is theologically incompatible with the entire argument of 9.6-10.21; and it undermines what Paul has emphasized again and again in Romans 1-8.

Abraham's true family are 'not those of the law only, but all who share Abraham's faith' (4.16); 'the Jew is the one in secret' (2.29); 'you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus, and, if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise' (Ga 3.28-9); 'it is we who are 'the circumcision,' we who... put no confidence in the flesh' (Ph 3.3-4). And these statements are just the tip of the iceberg. Paul has spent half his writing life telling his readers that Abraham's family, Israel, the Jews, the circumcision, are neither reaffirmed as they stand, nor 'superseded', nor 'replaced'— that is precisely what he is arguing against in this very sec-

tion (11.13-24)— but transformed, through the death and resurrection of Israel's own Messiah and the Spirit of Israel's own God, so that Israel is now, as was always promised, both less and more than the physical family of Abraham: less, as in 9.6-13; more, as in 4.1 3-25.

In 10.1-13, Paul announced that he was praying for the salvation of his fellow Jews, and described in detail how such salvation would come about, in accordance with Deuteronomy and Joel: 'all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved' (10.13). That verse was actually a clear pre-statement of 11.26a: 'All Israel (i.e., those 'who call on the name of the Lord') will be saved'. Paul intends that sentence both as the answer to the question of 10.1, the question of salvation for presently unbelieving Jews, and as the indication that God's mode of salvation, held out in Deuteronomy, is one that, as 9.24 had already indicated, would include Gentiles as well. The 'all' of 11.26 looks back to the 'all' of 10.11-13, and behind that of 4.16 ('all the seed... Abraham as the father of all of us'). Paul does not intend to say something radically different in 11.26 from what he has said already. The 'mystery' is not a new revelation, standing over against the previous argument. It is the unveiled righteousness of God, of which Paul believed his kinsfolk to be ignorant (10.3). And the 'Lord' upon whom all must call is Jesus the Messiah, cf the application of the term 'Lord', which stands for the Name of God in the OT in 10.13; and 'God forever blessed' (9.5).

So the dramatic theological redefinition of Joel 2.32 (LXX 3.5) in 10.13, in which 'the Lord', which clearly referred to YHWH, is applied to Jesus, undergirds a dramatic redefinition of God's people, where 'Israel', as in 9.6 and Ga 6.16, now refers to the whole Abrahamic people of God, Gentile and Jew together. When, therefore, at the height of one of his most careful and long, drawn-out arguments, Paul declares with dramatic irony that 'all Israel shall be saved', we must stand firm taking the phrase out of context and making it mean something he has carefully ruled out over and over again.

'All Israel' is a polemical redefinition, in line with Paul's redefinitions of 'Jew' in 2.29, of 'circumcision' in 2.29 and Ph 3.3, and of 'seed of Abraham' in Rm 4, Ga 3, and Rm 9.6-9. It belongs with 'God's Israel' in Ga 6.16.

When, therefore, is this salvation of 'all Israel' to take place? The key is the phrase 'and so' (*kai houtōs*), which introduces 'all Israel shall be saved'. Translating this phrase as 'and so' is technically correct, but may be misleading if we imagine that 'and so' really means 'and then'. The Greek just doesn't have that sense. It means 'and in this way',¹³ an explanatory

¹³ In all other occurrences in Romans, *houtōs* obviously means 'in this way'; never 'then' or 'after that', cf 1.15; 4.18; 5.12,15,18-19,21; 6.4,11,19; 9.20; 10.6; 11.5,31; 12.5; 15.20; other Pauline instances of *kai houtōs* include 1Co 7.17,36; 11.28; Ga 6.2; 1Th 4.17.

which expresses the significance of what has been going on all the time.

'A hardening¹⁴ has come upon part of Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in; and that is how God will save 'all Israel.' This is in fulfillment of the scripture...'

But surely the quotations from Isaiah that now follow in 11.26b-27 refer to the parousia? And doesn't that mean that Paul really is thinking of a large-scale last-minute act of salvation for the Jews, at least augmenting the steady process of 'jealousy' and coming to faith that he has spoken of throughout Rm 11 so far?

This idea is popular, but deeply mistaken. The contexts of the passages Paul quotes— always an excellent guide to his meaning— show that he has in mind once more the same process of God's dealing with Israel's (and the world's) sins that he has described in 9.24-26 and especially 10.6-13, with 2.25-29 and 8.1-11 in the immediate background. From the point of view of a Second Temple Jew like Paul, these passages are about exile undone and sins forgiven, covenant renewed and the word of faith put in the heart by the Spirit.

The backbone of the scriptural citation comes from Isa 59.20-21. Isaiah 59 opens with a lament for Israel's continuing sinfulness. He has already quoted Isa 59.7-8 as part of his indictment in 3.15-17. YHWH himself will intervene, wearing righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet (Isa 59.17). He will bring terrible judgment, so as to be feared by the nations of the earth (Isa 59.18-19). In that context, 'a deliverer will come to Zion [or: he will come to Zion as deliverer], and to those in Jacob who turn from transgression.' At least, that is the meaning of the MT. The LXX has already altered this to mean 'the deliverer will come on behalf of Zion, and will turn ungodliness away from Jacob.' Paul has altered this again; the deliverer, he says, shall come 'out of Zion' (*ek Sion*). Perhaps he still has Deuteronomy in mind as well, because in Dt 33.2, the beginning of the blessing of Moses, which ends with the salvation of Israel (Dt 33.28-29), we find 'The Lord comes from Sinai'. So far from pulling the text toward the parousia, he seems rather to be emphasizing that the redeemer (Messiah) 'comes' from Zion into all the world, like YHWH 'coming' from Sinai to establish the covenant and give Israel its inheritance. As the Messiah does so, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. Once again Paul takes texts about YHWH in the OT as referring to Jesus. And once again Paul takes texts that looked forward to a future event, not indeed as excluding the many still-future elements of his gospel (see Rm 8 and 1Co 15), but as highlighting what is already happening through the good news.

¹⁴ For more on 'hardening' see Dt 29.4; Isa 6.9-10; 29.10; 2Mc 6.12-15; and Rm 9.14-18.

'And this,' continues Isaiah, 'will be my covenant with them'— at which point Paul merges seamlessly into Isaiah 27. Had he continued with Isaiah 59, the description of the 'covenant,' which in context is obviously the covenant renewed after the exile, would tally closely with what he has said throughout the letter so far: 'this is my covenant with them, says YHWH: my spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your seed... from now on for ever.' This language of covenant renewal, replete with echoes of Joel 2, Ez 36, and Jr 31, also sends us back to Dt 30, as expounded in 10.6-11. God's Spirit and Word, placed in the mouths of his people, renew the covenant. And, to move with Paul to Isa 27.9, with strong overtones of Jr 31.33-34 (38.33-34 LXX), the substance of the covenant is this: God will take away Israel's sins. This is not, then, an alternative 'covenant,' a way to salvation for Jews and Jews only, irrespective of what Paul laid out in 9.6-10.21. Nor has it much to do with the 'pilgrimage of the nations to Zion,' anticipated in some biblical and post-biblical prophecy (e.g., Isa 2.2-3; *Ps. Sol.* 17.26-46). At most, it would be an ironic reversal of that idea. This is the same covenant renewal Paul has spoken of again and again in the letter. The hope for Israel-according-to-the-flesh lies not in clinging to its privileged status and hoping that, despite everything, God will in the end make a way of salvation other than that revealed in Jesus the Messiah and by the Spirit. The hope of salvation lies in the Messiah, who is the Torah's true goal, and in the renewal available through him. God's salvation must be found where he has accomplished it, revealed it, and proclaimed it.

Throughout the period that begins with the Messiah's death and resurrection, God is doing what Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and others had promised. This is the implication of the last clause of 11.27: 'When I ever (or: if and when I) take away their sins'. They can be grafted in again, if they do not remain in unbelief. There is no salvation that does not involve the faith spoken of in Rm 10. Paul speaks of the ultimate salvation of all God's people, not only Gentiles but also an increasing number of Jews, a salvation to be brought about through the suspension of judgment (which, however, will lead to the 'hardening' of those who do not believe) so that the gospel can spread to the Gentile world, and so by that means ethnic Jews might become 'jealous' and so come to believe in their own Messiah.

The conclusion of the argument comes in three typically Pauline statements:

- 11.28-29 the first with its own explanation,
- 11.30-31 the second explaining and clarifying the first, and
- 11.32 the last explaining and rounding off the entire sequence.

Paul has now spelled out the balanced view that will enable Gentile Christians to live by faith and without arrogance. He sums it up in 11.28, and explains the second part of it in 11.29, in terms of God not changing his mind— that is, his word has indeed not failed (cf. 9.6). 'In terms of the good news', he says, 'they' (i.e., unbelieving Jews) 'are enemies on your account.' NRSV has 'enemies of God for your sake', presumably to avoid antisemitism, but this is unwarranted. Unbelieving Israel is not the enemy of the church, but is hostile to the good news itself, opposing it as an enticement (*skandalon*) from God. That, indeed, is a problem because of God's elective purposes and promises (9.11). Unbelieving Israel is 'beloved because of the ancestors'— that is, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (9.7-13)— because God's own desire, like Paul's, is for them to find salvation in the full and final way it has now been achieved and unveiled. God has not written them off. The contrast of 'enemies... beloved' puts us in mind once more of 5.6-11, which explains yet again how it is that this 'beloved' status can itself be the means whereby enmity can be overcome.

Israel is 'beloved because of the ancestors', not because of their special merits, but because God himself made promises to them, and these cannot be revoked (11.29). God said that Abraham's family would be the bearers, as well as the recipients, of salvation, and this is what will happen. There will always be ethnic Jews among the 'true Jews' of 2.29; there will always be physically circumcised people among the 'true circumcision' of Phil 3.3; there will always be some from 'Israel-according-to-the-flesh' (see 9.1-5, comparing 1Co 10.18) among 'all Israel.' Sin may have abounded through the Torah (5.20), but that was where grace more than abounded; and God will not revoke that grace.

As often, in 11.30-31, Paul's explanation of an initial compressed statement consists of an expanded version of the same point. Here he retells 9.6-10.21, highlighting the past (11.30) and the present (11.31). You Gentiles were once disobedient to God, but you have received mercy— because of their disobedience (11.30). He assumes again the connection, never fully spelled out, between Jewish disobedience to the good news and the Gentiles' coming to faith (see 11.11-16). Under God, the Gentiles depend for their chance at salvation on the 'casting away' of Israel-according-to-the-flesh. They should no more look down on this Israel, therefore, than they would on the Messiah himself because of his salvific death. This leads naturally to the statement of the present situation (11.31): in the same way, they are now disobedient, but this is so that 'that by the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy' (11.31).

This is exactly what 10.19 and 11.13-14 were saying: the mercy shown to Gentiles is meant to make unbelieving Jews 'jealous,' and so bring them to faith and salvation.

But when does this mercy happen? It is available 'now'; and Paul's kinsfolk can, he hopes and believes, be provoked into seeking it by being 'jealous' of the way in which Israel's privileges are being enjoyed by Gentiles. And this is precisely where the section began (9.1-5).

11.32. The final explanatory statement, as is appropriate, is about God. Echoing Ga 3.22, Paul declares that God has locked up the whole human race in a prison called 'disobedience,' in order that what they then receive will be a matter of sheer mercy (for the sense of 'mercy on all,' see Wi 11.23).

Paul has demonstrated that the whole human race was under the power of sin. All were 'in Adam,' and even Israel's Torah only bound the holy nation the more tightly to sin and thence to death. But Israel was nevertheless the bearer of the promise, and the promise would be honored by God even if all humans failed. As the faithful Israelite, the Messiah's obedient death and resurrection accomplished salvation for all who put their trust in the God who raised him. But how could God bring salvation not only to Gentiles— who were so far outside that it was obvious they could only come in by sheer grace and mercy— but also to Jews? How could God not play favorites? Paul's answer is that God has imprisoned Israel, too, within 'disobedience,' so that, if and when Israel-according-to-the-flesh come to faith in Jesus as the risen Messiah and Lord, the justification they enjoy, and the salvation they await, will be for them, as much as for Gentiles, a matter of mercy from start to finish. God's word has not failed. He has been true to his covenant; he has unveiled his righteousness in the good news of Jesus the Messiah, 'to the Jew first, and also equally to the Greek' (1.17).

Rm 11.32 is the conclusion, not only of Rm 9-11, but of the whole letter so far. And all that remains for this section now, balancing the cry of anguish in 9.1-5, is the cry of praise in 11.33-36.

E. Praise to the All-Wise God 11.33-36

The concluding doxology emphasizes God's sovereignty and inscrutability. His ways and purposes are not invisible, in the sense that he has unveiled them in his Messiah. But nobody could ever have worked them out, nor could anyone plumb their depths. And yet, seen with hindsight, God's way of making the world right, God's way of doing everything from creation to new creation, turns out to be spectacularly right, full of wisdom and insight, of appropriate judgment and overflowing mercy.

This is the longest of Paul's doxologies, almost as long as his two great christological poems (Ph 2.6-11 and Col 1.15-20), and not without echoes of both. It's rooted, as his thought often is, in the Jewish Wisdom tradition.¹⁵ What is unveiled

¹⁵ See, e.g., 1Co 1.17-2.16; 3.18-23; 8.1-6; cf 2Bar 14.8-9; 20.4; 1QH 7.26-33; 10.3-7.

in the good news of Jesus is not something other than the Wisdom that ancient Jewish sages sought and celebrated, but that very Wisdom, now made known for the salvation of the world.

Before God's wealth, wisdom, and knowledge, we can only stand in awe (11.33)— not only what he has and is, but above all what he decides and does, his 'judgments' (*krimata*) and 'ways' (*hodoi*) which, the whole letter has been saying, were unveiled in the raising of Jesus from the dead.

At the heart of the hymn of praise (11.34-35) Paul places one more double scriptural quotation, partly from his beloved Isaiah and partly from the book of Job, the greatest of biblical wrestlings with the problem of God's justice and human suffering. 'Who has known the mind of the Lord?' asks Isaiah (40.13) at the start of his mighty exposition of God's creative power, which is now to be unleashed to bring about the return from exile through the work of the Servant. Paul has cast himself in the role of present-day Isaiah, announcing in 10.14-17 the good news of the Servant, and now he celebrates Isaiah's God, by whom that good news is initiated and confirmed.

The quotation from Job 41.11 [41.3 LXX] comes from one of the most astonishing biblical statements of the sovereignty of God over all creation. God is in nobody's debt; nobody ever gives God a gift and stands back smug in the knowledge that God must now repay. All is of grace, and only of grace; to think otherwise is not to forget a theological detail, but rather to forget the meaning of the word 'God' itself in the biblical tradition.

God is the one from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (11.36). Elsewhere, when Paul uses this language (1Co 8.6; Col 1.15-20), Jesus the Messiah, the Lord, the Son, is the one 'through whom' the one God, the Father, has acted and does act in creation and redemption. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Son, is the one 'through whom' Father and Son act together to renew the covenant with a worldwide family, to bring the 'word' very near, on the lips and in the heart. Paul has no need to spell out the detail in this short doxology, because he has already painted it in from so many angles and now just wishes to stand back and gaze in wonder. Humankind failed to give glory to God (1.21), and itself thus fell short of that glory (3.23). Abraham, in faith, gave glory to God (4.20), believing that God was indeed able to keep the life-giving promises. Now, in hope, through the good news of the Messiah, Jesus, the glory is restored (5.2; 8.30). To this God, Paul concludes, be glory given back, forever, Amen.