

THE DIVINE DRAMA

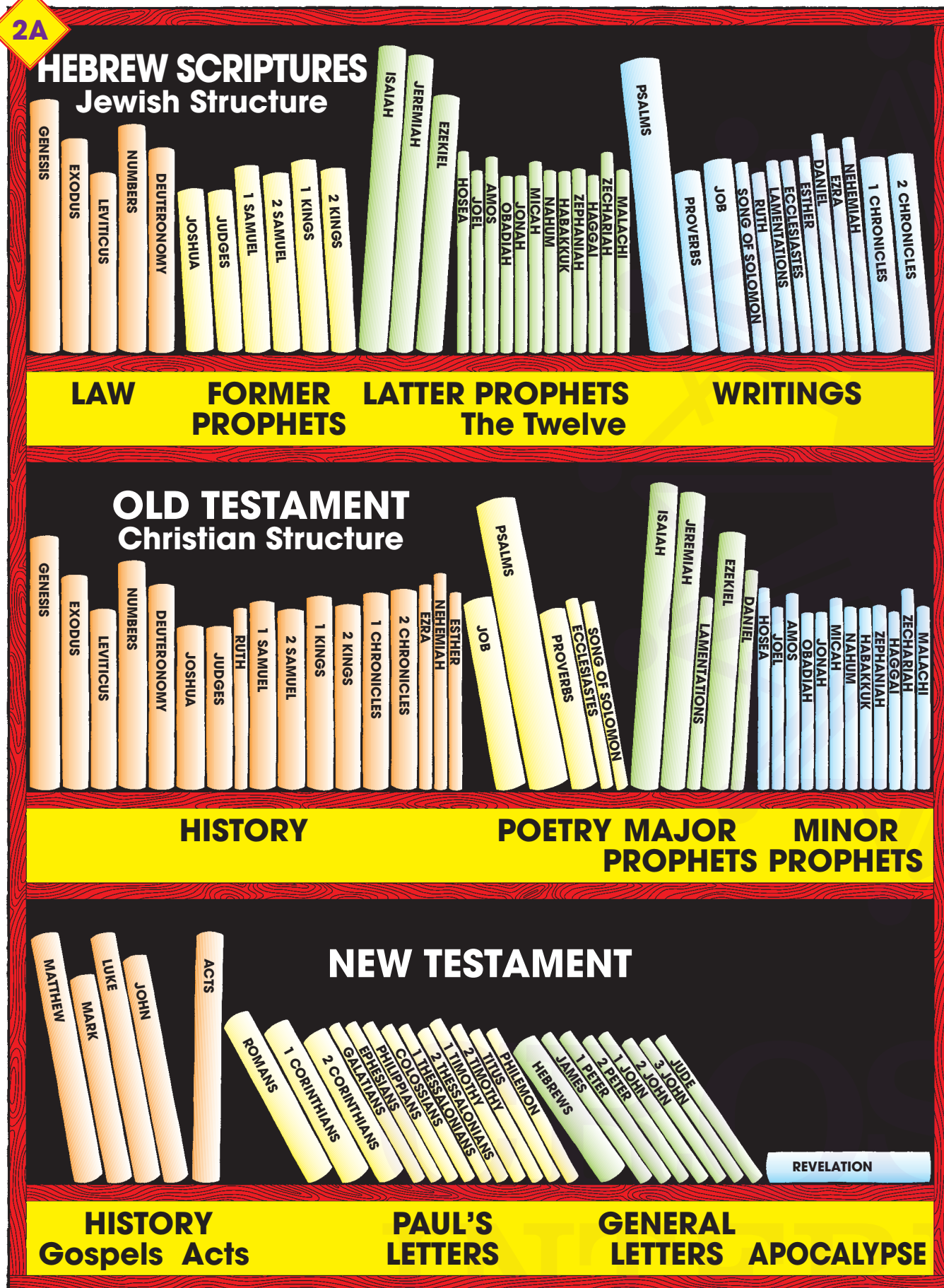
THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

UNIT 2

The Divine Drama in Miniature



CROSS
INTERNATIONAL



The Book That Is a Library

The Greek word *byblos*, from which the English word “Bible” is derived, means “book.” However, the Bible is really a **library of books** written by numerous authors over hundreds of years. **ILLUSTRATION 2A** depicts three shelves of books.

- The **first shelf** contains the books that make up the **HEBREW SCRIPTURES**, and shows how they are grouped. The Jewish people refer to:
 - Genesis through Deuteronomy as the **Torah** (or **LAW**). The *Torah* describes the origin of the ancient Israelites and defines their mission.
 - Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings as the **FORMER PROPHETS**, and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea through Malachi as the **LATTER PROPHETS**. Jewish teachers refer to the prophetic writings as the *Nebi'im*.
The *Former Prophets* describe how the Israelites forsook their God-given mission, worshiped other gods and eventually were taken into exile to Assyria and Babylon.
The *Latter Prophets* consist of the writings of Israel’s ancient prophets who warned the people that they were ignoring God’s goodness and will for their lives, and that tragedy would overtake them if they did not repent and return to the God of their fathers.
 - The rest of the books as the **WRITINGS** (or *Kethubim*). The Writings, among other things, describe how the exiles who returned from Babylon reestablished themselves and their Jerusalem-based worship system in the “Promised Land.”

The Jewish religious community refers to its Bible as **TaNaK**, a word made up of the first letters in *Torah*, *Nebi'im*, and *Kethubim*. Christian scholars generally consider the Jewish division of the Old Testament more appropriate.

- The **second shelf** contains the **OLD TESTAMENT** books in Bibles traditionally used by Protestants, and the order in which they are placed in those Bibles. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches add a number of books to the Old Testament; these are generally referred to as the *Apocryphal* or *Deuterocanonical* books. Many Bibles used by Protestants also contain these books. The Apocryphal books contain information about the history and faith of the Jewish people in the period between the Testaments.
- The **third shelf** contains the **NEW TESTAMENT** books used by Protestants and Roman Catholics. *The point of departure between the Jewish faith and Christianity* has to do with the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Was He the promised Messiah? Judaism says “No.” Christianity says “Yes.”
 - Jews* insist that Jesus was not the Messiah because the Messiah of Jewish expectation would be a great teacher and leader who would, among other things, make Jerusalem the political, moral, and spiritual capital of the world.
 - Christians* believe that the pivotal event in biblical history is the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, the incarnate Son of God, for all humanity.



How Do All the Pieces Fit Together?

At the bottom of **ILLUSTRATION 2B** is a **face** with a **question mark** above it. Let's name the person Sylvester. Sylvester sees the Christian faith and everything related to it as one big puzzle (**black lines indicating jigsaw puzzle**). He is asking many questions about the Bible's contents and message (**question mark**):

- 1 **Bible:** "The contents of the Bible are confusing. How can I fit all the bits and pieces together and make sense out of them?"
- 2 **Person wearing clerical collar:** "If I am to serve God full-time with my life, must I become a pastor or priest to do that?"
- 3 **Faces and music:** "If I can't serve God full-time as a pastor or priest, can I perhaps serve God part-time by singing in the church choir?"
- 4 **Law-codes:** "The commandments were given a long time ago. Do they still apply to me and my life today? If so, how?"
- 5 **Angel on cloud:** "What is an angel? Are there bad ones as well as good ones?"
- 6 **Dollar sign on envelope:** "Why do Christians give money to the church? What right does anyone have to tell me what to do with my money?"
- 7 **Church building:** "There are many different Christian denominations. Which one is right?"
- 8 **Tombstone with skull:** "Why do we die? Is there life after death, and can we be sure about what it will be like?"

In the pages that follow, we will put the pieces together to make a non-puzzling, complete picture.

- ◆ **Unit 3** will describe God's original plan for creation and humanity.
- ◆ **Unit 4** will show how sin broke into creation and history, and shattered that plan.
- ◆ **Units 13 and 14** will outline God's solution to the problem caused by sin—a solution achieved through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.



Church Things and Non-Church Things

2C

When Sylvester hears some of his friends distinguish between *church things* and *non-church things*, he gets the impression that they view Christian things (section containing a *Bible* and *church building*) as merely a *part of life, as one interest among many others*.

ILLUSTRATION 2C points to some of the questions Sylvester is asking:

- 1 **Dome (government):** "Should religion and politics be kept separate?"
- 2 **Diplomas (education):** "If I want to learn to serve God, must I go to a church school or college and study only the Bible? Can studying other subjects help equip me to live as a Christian?"
- 3 **Plate, knife, and fork:** "Does Christianity have anything to say about what and how much I should eat and drink?"
- 4 **Family:** "Does the Bible say anything about marriage and family life?"
- 5 **Dollar sign:** "What really is money? How am I to use it?"
- 6 **Ball:** "Is there any relationship between recreation and the Christian life?"
- 7 **Factory:** "Does Christianity have anything to say about life from Monday until Saturday—about daily work, for example?"

When people like Sylvester first come into contact with Christianity, they tend to ask, "How do I fit Christianity into all these other things?" However, the more they learn about Jesus, the more they realize they must ask, "How do I fit all these other things into Christianity?"



God's Personality

ILLUSTRATION 2E introduces a symbol for God that will be used in many of the illustrations that follow. **ILLUSTRATION 2D** helps introduce that symbol.

Let's imagine we are watching a woman who is buying a hat in a store. The assistant spends half an hour showing her a variety of styles. Finally, the assistant places one on her client's head and says, "Perfect! It's you!"—suggesting that the hat reflects the wearer's personality.

Similarly, in their imaginations, people put a variety of *personality hats* on God. **ILLUSTRATION 2D** depicts some of those "hats."

- 1 **Graduate's hat:** God knows everything, John 21:17.
- 2 **Policeman's hat:** God is always out to catch sinners, Genesis 3:8–10.
- 3 **Chef's hat:** God supplies daily bread, Psalm 145:15,16.
- 4 **Father Christmas or Santa Claus hat:** Many think that it is God's job to provide an endless supply of gifts to make life pleasant, Deuteronomy 28:1–14; Isaiah 3:18–23.
- 5 **Magician's hat:** God is the great miracle worker, Exodus chs. 7–10.
- 6 **Crown:** God is King of the universe, Psalm 24:1,2,7–10.
- 7 **Puritan's hat:** God wants people to work hard, and perhaps be a little stern, Mark 10:17–22.
- 8 **Doctor's headgear:** God can and should heal people when they are sick, Psalm 103:3.

Although there is an element of truth in each of these "hats" as they relate to God's character, **ILLUSTRATION 2E** introduces us to a hat that Jesus once wore—and to a symbol that depicts God's character in a way that reflects biblical teaching.

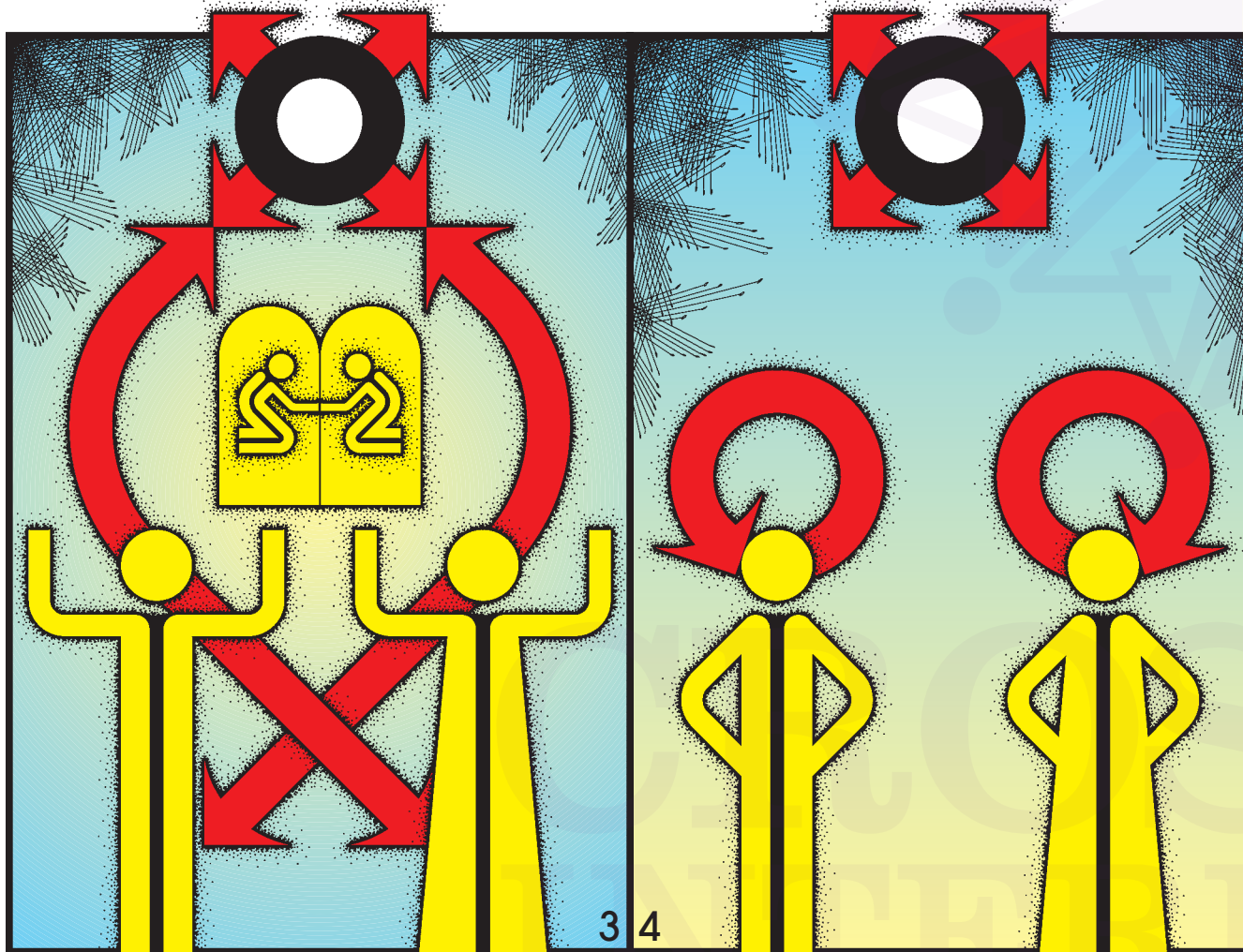
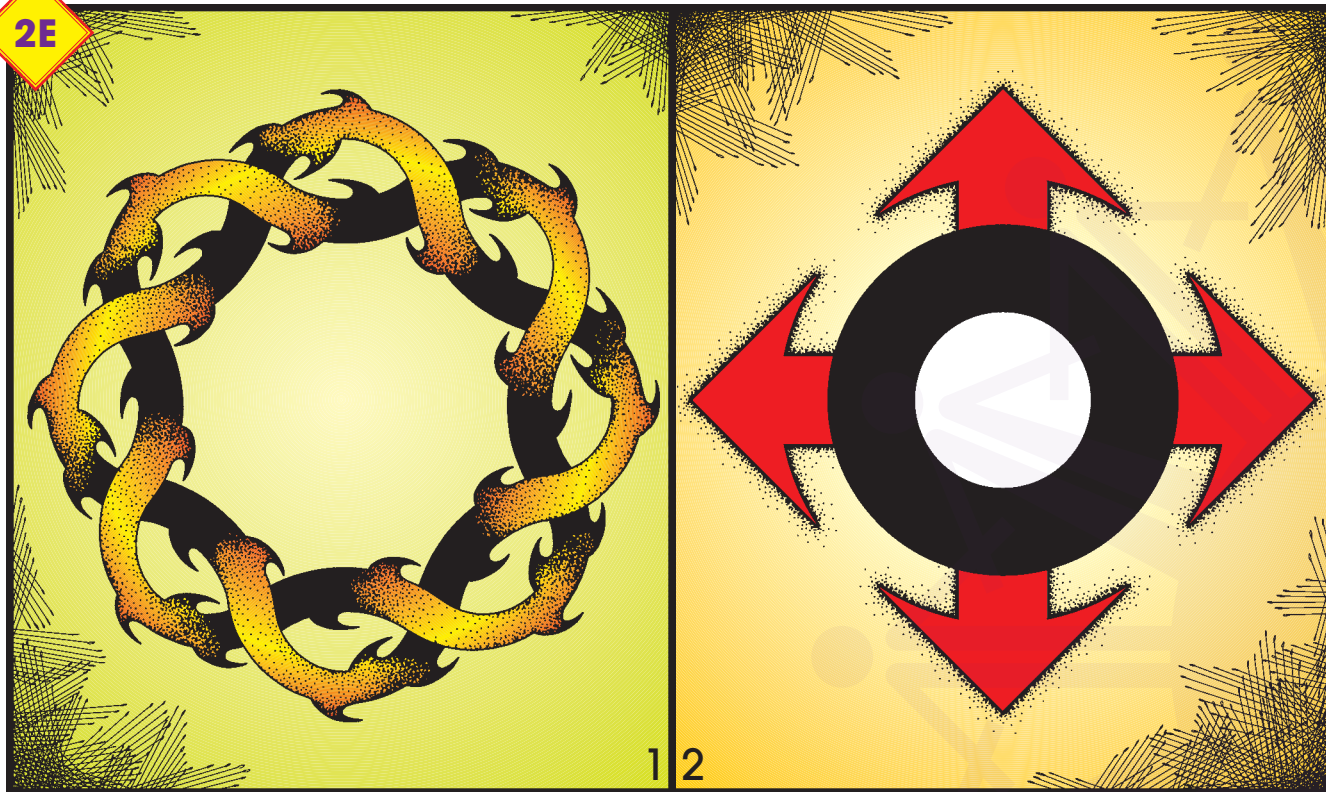


Image and Option

Upper section

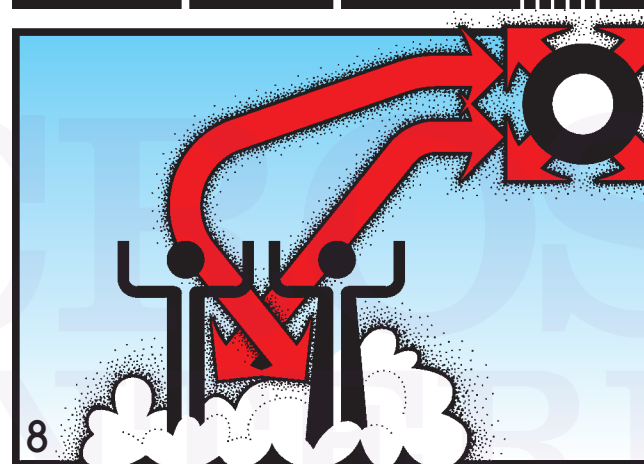
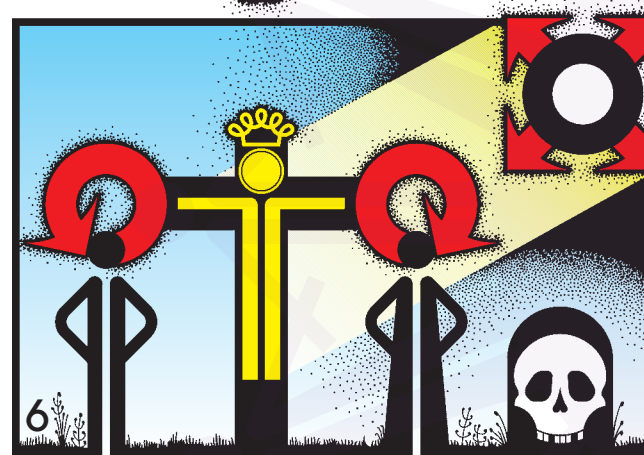
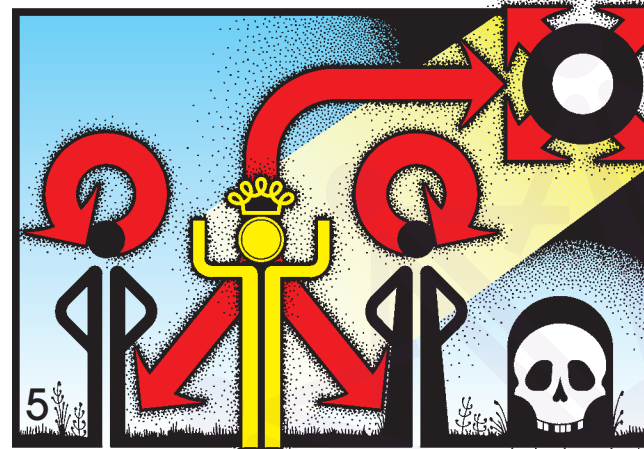
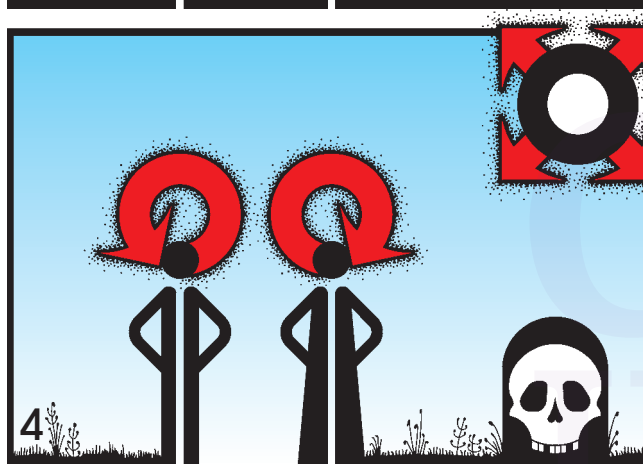
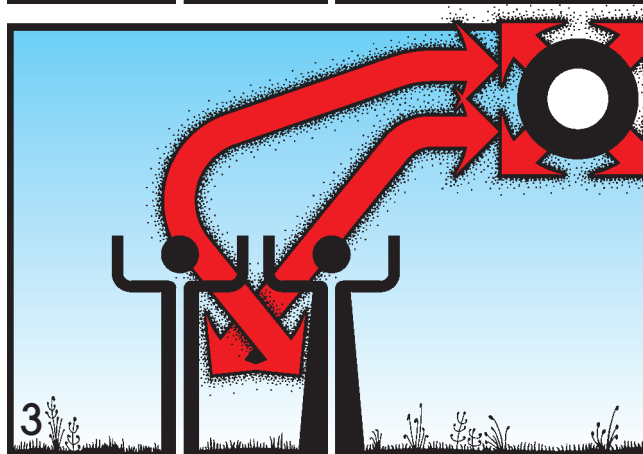
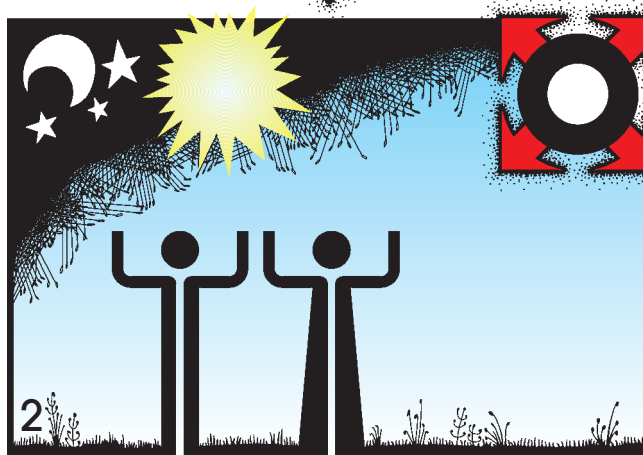
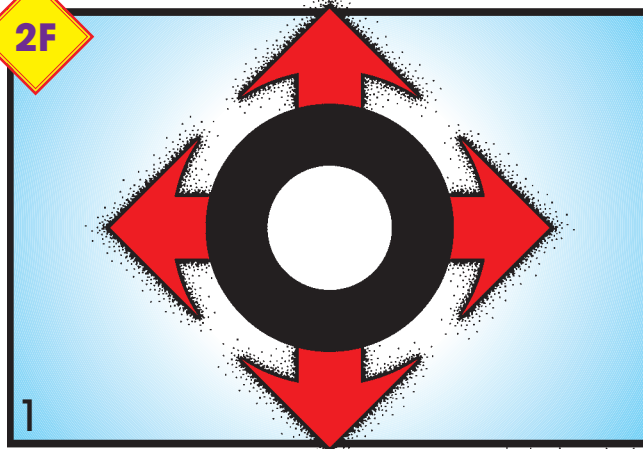
- 1 God once wore a hat (*a crown of thorns*) when, in the person of Jesus the Messiah, He was crucified. A crown of thorns is *circular*. *Thorns protrude from it*. This hat becomes the basis for the *symbol for God* introduced in segment 2—a circle with four arrows protruding from it.
- 2 The *circle* expresses the truth that *God is one* and has *no beginning and no end*. The *arrows* signify that God is always *One who acts*, that the key quality to God's actions is *love*, and that this love always goes *out* from God. God is like a great tank full of love, kindness, and mercy—a tank whose faucet is always turned on and whose contents always flow out, and never end.

Lower section

- 3 God made people to be creatures who *love*. Their love is to flow *out to God* and to *others*. Love of God expresses itself in service to others.
 - a. The Old Testament quotes the first commandment (to love God) in Deuteronomy 6:4,5 and the second (to love neighbor) in Leviticus 19:18. In Jesus' day, most teachers and people looked on these as two separate commandments.
 - b. Jesus welds these *two* commandments into *one*, Mark 12:28–31; Matthew 22:34–40. Those who love God demonstrate that love by loving (serving) others full-time. *Serving* has to do with developing and using life to benefit others.
 - c. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus deals with a person who:
 - ◆ looks on obedience as a *merit system*, and
 - ◆ wants to *place limits* on who the neighbor is, and how far we are to go in serving that neighbor.
 Jesus teaches that:
 - ◆ the commandments were never meant to serve as a merit system, and
 - ◆ He removes all limits as to who the neighbor is and how far we are to go in serving that neighbor. The question is not merely "Who *is* my neighbor?" but rather "What does it mean to *be* a neighbor?"
 In this parable, the priest and the Levite walked past the helpless (*possibly dead*) victim of robbers because they asked, "What will it mean for *me* if I get involved with this person?" The Good Samaritan asked, "What will it mean for *this victim of violence* if I do *not* get involved in helping him?"
 - d. Christians are to pattern their servant life on Jesus' servant life (John 13:34), "love one another *as I have loved you*."

- 4 Sin is the failure or refusal to serve God and others. By nature, people are turned in on themselves and live to serve themselves (*person in posture of indifference, symbol for sin*). They are controlled by "the lusts of the flesh," Romans 7:5.

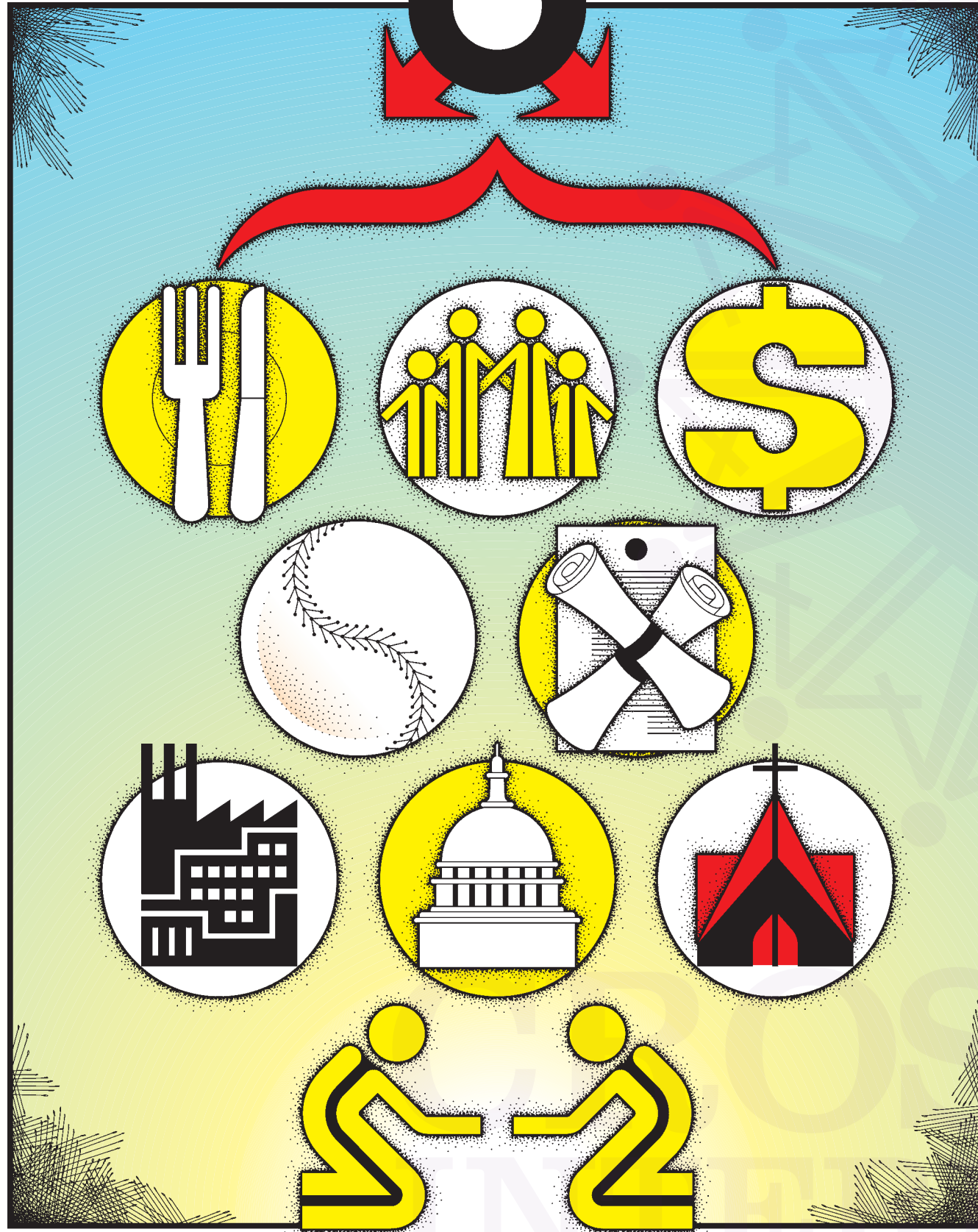
Christians are to treat others as God has treated them. They are to be living images of God's character, Genesis 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 10:31.



The Divine Plan

The numbers below relate to the numbered sections in **ILLUSTRATION 2F**.

- 1 "In the beginning, God..." Genesis 1:1 (*symbol for God*).
- 2 "created the heavens and the earth," Genesis 1:1 (*sun, moon, and stars; surface of earth*). "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind,'" Genesis 1:26. "Male and female He created them," Genesis 1:27 (*male and female figures*).
- 3 "in our image, after our likeness," Genesis 1:26 (*people serve God and one another with out-going love*).
- 4 Humanity sinned (*people live to serve themselves; note the break in the ground between the figures*). Death is the consequence (*tombstone with skull*), Romans 5:12, 6:23.
- 5 People changed. God did not. God became human in *Jesus*, and *lived for us the life we were meant to live*, but cannot.
- 6 *Jesus suffered the death we deserve to die*. He did it *for us*. We do not have to die as punishment for sin any more, Galatians 4:4,5.
- 7 Jesus lived a sinless life for us, died to suffer the punishment we deserve, and rose again from the grave as Lord over death and eternity. He is among us through His Holy Spirit (*dove*).
 - a. He assures us that our sins are forgiven (*cross through sin*).
 - b. Death is transformed into a doorway leading to God's Eternal Home (*door with slats*). We can "see" in faith what lies on the other side of death.
 - c. Now we are to live as God first intended us to live (*arrows to God and neighbor*). The lines forming the arrows are *broken*, because our obedience is, at best, imperfect.
- 8 In the life to come (the *cloud* symbolizes God's presence), God will restore things to the way He first intended them to be. In eternity, we shall perfectly *praise God and serve others*.



Him Only Shalt Thou Serve

- 1 Some people talk about putting God *first* in their lives. True, in Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us to “strive *first* for the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” However, in Luke 12:31, Jesus leaves out the word *first*. Furthermore, in Matthew 4:10, Jesus says, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve *only* Him.”
- 2 In Matthew 6:33, Jesus is not talking about *priorities*. Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is to be like the hub of a wheel, around which everything else revolves.
- 3 It follows, then, that we are not to think of the kingdom of God as *the most important part* of life. God wants us to live *all of life* under His grace, goodness, and care (**ILLUSTRATION 2G, horizontal red bracket below symbol for God**).
- 4 We are called to spend life *serv*ing one another (**two servant figures, lower center**) with the tenderness and humility Jesus demonstrated towards His disciples. This response is to show itself in the following ways:
 - a. **Plate, knife, and fork:** We are to eat to live—not live to eat. Our eating habits must not endanger our lives nor deprive others of food.
 - b. **Family:** Within the family circle, we are to love and serve one another.
 - c. **Dollar sign:** We are to use money to God’s glory in the service of others.
 - d. **Ball:** Leisure time and exercise are necessary to help our minds and bodies remain healthy and fit.
 - e. **Diplomas (education):** We need to develop our minds to be equipped to serve others.
 - f. **Factory:** Daily work provides us with an opportunity to serve people in our family, community, nation, and world.
 - g. **Dome (government):** We are to serve God and others at international, national, state, and local levels.
 - h. **Church building:** God wants us to involve ourselves in the work of the organized church for the sake of Christian growth in ourselves and others.



- 2A Although at first glance the Bible appears to be a single book, it is really a library of 66 books written by dozens of authors over a period of many hundreds of years. What Jewish people refer to as the *Hebrew Scriptures*, and what Christians refer to as the *Old Testament*, contains 39 books. What Christians refer to as the *New Testament* contains 27 books.
- 2B People who begin to study the Bible for the first time find its contents rather puzzling, and feel challenged when trying to fit its many pieces together.
- 2C Christianity is not to be understood as *part of life*, not even as *the most important part of life*. Christian faith and discipleship relate to *all of life*. There is no secular realm.
- 2D When left to their own devices, people conjure up a variety of ideas about God's character.
- 2E The Bible teaches that God's character and heart is best summed up by one word: *love*. God's love always *flows out* from God. God's plan was that people should live to *serve God* by *serving those around them*. However, the first humans chose to *serve their own whims* rather than *do God's will*.
- 2F Although humanity changed as a result of the fall into sin, God did not. God broke into history in the person of Jesus the Messiah to save humanity from the power of sin and death.
- 2G Those who belong to God through faith in God's Son, Jesus the Messiah, are to live all of life under God's love and lordship. Jesus' servant life serves as the model for everything they do.