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Romans

**For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,
Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth. Romans 9:28**

Romans 9:28 is a quote from Isaiah 10:23. However, Paul cites the Greek translation of the verse. The Hebrew reads a bit differently, but the general sense of the passage comes through either way.

It needs to be remembered that this verse is speaking of Israel, just as the previous one is. The distinction between Israel and the church is consistently clear. There is not an overlapping of the two, nor does Paul ever attempt to demonstrate that Israel transitions to the church; one replacing the other.

The previous verse, speaking of Israel who were "as the sand of the sea," will be so depleted in number that only "the remnant will be saved." The way this will occur is spoken of now. It will be accomplished by the Lord who "will finish the work." This means that the Lord will bring the deed to a completion. What He has spoken will surely come to pass and it will be executed exactly as He spoke - "only a remnant will be saved."

Not only will He finish the work, but he will "cut it short in righteousness." This will surely come to pass, and it will come to pass speedily. Cutting something short means that what one might originally perceive as a lengthy process will suddenly and exactingly come about. The reason for this swift action is because it is done "in righteousness." What God does is always perfectly just, including the

execution of His judgment. And as an explanation of why this is so, we are given the second half of the verse - "Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth."

From Isaiah's perspective, the "Lord" in this verse is referring to "Jehovah." He is the covenant keeping God who bestows the blessings and executes the curses upon the covenant people. The list of blessings and curses is detailed in both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. When the people adhered to the covenant's precepts, the blessings were lavished upon them. However, when disobedient, the curses would come. And yet, as a continued grace even in times of disobedience, the promise of a protected remnant remained -

"Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God." Leviticus 26:44

Outside of this remnant though, there would be only judgment by the hand of the Lord. He promised to "make a short work upon the earth." This "short work" is the execution of the decree, thus showing His adherence to the covenant they rejected. Finally, "upon the earth" is not speaking of the entire earth, but rather the land of Israel. The term in Hebrew is ha'erec. This term is commonly used throughout the Old Testament when speaking of Canaan alone. Even in the New Testament this sentiment is found. An example of this was Jesus speaking to the people of Israel in Matthew 5:5 -

"Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth."

Life application: God has been faithful to His covenant people Israel. Even in their judgment His faithfulness is seen. If He failed to meet the promises of His covenant, including those detailing judgment, He would not be a proper Steward of that covenant. The very act of judgment demonstrates His grace. Left to themselves and without His covenant care, they would have been completely

consumed by the surrounding nations or by their own hand. His judgment, though strict, has actually preserved them. If this is so with Israel, it is also true with you. Understand that when you receive God's chastisement, it is because you belong to Him. See Hebrews 12:7, 8.

And as Isaiah said before:

**“Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed,
We would have become like Sodom,
And we would have been made like Gomorrah.”** Romans 9:29

Again Paul cites Scripture to support the argument he is making. In verse 27, he showed that because of Israel's disobedience, only a remnant would be saved. This was promised in the law at the time of Moses in the blessings and curses. It is noted elsewhere in Scripture, both as future prophecies and as prophecies fulfilled (such as in the recorded names and numbers of the returning exiles in Ezra and Nehemiah).

Two exiles were prophesied for Israel - the Babylonian one came about prior to Paul's time; the Roman one would occur in the year AD70 at the hands of the Romans. Paul knew it was coming on the nation based on their rejection of Christ. And so to show that God's workings were anticipated and deserved, he quotes Isaiah 1:9.

"And as Isaiah said before..." He has twice quoted Isaiah and he turns again, right to the beginning of this prophet's book to highlight that this wasn't just expected, but that it was a note of highlight. Isaiah doesn't begin with words of Israel's obedience and supremacy among the nations. Instead, he begins with their disobedience and prophesied destruction.

"Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed..." The Lord is "Jehovah;" Sabaoth is often translated as "Hosts." Thus, unless "Jehovah of Hosts" is the idea we are to understand. As noted in 9:28, "Jehovah" is the covenant keeping God who

bestows the blessings and executes the curses upon the covenant people. "Hosts" is a military type term used of an organized army. We can therefore understand this verse as, "Unless Jehovah of Heaven's Armies had left us a seed..."

What is implied by using this term is that the warriors of heaven itself have come to fight against the disobedient and unruly people. Their instructions were destruction. They were to execute their duties with full determination of purpose, with the exception of "a seed." Leaving but a seed is synonymous with sparing a remnant. A seed by itself when watered will again grow into a multitude. Here then is a picture of the "righteous remnant" saved by the Lord of Hosts for the unveiling of His glorious future plans for Israel.

But if this seed had not been spared, Isaiah says that, "We would have become like Sodom, and We would have been made like Gomorrah." The Bible's noted example of wickedness leading to destruction is Sodom and Gomorrah. Like the Flood of Noah itself, there were but a few survivors. In the case of the flood, only eight survived, out of a world of people. In Sodom, only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters were spared. But even Lot's wife was lost when she turned back to view the destruction.

Paul is using examples of temporal destruction at God's hand to show that He truly is angry at sin and that the disobedient will be cast off. But he is also demonstrating that God, even in destruction, will keep His covenant promises. This is an important and often overlooked aspect of Romans 9. Unless we look back to this truth, found in the promised blessings and curses, we could come to the conclusion that God has, in fact, cast off His people Israel. But such was not the case in the first exile and such is not the case with the second one either. Israel has been returned to the land by the covenant-keeping God. This was done to fulfill the ancient promises to this group of people.

Life application: Is God not in control? Who could honestly look at the nation of Israel today and not see that they must be there for a reason. Prior to their re-gathering, spiritualizing Old Testament prophecies could almost be regarded as acceptable, though it would still be considered far-fetched. But now, with their re-

establishment in the rear-view mirror, we are without excuse when we reject what God is beginning to do through them. Have faith that God is in control and that Israel of today is not an aberration.