“From Flat Earth to Lot’s Daughters—Major Questions on God”

Several very broad questions that have plagued many through the years were asked by young lady from the U.K.:

1) The Bible reflects that we live on a flat earth, does it not?
2) Why did God allow such terrible violence in the Old Testament?
3) Why does the bible degrade the women unequal to men?
4) The Bible says that women should not have authority over man or teach in 1 Timothy 2:12? Isn’t that God being [unfair] to women?
5) Why did Lot offer up his daughters to be gang raped? Why did God allow Lot’s daughters to later have sex with their father? I don’t understand why a loving God will allow this?
6) Was God being evil when He killed all the firstborn in Egypt?

Hello _____,

Thanks for your letter. Please allow me to briefly respond to your questions in the order in which you asked them:

1. The Bible nowhere teaches that we live on a flat earth. While some might say that the Bible’s use of poetic language implies such a thing, this would be to seriously misread and misinterpret biblical poetry.

2. This is a question related to the problem of evil. Please see response #5 below.

3. The New Testament teaches that men and women are equal in Christ. Paul writes unequivocally, “There is neither Jew nor

Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Both men and women are made in the image and likeness of God and, hence, have intrinsic worth and dignity (Genesis 1:27). But this equality in worth and value before God does not mean that men and women have the same function in the world or role in the church.

4. So I don’t think that 1 Tim. 2:12 is teaching that women are not equal to men in worth and dignity before God. Paul has already taught that they are in Galatians 3:28. Rather, this verse shows that men and women have different roles to play in the body of Christ. The sexes have different roles and responsibilities. Hence, women (and not men) are honored with bringing children into the world (and thus Eve is called the mother of all the living in Genesis 3:20). Further, they are encouraged to teach other women (Titus 2:4) as well as children. This verse (and others like it) speaks to that authoritative teaching ministry of the church (when it is gathered together as the church, with both men and women present) which God has committed to men. It does not mean that a woman cannot instruct men in all sorts of arenas (including college and university settings, etc.) outside this special teaching function in the church. Paul is speaking to a very limited area of teaching in the church which God has given to men. Women have other teaching functions in the church and (as I said) they can also teach all they want outside the church. But God has entrusted what we might call the “pulpit ministry” of the church to men.

5. This also, it seems to me, is a question which can be subsumed under the problem of evil. I think the correct answer to questions such as this is, first, to point out that such behavior contradicts (and is contrary to) God’s revealed moral will. In other words, it is sin. All human sin must be laid at the feet of human beings, for these are the ones committing such vile acts. God does not force man to misbehave and do

evil. Rather, mankind freely chooses such abominable behavior. God, indeed, is the One who has graciously provided a way of escape for all men in Christ. And hence, all men and women are called upon to repent of their sins and place their hope and faith in Christ for salvation. Those who refuse to repent and place their trust in Christ for salvation will be held fully accountable before God for their sins. This is a situation that we are all strenuously called upon to avoid by fleeing to the refuge (in Christ) which God has graciously made available to all men and women. But those who refuse God's free offer of salvation in Christ will held fully accountable for all the sin and moral evil which they have committed.

6. Now, as to God's killing the first born of Egypt, we must bear in mind a few things. First, as the Author and Giver of life, God has the right both to give and take life as He sees fit. Indeed, He does this all the time. But according to the Bible, physical death does not end our personal, conscious existence. Rather, our existence continues into the afterlife. And if (as I believe) all those that die before reaching an age of moral accountability before God (whatever that age might be) are saved, this sovereign act of God would have brought many of these people to a much better place—a place of everlasting joy and peace in the presence of God—a place they might never have seen had they been permitted to live out their days on earth. [See also our article Do Babies Go to Hell?"] Secondly, all these deaths could have been avoided if Pharaoh would have yielded his own arrogant will to God's and let God's people go free (as he was repeatedly told to do). Pharaoh witnessed several miracles of God and was given repeated opportunities to obey and let God's people go. Unfortunately, he refused—with the result that both he and his people were made to endure several more plagues until he finally relented and allowed God's people (whom he had enslaved, after all) to go free. It's always important to bear in mind the "much-bigger" picture of what we read in the Bible.

I hope these answers prove helpful to you in your ongoing spiritual pilgrimage. Each of these answers could be (and has been) developed at much greater length by Christian scholars—and I would encourage you to explore such answers in articles and books. But this is all I can say over email, for time is very limited.

God bless you _____!

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn