

The Waiting Game Pt 3 - Zechariah and Elizabeth

Message to Conversation Guide

Key Scriptures

Luke 1:5-25

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." NIV

Luke 1:57-65

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.”

61 They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. NIV

Discussion Questions

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth were Godly people yet they had something disappointing in their lives. Discuss our tendency to think that Godly people are always surrounded with perfect circumstances.
2. Zechariah and Elizabeth many years earlier had prayed for the Lord to give them a child. Discuss that they may have used the story and scripture below as the basis for their prayer.

Gen 25:20-21

20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.21 Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. NIV

3. Why do you believe that disappointment can have the effect of making us cynical? Read and discuss the quote below.

In his book Please Don't Squeeze the Christian, Scott Sernau reflects on the danger of cynicism—especially in the life of believers who claim a "living hope." He writes:

Cynicism kills in the manner of frostbite: the only symptom is a deadening numbness. And even Christians are often tinged with this frostbite. Callousness and doubt numb us to life and joy. We find ourselves leaving the triumphant lyrics of the old hymns on the church doorstep, because they appear hopelessly out of step with the world waiting outside. Our problem is not that we've been taught to question our faith, but rather that we've been taught to reject any answers. Doubt can be a state of mind—or it can be a way of life.

4. Zechariah was going through the ceremonial motions in the temple but in his heart he had no confidence in God's supernatural ability to intercede into his life. Why and how can this still be a danger today?
5. What may have been the reason that God silenced Zechariah during the 9 months of Elizabeth's pregnancy?