

**“Whoever surrenders will live.”** After King Hezekiah, the kingdom of Judah fell back into idolatry—worshiping the **works** of their own hands and living like all the **nations** around them. There was a brief period of renewal under King Josiah, who rediscovered the Law of Moses and destroyed the idols in the land. But Pharaoh, king of Egypt, killed Josiah. And the kings after Josiah brought all the idolatry back. The next king, Jehohaz, was imprisoned by Egypt. Then the next king, Jehoiakim, rebelled against Babylon and was thrown from the walls of Jerusalem. Then the next king, Jehoiachin, was captured by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and was taken into exile along with many others in 597 BC. King Zedekiah then became the next and last king of Judah.

In the fourth year of Zedekiah’s reign as king, I—**Jeremiah**—followed the Creator’s Word and put a wooden yoke on my neck and told Zedekiah to accept slavery under Babylon. I told him he must **surrender** himself to the king of Babylon and submit to the Creator’s punishments through Babylon. I told Zedekiah that he must not rebel against Babylon like the kings before him. But another prophet named Hananiah spoke up in opposition to me. He told Zedekiah that the yoke of Babylon would be broken and that the kingdom of Judah would be free from Babylon’s tyranny. The prophet Hananiah took the yoke off my neck and broke it in half as a symbol of the liberation he was proclaiming for the people. I told him, **“You have broken the wooden yoke and now you will get an iron yoke.”** I called Hananiah out as a false prophet for proclaiming **“peace”** when there was no peace. And two months later, the false prophet Hananiah was dead. But King Zedekiah didn’t listen to the Creator’s true word, he listened to the false prophet because that was the message he **wanted** to believe. So Zedekiah planned a rebellion against Babylon, he planned to break the yoke of oppression like the false prophet Hananiah had told him. This backfired against him and Babylon sent its armies and began attacking the kingdom of Judah. Zedekiah called for me and wanted to know if the Creator was going to miraculously deliver us like he had in the past—like he had delivered Jerusalem from Assyria in the time of King Hezekiah. The Creator said to Zedekiah, **“I am going to turn the weapons in your own hands against you.”** Zedekiah had taken up arms to stand against Babylon and now his own weapons were going to destroy him. I told Zedekiah that Babylon was going to completely destroy Jerusalem with fire. Yet at the same time, I told all the people, **“I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in the city will die. Whoever surrenders will live.”** I warned them, **“Practice righteousness! Take care of the poor and do no violence to anyone! Obey this and you will live!”**

Then out of nowhere, Babylon’s war against Jerusalem came to a sudden pause as Egypt sent its armies to attack Babylon. Things became easier in Jerusalem for a time. King Zedekiah took this time as an opportunity to try and repent, to see if it could save him and his city. I told Zedekiah to **“proclaim freedom for the slaves”** in Jerusalem, to practice the Jubilee and forgive all debts, as the Creator had commanded us. The rulers agreed to this, but once they saw what it did to their economy and society, the powerful and rich of Jerusalem changed their hearts and took their slaves back. The Creator then said to Zedekiah, **“You recently repented and did what was right, setting your slaves free. But now you have turned around and profaned my name by taking back your slaves. Therefore, I will proclaim freedom for you, freedom to die by the sword, plague, and famine. I will bring Babylon back against this city.”** Knowing that Jerusalem was now doomed and that Zedekiah had chosen the path of death, I chose **life** and began to **leave the city** as the Creator had commanded. But on my way out of Jerusalem, a city guard, who was the son of the false prophet Hananiah, captured me, beat me, and threw me in a deep dungeon. I urged Zedekiah to have mercy on me and so he took me out of the dungeon and **locked me up** in the courtyard of the royal palace. And while I was there, Babylon returned from fighting Egypt and began to besiege Jerusalem again. I knew this was the end of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah, for the Creator had proclaimed, **“Your wound is beyond curing. Your injury is beyond healing.”**

My cousin Hanamel came to me while I was locked up in the courtyard and said, **“Buy my land.”** Babylon was attacking Jerusalem as we spoke and my cousin wanted to make some money before our economy completely collapsed and everything became worthless under Babylon’s rule. The Creator told me to purchase the land from my cousin as a sign that we must not give up **hope**. Yes, Jerusalem would be completely destroyed, yes our kingdom would be destroyed, but the Creator would **restore** us again. So I purchased this land so that Zedekiah and all his officials would see that on the other side of death and destruction there was hope because of the Lord. The Creator told me, **“I will hide my face, but I will heal. I will cleanse and forgive.”** The injury and wound that was beyond healing for us, was not beyond healing for the Creator. **We** could not fix our situation, **we** could not save Jerusalem and the kingdom we had built. But the **Creator** would do the impossible and heal us on the other side of this great collapse. The Creator told me, **“I will make a righteous branch sprout from David’s line.”** The Creator had made a promise to David and no matter how evil David’s family was, no matter how idolatrous, the Lord would not break his promise. The Creator would do the **impossible** and heal the people and our incurable wound of idolatry.

But Zedekiah’s officials were hardhearted and refused to accept the path of life—which was the path of surrender, the path of letting their city and their lives be completely destroyed. So they came to Zedekiah and said, **“This Jeremiah should be killed! He is discouraging our soldiers and people! He is not seeking the people’s good but their ruin!”** Zedekiah said to them, **“Jeremiah is in your hands, I can do nothing to stop you.”** So they took me and threw me deep down into an empty **cistern** and I sank down into the mud at the bottom. But then an Ethiopian man ran to Zedekiah on my behalf and begged him to bring me out before I **died** of thirst and starvation. So they brought me out and locked me back up in the courtyard of the palace. There I remained until Babylon finally broke through the city walls of Jerusalem. Zedekiah and his officials snuck out in the middle of the night. But Babylon captured Zedekiah near Jericho and took him to King Nebuchadnezzar. There in 586 BC, Zedekiah watched his sons killed by Babylon and then his eyes were poked out so that the last image he would ever see was the death of his sons.

**“Whoever surrenders will live.”** We are really no different than Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah. We have given ourselves over to idolatry and have worshiped the works of our own hands. We have built a kingdom for ourselves that cannot and will not stand. The Creator says to us, **“Your wound is beyond curing. Your injury is beyond healing.”** There is no stopping the destruction and death that is coming upon us. The Creator says to us, **“I am going to turn the weapons in your own hands against you.”** We will die. We will be destroyed by the very weapons we carry in our own **words** and in our own **hands**. We have to face the consequences of our idolatry and unfaithfulness head on, we will not escape them. But there is still **hope**. The Creator offers you a path to life. He says to you, **“Whoever surrenders will live.”** If you stop resisting and stop fighting, you will find life. Not by bypassing death and destruction, but by accepting your death and trusting the Creator to bring you through it. You cannot escape death, but if you cling to the Lord Jesus **through** death, then you will find resurrection life. Jesus is the **“righteous branch”** from David’s line, he is the one who shows you the only Way to life. Therefore the Lord urges you, **“Take care of the poor and do no violence to anyone! Obey this and you will live!”** So stop trying to hold on to your life, it will not work, you will only make things worse. You can only be saved by letting go of your life, taking up your cross, and following Jesus into death. **“Whoever surrenders will live.” Amen.**