

## Sermon Guide: Heavenly Hope in a Heavy World - “Ray of Hope”

**Mike Woods | Dec. 10**

In this message, Mike discusses the challenges of finding and maintaining hope when fulfillment is long delayed. He focuses on God’s promise of a righteous king, given through Jeremiah, and how that plays out through history and particularly in the experience of Zechariah. He highlights the partial fulfillment in the Christmas story, and that we, like Zechariah, can place our hope in God’s promises as we await Christ’s second coming.

The narrative of Zechariah and Elizabeth is used to illustrate the nature of hope and the challenge of waiting for God’s timing. Despite their righteousness and adherence to Torah, their hope for a child wanes with age. Mike explores Zechariah’s struggle with unbelief when confronted by the angel’s message, and his subsequent reflection and rekindling of hope. Despite his initial disdain, Zechariah’s hope is restored through God’s message and the physical signs of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, culminating in praise for God’s redemption upon the birth of his son.

The sermon also examines the 600 years between Jeremiah’s prophecy and Zechariah, and the various Jewish groups in Zechariah’s time, including the aristocratic Sadducees, the Essenes, the Zealots, and the Pharisees. Each group had different hopes and methods for achieving their vision of fulfillment of the messianic promise, which Mike uses to consider how our hope in God can be replaced with our own plans of redemption.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- The narrative of Zechariah and Elizabeth teaches us about the virtue of patience and the danger of allowing our hope to fade. Their story is a testament to God’s faithfulness, even when our faith wavers. We learn that God’s timing is perfect, and His promises are worth the wait, no matter how long it takes. [\[21:08\]](#)
- The diversity of hopes and methods among the groups in Zechariah’s time, such as the Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, and Pharisees, illustrates the complexity of human attempts to fulfill divine promises. This serves as a cautionary tale against placing our hope in human institutions or actions, reminding us that God’s plans cannot be rushed or forced by human hands. [\[16:44\]](#) [\[17:27\]](#)
- The anticipation of God’s promises, as seen in the long wait between Jeremiah and Zechariah, challenges us to consider the depth of our own patience and faith. The sermon encourages us to reflect on our willingness to wait for God’s timing and to remain steadfast in hope, even when the fulfillment of His promises seems distant. [\[09:01\]](#)

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Bible Reading**

1. Jeremiah 23:1-6 (Promise of a righteous ruler, justice, and safety)
2. Luke 1:5-25 (Story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the angel's visit, and Zechariah's muteness)
3. Luke 1:67-79 (Zechariah's prophecy, also known as the Benedictus)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Considering the promise of a righteous ruler in Jeremiah 23:5-6, what might be the significance of this promise for a people waiting for deliverance?
2. In Luke 1:5-25, what are the characteristics of Zechariah and Elizabeth that are highlighted, and how do these characteristics impact their response to the angel's message?
3. Reflecting on Luke 1:67-79, what aspects of God's character and plan are celebrated in Zechariah's prophecy?

### **Going Deeper**

1. Reflect on a time when you felt that a hope or promise in your life was delayed. How did you respond?
2. Recall a moment when you were tempted to rely on your own understanding or actions to fulfill a hope or promise. What is one reminder from Scripture you can use to refocus on God's faithfulness instead?
3. Choose a day this week to fast from a common worldly offering (like social media, television, etc.) that often distracts from spiritual hope. During that time, what is a specific way you can seek to deepen your understanding of God's promises?