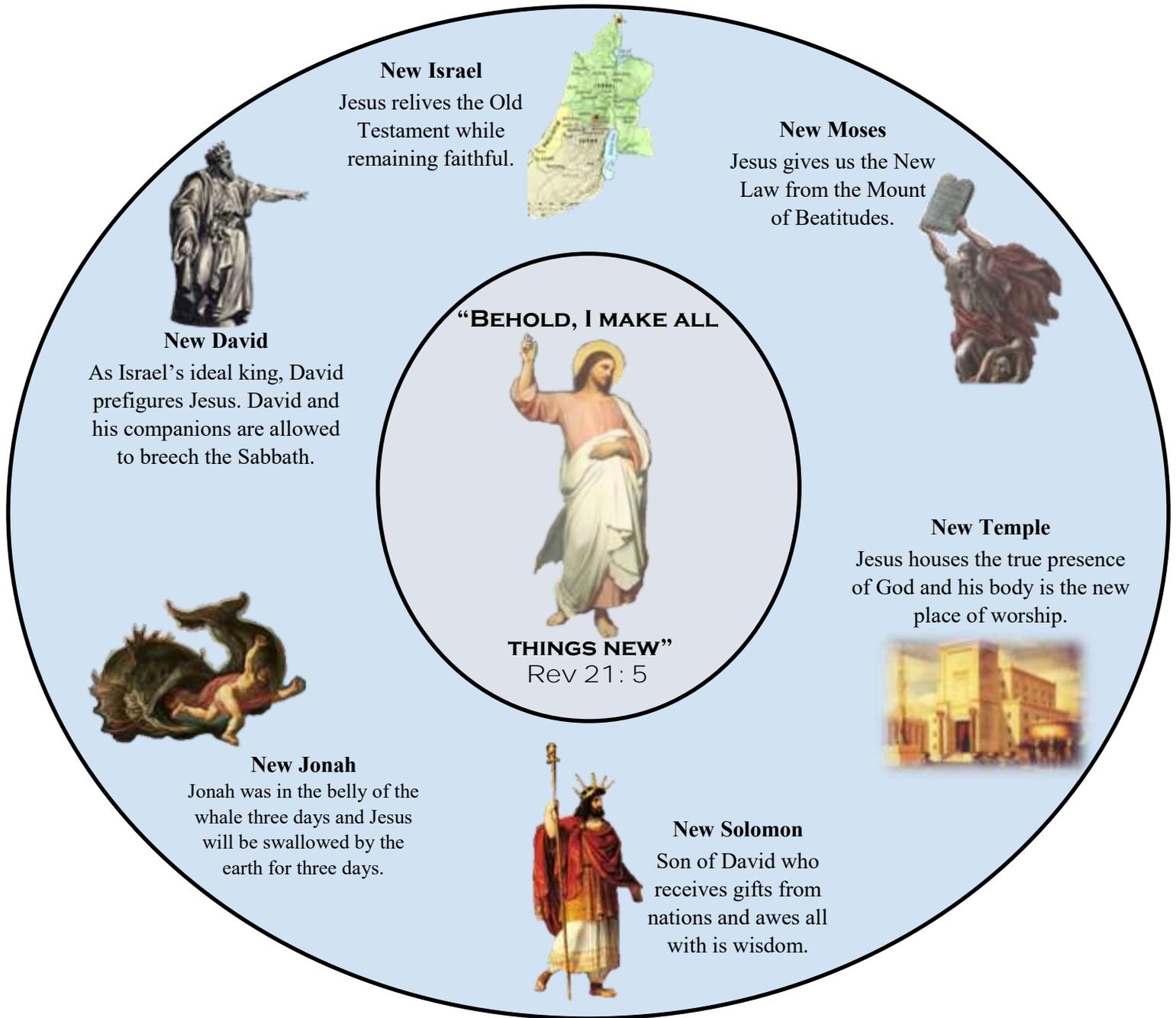


# Jesus, the Faithful and the Faithless (Matthew 12-15)



- **Jesus and the Sabbath**

- ◇ The Sabbath (Saturday for Jews) was a day when no work could be performed in line with the Mosaic Law. There were even rabbis who argued about how far someone could walk for supplies or to get to the Temple.
- ◇ Jesus reminds them that one of the great heroes of the Old Testament, David, did something very similar yet he remained guiltless. He also reminds them that the priests work on the Sabbath by replacing the Bread of Presence in the Temple and they too remain guiltless.
- ◇ “Something greater than the Temple”: The Temple was said to house the presence of God. Jesus is God incarnate standing before them.
- ◇ Jesus reminds them as he did earlier (Mt 9:13) that mercy is greater than sacrifice. Jesus orders things rightly for them.
- ◇ The man with a withered hand— “Is it lawful to heal him on the Sabbath?” Jesus states that good can always be done on the Sabbath. In his interpretation of the Sabbath, he is claiming lordship over the Sabbath.
- ◇ It is after this scene that Matthew tells us that they began to plot the death of Jesus.

- Jesus vs. the unfaithful generation
  - ◊ Jesus retreats to heal them all.
  - ◊ Matthew 12:18-21 quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 to illustrate that Jesus is God's son (Vs 18 Greek word (παῖς) is usually rendered as servant but means both servant and son). He is also establishing the beginning of the ministry to the Gentiles that would grow after the resurrection.
  - ◊ When Jesus casts out a demon (12:22) they ask if this is the Son of David. According to Jewish tradition, David's son, Solomon, was able to cast out demons and it was said that the Messiah would do this as well.
  - ◊ The Pharisees again state the Jesus casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul (probably a reference to "Baal-zebul" a deity of Ekron) which means from a false god.
  - ◊ Jesus rightfully brings attention to the lack of reasoning here. Dark forces do not drive out dark forces as that is more or less suicide.
  - ◊ Jesus also turns this around on them. "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand" Jesus is referencing that the kingdom of the Jews, the holy city of Jerusalem and the house of God (the Temple) have all turned on Jesus and thus have become collaborators of the kingdom of Satan.
  - ◊ Jesus then puts lines in the sand. We must be willing to work for the Gospel.
  - ◊ Blasphemy against the Spirit is to attribute to Satan the work of God. This leads to a hardening of the heart and makes the prospect of repentance impossible. To sin against the Spirit is to refuse to seek forgiveness.
  - ◊ Jesus and Jonah: looking for a sign? Jesus has healed, preached and exorcised in their midst and yet they look for another sign.
  - ◊ They're looking for the Messiah to be what they thought he would be. They are looking for evidence that he's going to usher in the earthly kingdom of which they had dreamed.
  - ◊ While they hoped for a sign of a conquering earthly Messiah, Jesus tells them they are going to get the sign of Jonah: Jesus will be swallowed by the earth (buried) for three days. Like Jonah, Jesus' ministry will go beyond the confines of the Jews (Jonah preached to non Jews [Ninevah in Assyria]).
  - ◊ Jesus uses the Queen of Sheba (Queen of the South) to shame the current Jews. She is a non-Jew who travels far to hear the wisdom of Solomon but upon hearing the greater wisdom of Jesus, the Jews reject him.
  - ◊ The question of exorcism returns in verses 44-46. The one who has been freed from a demon must fill his life with goodness. Following God is not simply an absence of evil but filling oneself up with the love of God.
- Parables: παραβολαῖς or *parabolē* which literally means "comparing one thing to another".
  - ◊ Why speak in parables? The underlying truths of Jesus' teaching will remain a mystery to the faithless. Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 as an illustration of this. Many hear Jesus but their infidelity to God makes it impossible for them to fully understand his teaching.
  - ◊ The Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat are two of the few parables for which we have a full explanation of its meaning (Mt. 13:18-23 & 13:24-30,36-43)).
  - ◊ The parables of the kingdom (Mt 13:44-50) bring into view what should be important in our lives. For those with their eyes set on heaven, we see following God as the treasure and the pearl. The net and the separation of the catch speak of the judgment to come.
- The death of John the Baptist
  - ◊ This is told as a kind of "flashback" calling to mind events that had already transpired.
  - ◊ The Herod mentioned is Herod Antipas who married his brother's (Herod Philip) wife while he was still living. This is contrary to Jewish Law and John was correct in denouncing him.
  - ◊ In condemning an innocent (and correct) man without a trial, Herod illustrates the grave immorality that is associated with the Herodian dynasty.



- The Multiplication of the Loaves
  - ◊ One of the few narratives that appears in every Gospel. No doubt this is because of the link with the Eucharist.
  - ◊ The narrative words **taking...blessed....broke...gave** are the same used in the Last Supper.
  - ◊ Jesus feeds the crowd through the hands of the apostles. It is the disciples who are the intermediaries between Jesus and the people. This anticipates the Eucharist which Jesus gives us through hands of the apostles and, later on, bishops and priests.
- Jesus walks on Water
  - ◊ Jesus comes in the 4th watch (between 3-6am) which is a time that speaks to the stillness of human activity. God comes when we quiet ourselves.
  - ◊ The rendering of “it is I” is not word for word. Here Jesus literally says “εἰμι” which literally means “I am.” This is important because it occurs against the backdrop of Jesus showing power over nature. Taken together it is hard for the apostles to see this as anything but a claim of divinity.
  - ◊ Peter puts a trust and confidence in Jesus. He believes not only can Jesus himself walk on water but that he can give Peter the ability to do the same. It is only when he begins to fear that he begins to sink.
  - ◊ This is a tableau of our faith lives. When we keep our eyes fixed on Christ, we are able to draw close to God. When we are distracted by other things, we begin to slip away.
  - ◊ This scene closes with the worship of the apostles and the declaration of divinity by Peter. This anticipates the more pronounced declaration of faith made by Peter in chapter 16.

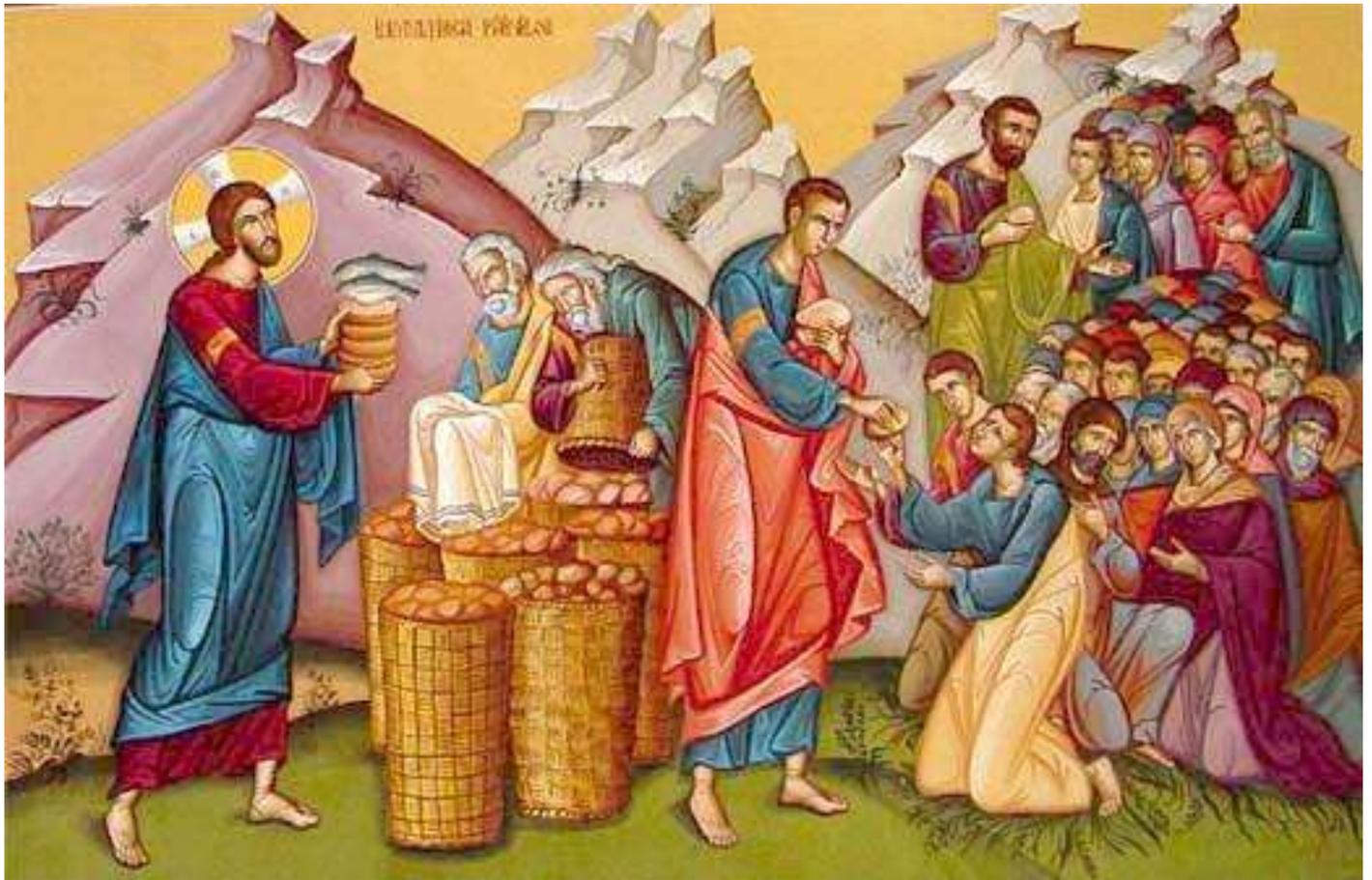


 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pharisees</b></p> <p>The main interpreters of Jewish Law.</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sadducees</b></p> <p>The ruling class of Jews in collaboration with Rome.</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Zealots</b></p> <p>Violent revolutionaries against Rome.</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Essenes</b></p> <p>Jewish ascetics that abandoned Jerusalem.</p>

- Jesus vs. the Jewish authorities
  - ◊ Transgressing the traditions of the elders. For the Pharisees and scribes it was just as important to follow the Jewish customs as it was to follow the Mosaic Law.
  - ◊ The Pharisees emphasized the following of their own customs and “laws” at the expense of the Mosaic Law.
  - ◊ Jesus turns this back around on them, “why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”
  - ◊ He uses Isaiah 29:13 as an indictment of the Jewish authorities.
  - ◊ He then attacks the ceremonial washings that were emphasized by the Pharisees.
  - ◊ What goes in is not what defiles but what stems from the heart. Real defilement is moral and spiritual. These are the things that make us unclean in the eyes of God.
  - ◊ The Pharisees are blind guides. They do not see what is right in front of them: 1. they are missing that God is present before them elevating their hearts to him; & 2. they are unable to recognize that they have replaced the commandments of God with their own “commandments”.

- More Miracles

- ◇ The Canaanite woman persists in her efforts to see and make her plea before Jesus.
- ◇ “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” The children’s bread refers to Israel and its inherited right to God’s blessings via the covenants.
- ◇ The woman responds with faith and she is persistent.
- ◇ Morally the woman represents the repentant sinner. She is incapable of pride and relies completely on the mercy of God.
- ◇ Jesus again feeds a crowd.
- ◇ The same language is used **took....gave thanks.....broke.....gave.**
- ◇ Again, the bread is distributed through the hands of the disciples-another foreshadowing of the priesthood and the Eucharist.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTERS 12-15

Jesus is the new David, Moses, etc. What way have you seen Jesus in the past? What way is new to you?

How do we view the Sabbath? Do we take it as seriously as the Jews in Jesus' time?

Do you see examples of our time as being a faithful or unfaithful generation? How so?

What parable of Jesus has meant the most to you (not just in Matthew)?

What do you find interesting about the death of John the Baptist?

What customs of men have begun to take precedence over the commandments of God?