

## A HELP IN UNDERSTANDING WHAT GOD IS

To help the reader comprehend the nature of God, I would like to borrow an analogy from the book *Flatland* by Edwin Abbott.\* Abbott was a mathematician and the model is geometric in nature. It was originally written in the nineteenth century for the purposes we are using it for here. *Flatland* is the story of a man who lives in a two-dimensional world—like a sheet of paper. In the surface of the paper there is only length and width—there is no such thing as thickness. You and I are three-dimensional beings—we have length and width and frequently considerable thickness. You cannot get me, a three-dimensional being, into a two-dimensional sheet of paper. You can draw a front view of me (a portrait), but that is not the whole me. You can draw a top view of me, which because I am bald ends up being three concentric circles, but that is not the whole me. If you and I were to look at the man in Flatland, we would see him as a profile (see figure 1). He would be outlined but have no thickness.



Figure 1. The man in Flatland

One day the man in Flatland is visited by a sphere. The sphere is a three-dimensional object just as we are, and it just so happens that it crosses Flatland right in the man's living room. Now if you will think about that for a moment, you will realize that for the man in Flatland a rather incredible thing has happened. A dot appears on the man's floor with no cause that the man in Flatland can understand.

A dot in Flatland is matter! In figure 1, the man, himself, is made up of a series of dots. Just as a tennis ball dipped in paint and touched to a sheet of paper would produce a dot on the paper, so too has our dot which the man in Flatland calls matter appeared out of nothing (see figure 2). As the man in Flatland watches, the dot becomes a circle which continuously grows in size (see figure 3). You will see if a plane truncates (or slices) a sphere, it will produce a circle; and the deeper the sphere sinks into the plane, the larger the circle will become.

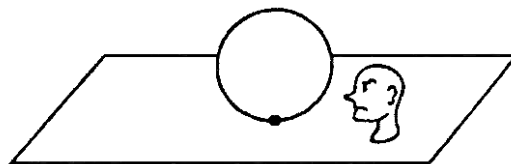


Figure 2. A sphere tangent to a plane produces a dot on the plane. The man in Flatland sees only the dot.

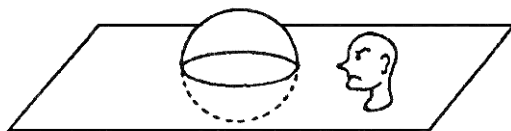


Figure 3. A plane truncating a sphere. The man in Flatland sees a circle.

The circle becomes so large it is about to fill the living room of the man in Flatland. He is terrified because he does not understand what is happening. All of the laws of science which state that matter cannot be created nor destroyed are being violated. What he sees is for him a true miracle. Just as he is about to run in panic from the room, the sphere reaches its equator, passes its equator, and gradually sinks out of the plane. So what happens to the circle in Flatland? It begins to shrink, and it becomes smaller and smaller until finally it is just a dot on his floor and then it

is gone! Another violation of the laws of science! Matter cannot be destroyed and yet the man in Flatland has seen it happen. The man in Flatland is being confronted with miraculous and ghost-like events which violates his science and his common sense.

Let us suppose now that the man in Flatland begins talking to the sphere, and he says to the sphere, “What is it like to be a sphere?” The sphere says, “I’ll tell you what it’s like; draw a circle on your floor.” This is not easy for the man in Flatland to do. His perception of a circle is a constantly curving line that returns to its origin, but he cannot see all of the circle at once. He can only see the side of the circle facing him. The only way he could see a whole circle would be to be inside the circle, and if he got inside he could never get out. People in Flatland commit suicide by drawing circles around themselves that they can never get out of. Because of this it takes a long time for him to draw the circle. The sphere is most impatient with all this because he could have done it instantly. Finally the circle is completed and the sphere says, “Now what I want you to do is to rotate the circle!” What he has in mind is that the man in Flatland will rotate the circle about its diameter producing a sphere, but what the man in Flatland does is to rotate the circle about its circumference, spinning it like a record on a record player. “No, no—rotate it the third way,” says the sphere. “There is no third way you fool,” cries out the man in Flatland, and for him this is true. There is no third way, no up and down in a thickness direction, and absolutely no way for him to comprehend what the sphere is talking about or what the sphere is. The only thing that he can understand is the world or dimension in which he lives.

Now the reason that I have told you this little story is to give you a foundation by which you can understand God. When you read, “In the beginning God created heaven and

the earth” (Genesis 1:1), you are reading a description analogous to Flatland. The concept is that, a God, who is in a higher dimension than are we, a God who has the same kind of relationship to us which the sphere had to Flatland, that, this kind of being touched our little “Flatland,” so to speak, and in violation of all of our laws of science created matter out of nothing. God is so superior to us, he exists in such a higher dimension than do we that what is natural and ordinary to him is miraculous to us. The Bible recognizes this concept and uses it in every single description of God.

God is light	1 John 1:5
God is love	1 John 4:8, 16
God is a Spirit	John 4:24
God is not flesh and blood	Matthew 16:17
God is not a man	Numbers 23:19
God is the word	John 1:1
God is unseen	1 John 4:12

\*Edwin Abbott, *Flatland* (Dover Pub. Inc., New York, 1952).

# A HELP IN UNDER- STANDING WHAT GOD IS

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