



A “MEDITATION OUTLINE” OF MATTHEW’S GOSPEL

by Fr. David M. Knight

The chart that follows offers you two things: a personal (or group) plan to study Matthew’s Gospel, and a “meditation outline” of his Gospel to use for personal growth.

What is a “meditation outline”?

Can Matthew’s twenty eight chapters be focused into a few clear teachings that invite a total response to the Good News of Jesus? Out of that question came the outline below.

Matthew’s overall intention was to present Jesus as Messiah to Christians with a Jewish background, familiar with the Old Testament and its prophecies. A popular title for the Messiah was “Son of David.” So Matthew begins by presenting a list of names, Jesus’ family tree, arranged to announce him as the promised “Son of David.” And this title, “Son of David” is the clue text which gives us the theme of Matthew’s Gospel. It begins, punctuates, and ends Matthew’s Gospel.

In his first nine chapters Matthew calls us to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. Let’s call this Part One.

We notice that in chapter ten Matthew gives another list of names, the names of the twelve Apostles, who, replacing the twelve sons of Jacob from whom the twelve tribes of Israel descended, are the “family tree” of the Church. Could it be that Matthew spends nine chapters asking if we can accept Jesus, and then goes a step farther, asking if we can accept Jesus present and presenting himself to us in his wounded and sometimes ugly body, the *Church*? And can we ourselves except to *be* that Church?

Let’s call this Part Two: “Can you accept the Church? Can you accept to *be* the Church?”

Then we find a third list of names -- a short list in answer to Jesus’ question, “Who are people saying I am?” (Mt. 16:14). Once the disciples identify him as Messiah, Jesus reveals the secret of his mission: he is going to save the world, not by being the conquering hero they expect, but by dying on the cross: enduring evil and loving back. Could Matthew be introducing here his third great question and challenge: “Can you accept the cross? Can you accept your life in the Church as a dying to self and to all things in order to live totally for God and other people in love?”

Let’s call this Part Three: “Can you accept the Cross? Can you accept to endure evil and love back?”

At this point we notice something else. Jesus is only called “Son of David” in direct address three times in Matthew’s Gospel. The first time is in 9:27, just before the transition to the second question, “Can you accept the Church?” The next time is in 15:22, just before Matthew begins to

introduce the third question, “Can you accept the cross?” If the last time it occurs—in Mt. 20:30—it also marks a transition; that is, to Matthew’s next question, then we should find a fourth list of names following it. But we don’t!

What we find instead is *the* name, “Son of David!”, shouted in acclamation (21:9) as Jesus enters Jerusalem to be defeated and to triumph on the cross. It is the one name, the Messianic title, finally declared publicly and accepted by Jesus as the definitive answer to the earlier question, “Who do the people say I am?” The people are saying now that Jesus is who he really is: the promised “Son of David.” He is entering into his reign—but mysteriously: not in obvious victory, but to triumph through his defeat on the cross, and to keep triumphing through innumerable defeats until the end of time. And here Matthew asks his fourth and final question: “Can you accept to *persevere* in faith and fidelity until Jesus comes again?”

Let’s call this Part Four: “Can you still believe Jesus is Messiah when everything tells you he is losing? And can you persevere with faith and hope in working to establish his reign on earth—without seeing results—until he comes again?”

If we divide Matthew’s Gospel into four parts, each of which asks a question, then as we read the stories and sayings in each part, we can reflect on each one in the light of the question it presents, clarifies and develops: “Can I, do I, accept Jesus? The Church? The cross? The active waiting of working for his kingdom until he comes again? These questions are graded in difficulty and challenge. Each one takes us another step into the fullness of response to the Good News of Jesus Christ, in whom we find the fullness of life. They are a plan of growth.

How to use this outline

This outline of Matthew’s Gospel is geared to meditation and response. It presents Matthew’s Gospel as divided into four parts, each of which asks a challenging question and provides everything we need to understand the question and respond to it. The questions are:

- Part I. Can you accept Jesus?
- Part II. Can you accept the Church?
- Part III. Can you accept the way of the cross?
- Part IV. Can you persevere in faith and fidelity until Christ comes?

Each one of these parts is structured in exactly the same way. Each presents its message in seven steps, seven themes, which follow each other in exactly the same sequence in each of the parts. The themes are:

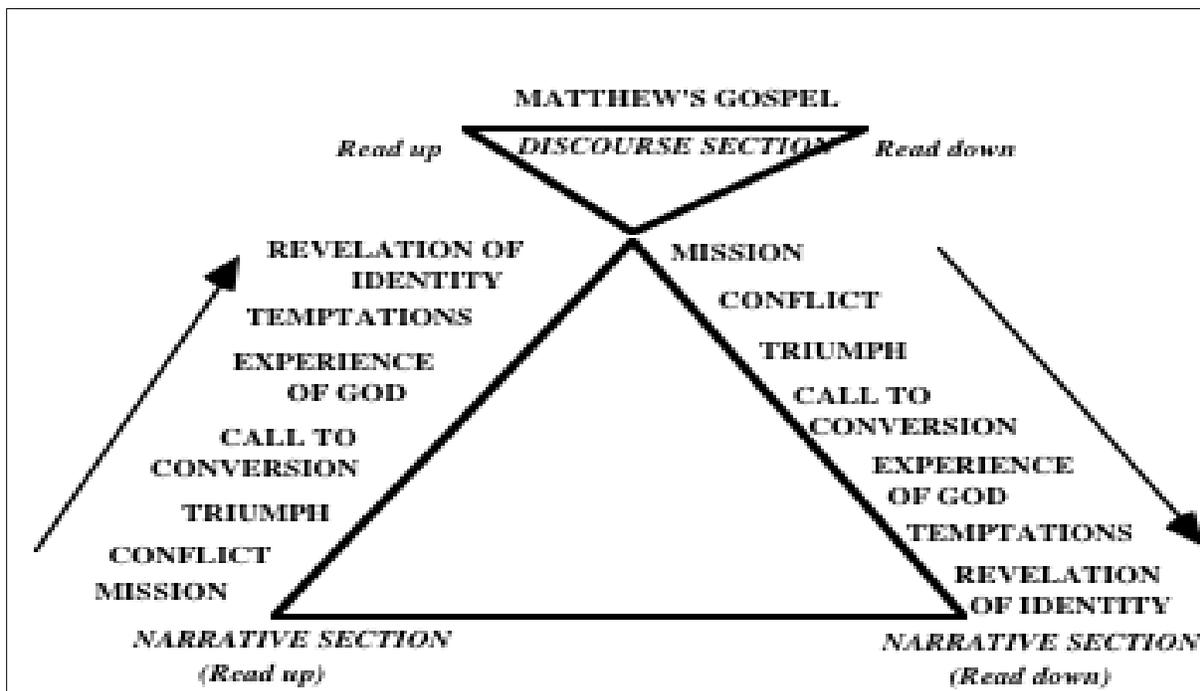
1. Mission
2. Conflict
3. Triumph
4. Call to Conversion
5. Experience of God
6. Temptations
7. Further revelation of Identity.

Each of the four parts (except Part Two) begins with a *narrative section* -- in which Matthew presents his seven themes by reporting various stories and encounters of Jesus with people. In narrating these events Matthew makes clear the *mission* of Jesus, shows how it arouses *conflict* followed by *triumph*, etc. And in each part, after he has gone through the seven themes, he crowns the presentation with a *discourse section* -- a long sermon or monologue in which Jesus alone is speaking. Each discourse section ends, and it is identified, by the repetition of an identical phrase: "Now when Jesus had finished saying these things..." (see Mt. 7:28, 11:1, 13:53; 19:1: *kai egeneto ote...*).

In the discourse sections Jesus develops the particular challenge of each of the four parts in a way that is both profound and practical. After the discourse section, Matthew repeats, in abbreviated form but in the same order, the same seven themes with which he began. Thus each theme comes up twice in each of the four parts.

Looking at Matthew's Gospel Graphically

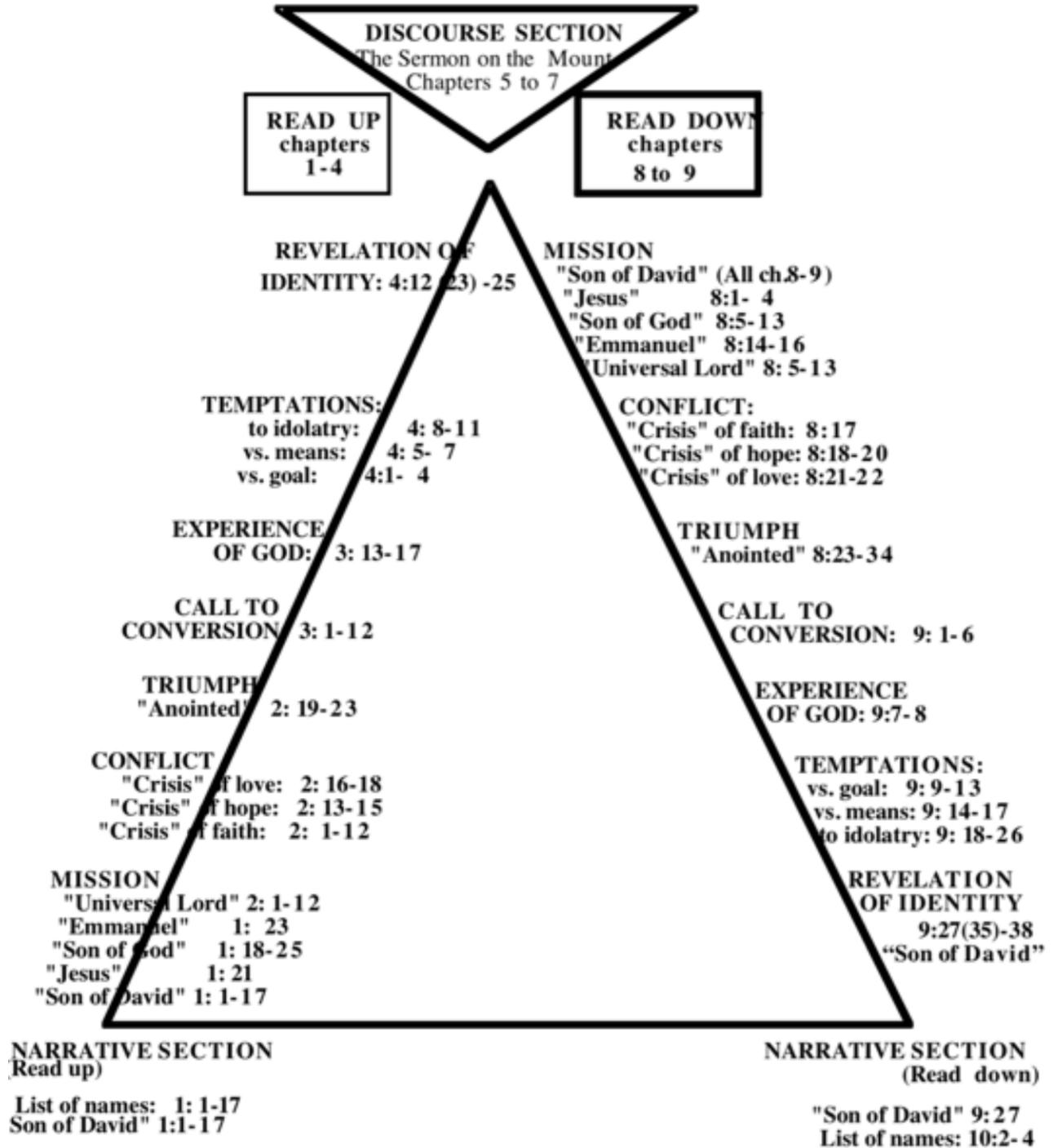
This means we can present Matthew's Gospel graphically in two ways: First, we can diagram each of the four parts as a triangle -- presenting the seven steps in ascending order leading up to the discourse section, and then descending again through the same seven themes to the end of the part.



In the graphics below, each of the four parts is presented as a triangle, and the Scripture texts that explain each theme are inserted. Readers should verify that the texts referred to really do present the themes the outline claims they do.

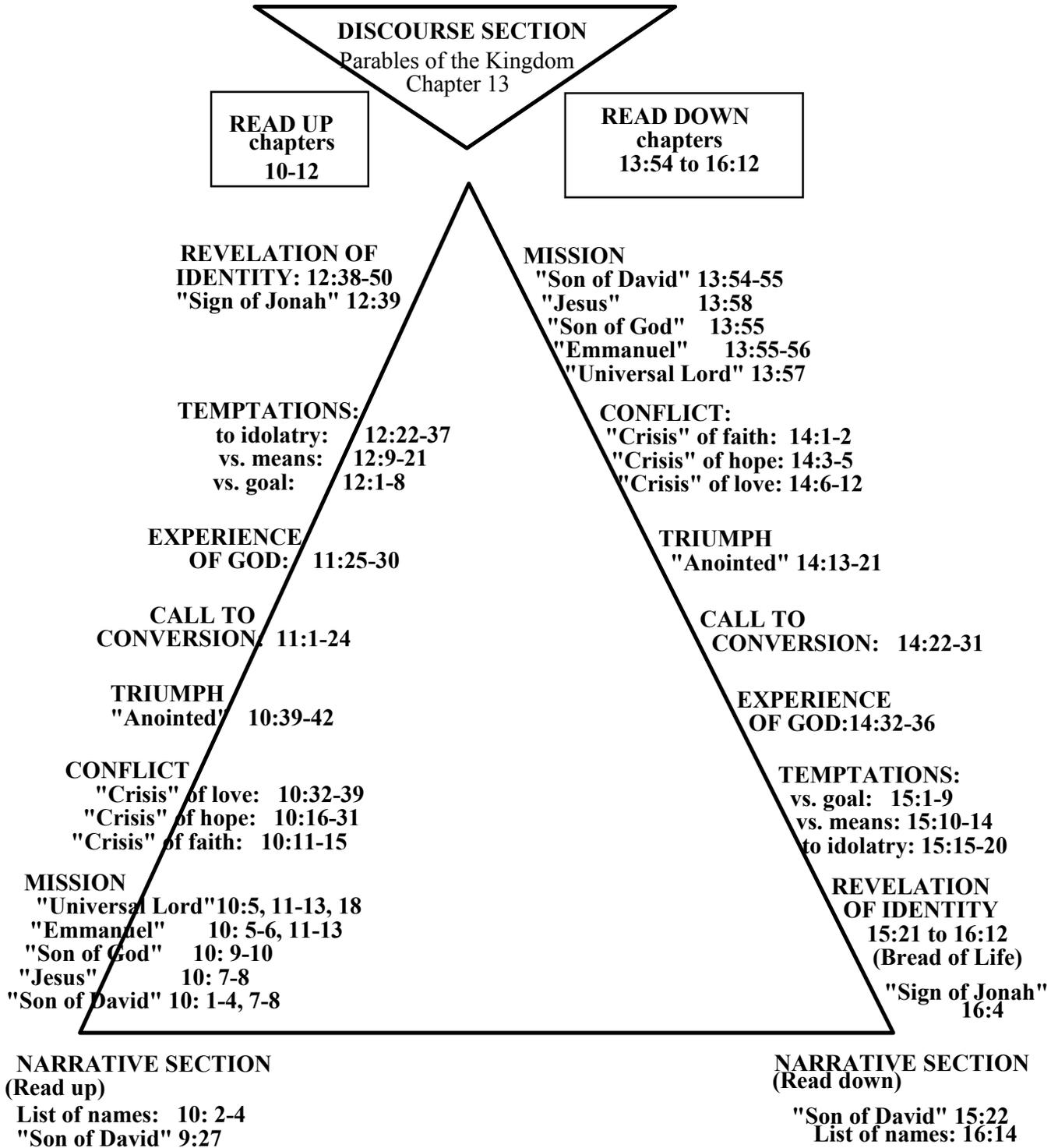
Part I: Can you accept Jesus (as Savior and as Teacher)?

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTERS 1 TO 9



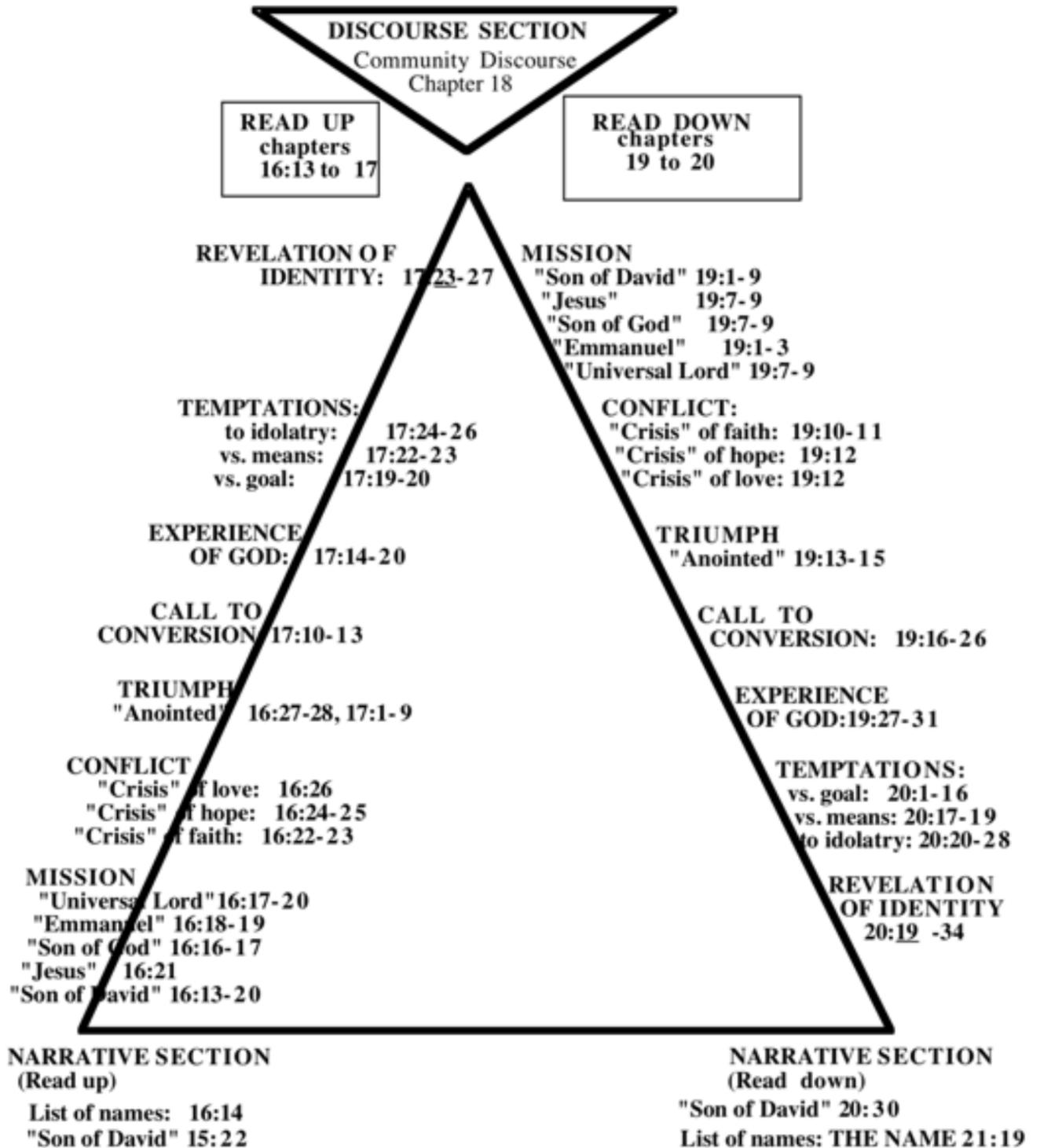
Part II: Can you accept the Church?

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTERS 10 TO 16:12



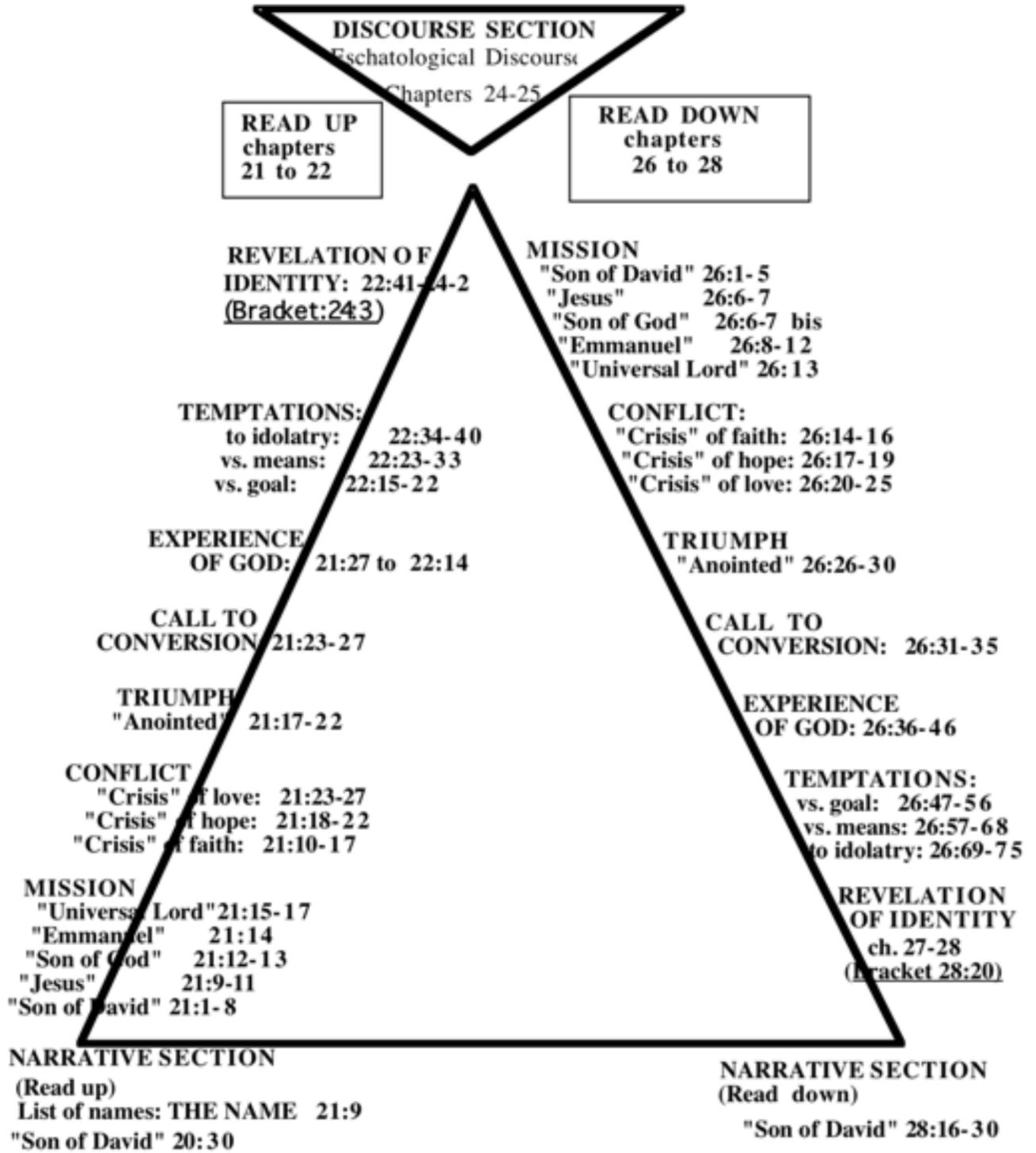
Part III: Can you accept the Cross?

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTERS 16:13 to 20



Part IV: Can you accept the Church?

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, CHAPTERS 21 to 28



An Alternative Graphic: Parallel Columns

A second way to present Matthew's Gospel graphically is to diagram the whole Gospel in four parallel columns, showing how each theme appears in each of the four parts. Thus we see the first theme -- *mission* -- presented in Part I as the mission of Jesus, in Part II as the mission of the Church, in Part III as the mission to save the world specifically through the way of the cross, and in Part IV as the mission of believers to persevere in efforts to establish the reign of God until Jesus comes again. In the same way we can see and compare the second theme in each of the four parts: the *conflict* people experience when asked to accept Jesus, to accept the Church, to accept the way of the cross, to accept waiting in faith and fidelity for Jesus to return in triumph. And so on for all seven themes.

When we look at the Gospel in columns, it is easier to see how the parallel passages in each of the four parts match each other, and how the same theme is found in each one. A graphic of the four parallel columns is presented below.

OUTLINE OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL IN FOUR PARTS

"SON OF DAVID" is used in direct address only three times. Signals transition to next part of Gospel. (See columns to right).		Between Parts I and II: "Son of David": Mt. 9:27		Between Parts II and III: "Son of David": Mt. 15:22		Between Parts III and IV: "Son of David": Mt. 20:30		
LIST OF NAMES introduces each part	Part I: JESUS Mt. 1:1-17: Family tree of Jesus	Part II: CHURCH Mt. 10: 1-7: Family tree of Church	Part III: CROSS Mt. 16:14: Names in answer to question, "Who...?"	Pt IV: PERSEVERE Mt. 21:9: One name shouted in answer to the question				
	↓	Discourse ch 5 to 7	↓	Discourse ch 13:1-53	↓	Discourse ch 18	↓	Discourse ch (23) 24-25
	<u>Begin</u>	<u>Repeat</u> ↓	<u>Repeat</u> ↓	<u>Repeat</u> ↓	<u>Repeat</u> ↓	<u>Repeat</u> ↓	<u>Repeat</u> ↓	<u>Repeat</u> ↓
Mission	1:17 to 2:12	ch 8, esp. 8:1-16	10:1-13,18	13:54-58	16:13-21	19:1-9	21:1-19	26:1-13
Conflict	2:1-18	8:17-22	10:11-25 34- 39	14:1-12	16:22-26	19:10-12	21:10-16	26:14-25
Triumph	2:19-23	8:23-34	10:26-42	14:13-21	16:27-28 to 17:1-9	19:13-15	21:17-22	26:26-30
Call to conversion	3:1-12	9:1-6	11:1-24	14:22-31	17:10-13	19:16-26	21:23-27a	26:31-35
Experience of God	3:13-17	9:7-8	11:25-30	14:32-36	17:14-18	19:27-30	21:27b to 22:14	26:36-46
Temptations	4:1-11	9:9-26	12:1-37	15:1-20	17:19-26	20:1-23	22:15-40	26:47-75
Revelation of identity	4:12-25 Return to top	9:27-38	12:38-50	15:21 to 16:12	17:27	20:24-34	22:41-46	ch 27-28
	Repeat themes next column	GO TO Part II, next column	Repeat themes next column	GO TO Part III, next column	Repeat themes next column	GO TO Part IV, next column	Repeat themes next column	NB 28: 16- 20 "Son of David" <u>END</u>

Note: Chapter 10 is actually a discourse section -- there are five in Matthew's Gospel -- but this outline proposes that Matthew used it in place of a narrative section because there was no way to present the mission of the Church in a narrative section before the Church existed).