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Reflections on Ezekiel's Ministry: Like Moses and Jesus

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REFLECTIONS ON EZEKIEL'S MINISTRY: LIKE MOSES AND JESUS

Ministry is about service, and pedagogy is defined as a study of ways of teaching. Service may be performed in a variety of ways and forms and in many different places. Multiple opportunities provide specific reasons for ministry. One may serve in diverse ways in unique situations and use divergent capacities as well as outstanding skills in order to apply an innumerable number of techniques. However, we need to remember that before we serve or say something, we already minister by who we are. Our personality, attitudes, integrity and influence speak louder than our words. Pedagogy deals with different approaches and methods of presenting truth to people or students in particular. It deals with the question of how we say, present, write or do things. What can we detect in that regard about Ezekiel?

Ezekiel was a master presenter and preacher and very innovative. His role was very crucial in the history of God's people because his message was the last divine ultimatum to return unconditionally to God in order to prevent the most tragic event in Old Testament history: deportation into Babylonian exile, the devastation of Jerusalem, loss of national autonomy, and the destruction of the Temple of God that King Solomon had built.

Word which they needed to proclaim (Exodus 3–4; Ezekiel 3:24–27).

4. Right after calling them to ministry, God performed miracles on or through them (Exodus 4; 7; Ezekiel 3).
5. Moses communicated with God and was given directions on how to build the Tabernacle (Exodus 25–40). Ezekiel, after the destruction of the Temple, received instructions in a vision about the new Temple and the restoration of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40–48).
6. The Law of the Temple was given only to Moses and Ezekiel (Exodus 25–40; Ezekiel 43:12).
7. Both spoke about a mountain “experience” (high mountain—Ezekiel 40:2; Sinai—Exodus 19–20, 24).

Their ministries were similar and marked by a close encounter with the Holy Lord that gave them power as well as meaning for their ministry. Both were to call people to follow God: Moses appealed to Israel to get rid of foreign gods and choose life (Deuteronomy 30), and Ezekiel called people to renounce idolatry and faithfully obey the Lord (Ezekiel 20). These were uncompromising invitations to return to the Lord and follow Him with an undivided heart. They preached and performed God's Word; but in the time of deepest crisis, they showed pastoral hearts and comforted and encouraged God's people.

Of course, Jesus is the real new Moses, as well as the new Ezekiel in a typological sense. Christ is the ultimate and original Moses and Ezekiel because He has surpassed them both. He leads from sin's captivity into the heavenly Promised Land and directs our minds to enter the heavenly sanctuary.

Ezekiel and Jesus have surprisingly many things in common. As for the pedagogy, there are at least seven striking elements that may connect both of them together:

1. Ezekiel and Jesus proclaimed the Word of God (Ezekiel 1:3; 2:4; Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). For example, the phrase “this is what the Sovereign God says” occurs 126 times in the book of Ezekiel.¹ Jesus proclaimed that He did not say things on His own but only declared the things that He received from His Father (John 1:18; 5:19–20).
2. Both used the recognition formula “you/they shall know . . .” many times (over 75 times in Ezekiel; John 8:28; 14:29, 31; 17:3).
3. Both employed parables as a method of communication (Ezekiel 20:49; Matthew 13:10). Ezekiel pronounced 10 parables,² or in some cases allegories or extended metaphors (15; 16; 17; 19; 23; 24:3–5; 27; 29:1–6; 31; 32:1–16), and, according to *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Jesus pronounced 40 different parables.²



Ezekiel acted like a new Moses. The similarities between these two giant leaders are obvious:

1. Ezekiel and Moses were called to ministry by seeing the Majesty of God during special times of deep crises (Egyptian exile; Babylonian exile) and hopes for a new beginning (exodus from Egypt—Exodus 3:2–14; Deuteronomy 5:24; return from Babylon—Ezekiel 1:22–28).
2. God spoke to both of them out of fire (Exodus 3:2–4; Ezekiel 1:27–2:2).
3. God opened their mouth and gave to both of them His

4. Both used the title “son of man” (Ezekiel 93 times; Jesus 83 times).
5. Ezekiel and Jesus began their ministry by calling people to repentance (Ezekiel has seven statements on repentance—3:19–21; 14:6; 18:30; 20:43; 33:11–12; 36:31–32; 43:9–10). Jesus emphasized a return to God from the beginning of His ministry (Mark 1:15).
6. Both emphasized the resurrection and the eschatological new age. Ezekiel had a vision regarding dry bones that were made alive by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Only this combination produces real spiritual life (Ezekiel 37; 40–48). Jesus emphasized that He will resurrect to new life even those who sleep in the grave (John 5:24–30; 11:25).
7. Both were encouraging people to trust God and do what was right (Ezekiel 18:5, 30–32; 33:13; John 14:1–3; 17:3).

A good amount of similarities exist between Jesus's and Ezekiel's pedagogical approach. They are models of how we should teach others: both taught in parables, proclaimed the Word of God, called people to repentance, and pointed to the principles of God's kingdom. Both used literary devices and examples from real life so people could remember their messages.

There are also several dissimilarities in their ministry and pedagogical approach which are instructive:

1. Ezekiel performed 12 symbolic or sign-actions on different occasions as an actor who acts out the Word of God: (1) Ezekiel 3:24–27: God's sign on Ezekiel of being unable to speak except for the Word of God; (2) 4:1–3: siege of Jerusalem demonstrated with a clay tablet and an iron pan; (3) 4:4–5: lying on the left side for 390 days; (4) 4:6–8: lying on the right side for 40 days; (5) 4:9–17: preparing rationed food over cow manure; (6) 5:1–4: a sharp sword used as a barber's razor; (7) 12:1–11: packing his belongings for exile; (8) 12:17–20: trembling and fearing while eating and drinking; (9) 21:6–7: groaning with a broken heart and bitter grief; (10) 21:18–24: marking out two roads with a signpost; (11) 24:15–24: death of Ezekiel's wife; and (12) 37:15–23: two sticks put together. On the other hand, Jesus did not perform messages from God, but He lived the message. Christ's life was the message. Every act, thought, teaching, reaction and expression reflected who God is. Jesus was the Message (not only a Messenger). Only He could say: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV). His entire life was the message. To know and accept Him as Savior means to be saved and receive eternal life (John 5:24; 14:1; 17:3).

2. The book of Ezekiel contains three main visions (see chapters 1:1–3:15; 8–11; 40–48; to them could be added the fourth vision of 37:1–14, even though the technical word for vision *mar'ot* is not used there), but there is no record that Jesus had visions. He studied the Holy Scriptures to know the truth.
3. Ezekiel expressed seven oracles against foreign nations (Ammon, 25:1–7; Moab, 25:8–11; Edom, 25:12–14; Philistia, 25:15–17; Tyre, 26:1–28:19; Sidon, 28:20–29; and Egypt [seven oracles], 29–32). Jesus was not talking so much about foreign countries or cities as about Israel; but when He mentioned foreign cities, He stressed that they would receive a lighter punishment than God's people because they were not as stubborn. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matthew 11:21 NIV).
4. Ezekiel pointed to Christ: (1) 17:22–24—a Shoot from the very top of a Cedar; (2) 21:27—until He comes to whom it rightfully belongs; (3) 29:21—a Horn will grow for the house of Israel; (4) 34:23–24—Davidic Shepherd and Prince; and (5) 37:24–25—Davidic King, Prince, and Shepherd. However, Jesus, on the other hand, was pointing to Himself (John 5:39–40).
5. Ezekiel first expressed a straight and strong message, warning his people, because of an impending tragedy (Ezekiel 1–24). However, when Jerusalem was destroyed in 587/586 BC, he acted like a pastor (Ezekiel 33–48) by comforting God's people, helping them to cope with the greatest catastrophe to strike them in Old Testament times. In comparison, Jesus's ministry was full of compassion, understanding and love. Only in the last week did He speak about seven woes (see Matthew 23:1–9). Nevertheless, even on the cross, He showed His love and prayed for forgiveness for those who were crucifying Him and demonstrated His sympathy for His mother. In all this, He showed His concern for the salvation of us all (Isaiah 53:3–9; John 3:17).

In addition, Ezekiel typifies Jesus. It is striking that both:

1. Were called to their prophetic ministry at the age of 30, by a river, along with an opened heavens, a voice and the Spirit (1:1–2, 28; Luke 3:21–23).
2. Occupied a priestly office (Ezekiel 1:3; Hebrews 7–10) with zeal for a purified temple (Ezekiel 8:1–8; 40–48; Matthew 21:12–16; John 2:13–22).
3. Performed an intercessory ministry (Ezekiel 3:17–22;

12:1–16; 24:15–24; 33:7–9; John 17; Hebrews 7:25).

4. Bore the punishment of Israel: Ezekiel in a representative way, but Jesus, as our Substitute, bore our sins (Ezekiel 4:4–8; Isaiah 53:3–6; Mark 10:45; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 2:24–25).
5. Went directly from commission to mission without a period of transition (Ezekiel 3–4; Luke 4; Mark 1).
6. Sent to the people (house) of Israel (Ezekiel uses that term 83 times; Matthew 10:5–6, Jesus works first for the “lost sheep of Israel”).
7. Were led by the Spirit (Ezekiel 2:2; 3:24; Isaiah 61:1–2; Matthew 4:1).

Praise the Lord for these great examples of loving and unselfish ministry that teach us a variety of ways to approach people and teach them about the God of truth, love and justice.

Endnotes

¹ See Jiří Moskala, ed., *Meeting With God on the Mountains: Essays in Honor of Richard M. Davidson* (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2016), 106.

² *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 5: 205–207. The main chapters with Jesus’s parables are Matthew 13; Mark 4, and Luke 15.



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