

“How Many Bethlehem Children Were Killed by Herod?”

I was reading your [Christmas Quiz](#) and I wondered if you had researched the number of children killed by Herod? Matthew doesn't mention the gender. Would these be Joseph and Mary's nephews and/or nieces, or distant relations? How long were Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem? Would they have known some of these children? Did Jesus ever go back to Bethlehem to minister?

We do not know the number of infant boys killed as a result of Herod's order. Scholars estimate that it was probably no more than a dozen (because Bethlehem's population was small and the order only concerned infant boys age two and under). Note that Matthew 2:16 does specifically mention “boys” or “males.”

We simply are not given enough information to know much about these children. We don't know if any of them were related to Joseph and Mary or not. Although they may have known many of these other children and their families, we are not provided with all the details about this event that we might like. In fact, as far as I know, Matthew is the only author who records this event. His account is all the information we possess. It seems possible (maybe even probable) that the family was in Bethlehem for quite some time before fleeing to Egypt (Matt. 2:13). According to Matthew, the family was in a “house” when the wise men arrived (2:11) and Jesus is called a “child” (Gr. *paidion*), instead of “baby” (Gr. *brephos*, Luke 2:12. In addition, Herod inquires about the precise time at which the magi saw the star (Matt. 2:7), and this becomes the basis for Herod's killing all the male children two years old and under (2:16). Hence, the family may have been there nearly two years by the time they fled to Egypt. Of course, we really just don't know all the details about the timing of these events. But I'm somewhat inclined to think they may have been in

Bethlehem long enough to get to know many of their neighbors—particularly those who had children roughly the same age as Jesus.

Concerning your final question, we are just never told whether or not Jesus returned to Bethlehem. The Bible is simply silent about this, so far as I can tell.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“What Do You Know About Landmark Forum?”

What do you know about Landmark Forum? Received an e-mail from a relative about how this has changed her life and invited me to check it out. I came straight to your website to see if you had anything on this organization.

We haven't done any research ourselves on The Landmark Forum, but others have:

[“Landmark Education” on Apologetics Index](#) (note the very beginning of this analysis: “NOTE: (Landmark Education lawyers, pay attention please!)” The litigious nature of Landmark is quite interesting! Note this corollary article:

[Landmark Education vs. A Link on Apologetics Index](#)

[Inside the Landmark Forum](#)

Watchman Fellowship, a trustworthy source of information on

cults and false religions, took down their analysis of Landmark after being threatened with a lawsuit. However, someone else has put it back up:

web.archive.org/web/19980615070001/http://www.watchman.org/LandmarkProfile.htm

If you google Landmark Forum, you can find some intriguing information, including comments by people who have attended and/or experienced pressure from recruiters.

ask.metafilter.com/15619/Opinions-of-Landmark-Forum

www.ex-cult.org/Groups/Landmark/landmark-cherries.dir/_X00M/apostate/index.htm

For what it's worth, Landmark uses experiential exercises rooted in its history of Werner Erhard's "est" program, which eventually morphed into Landmark. Some of the exercises themselves are helpful and do not violate any biblical principles. [Dr. Phil McGraw](#), formerly associated with Pathways, a similar program to Landmark, brought TV cameras into the "training room" of some of these same exercises when he was featured on Oprah, and periodically uses elements of the exercises on his programs.

And several Christians have taken the helpful parts of Landmark, rejected the rest, and created God-honoring, people-honoring seminars that are about discipleship and personal growth, not making money.

www.heartconnexion.org (my son and I both participated in this one, and bless God for it)

www.graceadventure.org/

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“What’s the Difference Between Reiki and the Biblical Practice of Laying On of Hands?”

I’m researching [Reiki](#) and found a website that purports to be “Christian Reiki.” The woman who does this says she only connects with the Holy Spirit inside of her for the energy she uses. She commits each session to God and communicates with the Holy Spirit by means of prayer during the session. She further states that the Reiki symbols she uses to deliver that energy actually have no meaning but that they act as focus points for transmission of energy. I would tend to be a little leery about this but want to know, how does this differ from the Christian “laying on of hands”?

Yes; I think this does differ from the Christian “laying on of hands” (1 Tim. 5:22).

Christians lay hands on a brother or sister in Christ as an act of identification. They identify with another believer who is part of the body of Christ. When we then pray for that individual’s healing, there is no attempt to channel “energy” of some sort to bring the person healing. Rather, we simply make a request that God would heal the person if it is His will to do so. Sometimes He is willing; sometimes not. But this is a choice for God; we are simply making a request, subject to His will.

There just isn’t any biblical warrant for “Christian” Reiki, so far as I can see. We are never commanded (or even encouraged) to channel spiritual “energy” for the healing of

others. Indeed, I think the biblical authors would regard such a practice as highly suspect. We are simply encouraged to pray for their healing. And this is something we can do (and that the church has always done) without any assistance from the practice of Reiki.

In this respect I don't see what "Christian Reiki" adds to the equation (that isn't accomplished simply through prayer to God). If the Reiki practitioner thinks that Reiki gives them power or authority over the Holy Spirit, then such a belief is totally absurd and unbiblical. God is sovereign and is not in any way subject to the will and manipulation of men. So it seems to me that Reiki is a questionable practice for Christians, that adds nothing to simple prayer, and that is possibly grounded in some very unbiblical beliefs about God and healing, etc.

At any rate, that's my view of the matter.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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"You Shouldn't Dis the Mormons Unless You're a Member"

I think religion is great! I don't however see why we have to dis other people. We are all children of God and here trying to get back to Him. I hate it when I see all these sites

talking bad about the Mormons. They aren't bad people, they just believe a little different. I think it's kinda cool the things they do, like work in their temples for people that have passed on. In the Bible it says that we need to be baptized to enter into heaven and what if someone didn't get the chance, they can still be saved because of the Mormons beliefs. It also talks about baptisms for the dead in Peter, so it is scriptural. I also had a thought. Are you guys Active Members in Full Fellowship of the Mormon Church? If not why are you talking about the Mormons? It's like this, If you have a Ford Explorer and it has a very serious electrical problem that requires specific dealer attention, are you going to take it to a BMW Dealer... I personally don't feel that is very Christ-like talking bad about other religions whomever it may be. Why don't we focus on our own churches and magnify our own beliefs and our own salvation [rather] than attack other religions that are trying to do good according to what they know. Why can't we all just love our neighbors like Jesus Christ says? Whata ya say.

We certainly aspire to love our neighbors as Jesus commanded. But being loving and gracious does not exclude truth telling. In fact, ignoring the issue of truth is not very loving at all. If we believe that someone is in danger it would be cruel not to inform them. Certainly, we are to do this with gentleness and respect as Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:15-16, but we are still responsible for sharing the truth in love. Jesus warned that there would be false prophets, and that they would be dangerous (see passages below). The danger is that people might be deceived into trusting a gospel that is not capable of saving them. The price for being deceived is steep: spending eternity separated from God.

Actually it is the Mormons who first charged that all of traditional Christianity is apostate. The message that Joseph Smith supposedly received from the divine figures in his first vision is that all the denominations and teachers at that time

were an abomination to God. Mormons claim that they are restoring the true gospel that was lost a short time after Christ. There is a long tradition within Christianity, going back to the first generation after the birth of the church, to defend itself against new gospels and new messiahs. Defending biblical Christianity against the claims of Mormonism is the responsibility of everyone who claims the Christ of the Bible as their savior.

Although tolerance has come to mean that we are to hold all ideas equal, that is not what the word means. To tolerate someone you must first disagree with them, otherwise there would be no need to be tolerant. A tolerant individual gives someone he disagrees with an opportunity to make their case, to convince them that their view is correct. After meeting with Mormon bishops for over four years I feel that I have been tolerant and will continue to do so in the future.

Sincerely,

Don Closson

False Prophets – Matthew 7:15-23 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. 21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

False Christs – Matthew 24:5 For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.

False Gospels – Galatians 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

False Gods – Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.”

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“Does the Bible Talk About Reincarnation?”

Does the Bible ever talk about reincarnation?

The short answer is “No; the Bible nowhere speaks of reincarnation.” Unfortunately, however, some people have claimed to find evidence for this belief in the Bible. For example, John the Baptist is often claimed to be the reincarnation of Elijah.

This is a popular “New Age” sort of interpretation. Of course, no respected biblical scholar would accept this interpretation as true.

And it certainly wasn’t the view of Jesus, His disciples, John the Baptist, or the Gospel writers. Luke 1:17 tells us that John came in the “spirit and power” of Elijah, which is far different than asserting that John was the reincarnation of Elijah. In addition, it’s important to remember that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus, Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. But as Geisler and Rhodes observe, “Since

John [the Baptist] had already lived and died by then, and since Elijah still had the same name and self-consciousness, Elijah had obviously not been reincarnated as John the Baptist.” Third, we must remember that Elijah never died (2 Kings 2:11); therefore, he doesn’t fit the reincarnation model.

An important verse to bear in mind in these discussions is Hebrews 9:27. This verse teaches us that we die once, and then face God’s judgment. The consequences of that judgment, according to the Bible, are eternal—not temporal (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:10-15).

If you would like more information about this subject, please see the following two resources on Probe’s website:

1. The Mystery of Reincarnation –
www.probe.org/the-mystery-of-reincarnation/
2. “Was Reincarnation Ever in the Bible?” –
www.probe.org/was-reincarnation-ever-in-the-bible/

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

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“Islamic History Says Abraham Spoke Arabic”

Islamic history shows that prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) spoke Arabic. What would you say to that sir? Not or possible? Or not sure?

I would be surprised if Islamic history seriously says such a thing. I would carefully check your sources and make sure the source you are relying on is a reputable, scholarly source.

At any rate, I do not think it possible that Abraham spoke Arabic. Arabic appears to go back only about as far as the 4th century A.D. or so. See, for example:

1) <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Arabic?o=100074>

2) <http://www.arabic-language.org/arabic/history.asp>.

Since Abraham lived about 2000 B.C., this would be about 2,400 years before the earliest known examples of written Arabic. I don't think it likely that a 2,400 year gap can be bridged in this case. And, of course, biblically speaking, there is no evidence at all for such an assertion.

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

"Arabic: a Semitic language that developed out of the language of the Arabians of the time of Muhammad, now spoken in countries of the Middle East and North Africa."

The above is from one of the links you posted. This is false—Arabic was used before prophet Muhammad.

Yes; I would agree that the language dates to before the time of Muhammad. But as I said, the evidence seems to point to the 4th century A.D. (before Muhammad, but long after Abraham, who lived around 2000 B.C.).

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

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“You Should Improve Your Article ‘A Short Look at Six World Religions’”

My name is _____ and I am a born again Christian. I have a BA in Pastoral Theology and a MA in Philosophical Theology. I believe that there could be improvements to your article [A Short Look at Six World Religions](#).

I do believe that “snapshot” looks at our neighbors’ faiths are valuable but they do have limitations. It can be difficult to convey the rich diversity of their sects, denominations, and teachings. This being the case, and given that adherents of any faith often do not align strictly to orthodox doctrine, it may be worth noting in your piece in the sections that deal with “relating with folks from these faiths” that on top of prayer and Biblical knowledge they should listen closely to the others’ perspectives. Listening at first will give more clarity to the type or specific tradition the person is a part of.

Islam has been called a religion of works, but I have found this to not be true upon both study and speaking to Muslims. They are fully dependent on Allah’s mercy and the grace of God. They will often say that even if they were perfect and without sin, God could cast them into hell if he wanted because God owes no one anything—it is His grace and mercy alone that allows salvation. This is an important facet of Islam that I feel should be included. The six tenets of faith are of course much more flexible in many Muslims’ eyes than the five pillars and this could be emphasized. I also would say that Islam is no more fatalistic than many expressions of

Christian faith. As many Christians would say, God is sovereign and everything that happens is in His purview and is because He allows it. Even Satan's and hell's existence is only because of His allowing it to be so. I do not think of Christianity is fatalistic because of this teaching. One Christian tradition that may deviate from this is Process Theologies of Christianity, which in my reading give more a 'participant' role to God than 'sovereign'. You write that Allah is a distant spiritual being, but again this is not how I have heard Muslims describe God. They will often as Christians do also balance transcendence and immanence. I have read of Allah being the center of all things, not 'out there'. It is we who may feel like we're 'out there' when we are distanced by sin.

I appreciate that you note Hinduism's diversity. *Star Wars*, however, I would argue is closer to Taoism.

There are some forms of Buddhism that pray, and worship divine beings. I would disagree with C.S. Lewis—Buddhism may be said more properly to be a 'reformation' of Hinduism, not a heresy. Buddha wanted to bring a more 'democratic' and less austere faith. The 'I don't exist' is the ego. A Buddhist would recognize a pinch hurts and that a pinch hurts any living creature. Buddhists would say that Nirvana is not a goal, and is not something that is sought. There is no inconsistency of no-self and karma continuing the ripple effects. Karma is just cause-effect. A Buddhist would seek to absolve all action, cause-effect. Though a person dies, the consequences of their actions will still effect the next generation and their environment.

It may be worth noting the Messianic Jewish movement—I worshipped alongside these folks in a St. Paul Minnesota Temple and they are really Jews for Jesus!

It may be more appropriate to refer to Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses as 'sects' rather than cults as this is the trend in

writing, commentary, and popular usage.

I hope that some of this may be useful to you, even if to a small degree. I do thank you for your ministry at Probe and am grateful that you write on these other religions with great love in your writing voice. My best wishes to you!

Thank you, _____.

It may be helpful for you to understand that the article on our website is the radio transcript of a week of programs I was asked to do for Moody Radio some years ago, giving a 35,000-foot overview of major religions to their radio audience in a very restricted time parameter. And that's why it's called a "Short" look at world religions.

Your excellent observations are about fine-tuning the details of an article that was intentionally written with broad brush strokes. So I'm going to add it to our website from a link at the bottom of the article, highlighted in a "See Also" box.

Thank you, thank you for "hearing" the love in my heart and in my fingertips as I wrote this article! You have greatly blessed me today!

Warmly,

Sue

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"Another Story of a Couple's

Heartbreaking Experience with an Abusive Church"

For the second time since joining a church which I now realize is abusive, our twenty six year old son has had what we term as a nervous breakdown. This time he spent three weeks in hospital. Our daughter who is twenty four has also been a member of this same church for three years. Neither of our children are married.

I could not believe what I was reading in your article [Abusive Churches](#). It described to a tee, the church that our children attend. This church is called the _____ Christian Center and is in _____, BC. A year ago, the Lord answered a mother's prayer and standing on Ps 37:4, my husband and I were transferred to British Columbia from Ontario, Canada. We have seen such a pulling away from parents and during my son's recent hospitalization, I went to be near him and stayed in his apartment which is below and owned by people from their church. I was shunned by the whole church and most especially by our daughter. My husband joined me there until our son was well enough to come home from the hospital.

I made many attempts to meet with the church ministry and most attempts were futile. I have never felt so alone in my whole life. Praise God that when we have Jesus, we are never alone. My husband and I eventually met with one of the pastors and the senior pastor's wife and were able to voice all our fears. Of course they had answers for all our questions. As an example, I voiced my concern about a phone call from our daughter where she told us that the pastor's wife called her in for a "counseling appointment." During this appointment the pastor's wife told my daughter that she was not flirting enough and should change her hair and the way she wore her clothes to appear more sexy to the young men in the church. She went on to say that the Lord showed her that our daughter

and a young man named Peter would make a wonderful couple and that she could see them as missionaries in Germany (which seems to be a country of great focus in this church. Our son took a year of German at college). The pastor's wife said she did not remember a man named Peter (he has since left the church) however she did have a vague memory of telling our daughter that she should do something with her hair (our daughter is a senior at SFU and has been working part time at a bank for the past three years). She was somewhat taken back when I pardoned myself and asked who she thought she was to think to tell our daughter how to do her hair.

This is just an example of what is going on there. Our son who was an outstanding student five years ago, is now an impoverished basket case. The police can do nothing even though our son was drugged and sexually molested (praise God our son was able to get away before he was actually raped) by a older man from the church, who is still there. Our son refuses to go to the police as he says the whole matter should be handled through prayer and forgiveness. This has been done but still our son recounted the experience in detail during his recent hospitalization.

Our children refuse to listen to us, so we are holding the whole situation up in prayer. Can you offer any pointers? Is there anything we can do to prevent this church from damaging other young people? We need help but we don't know where to turn.

Thank you for sharing your story with us. We pray others will learn from your pain, and that God will show your children the truth.

“How Can Masons Be Prominent Leaders in the Church?”

My husband read a book that referred to how many Masons are actually serving with the Southern Baptist Convention and other churches. I know as a child I knew of pastors who were Masons and that didn't seem to be a bad thing, but now with all that I've learned, why are these people still prominent leaders in the body of Christ?

Thank you for your inquiry. I appreciate your reading and responding to my article on [Freemasonry](#). Regarding your question concerning the continued “ministry” of men who embrace Freemasonry within the larger church (Baptist) I would suggest the the primary reason is the compartmentalism of one's faith and their involvement in a fraternal organization.

In my view, the problem lies in their inability to allow their faith to influence their lives in its totality. In other words, they separate their Sunday experience (faith life) from the balance of their week (secular life). They are unable or unwilling to assimilate their faith life/walk with their life in general. They do so at their peril—spiritually and relationally with their God.

I also think they do not fully understand scriptural teaching regarding the believers' need to fear God. That is, to have a reverential fear of the Creator. I would suggest a word study of the term “fear God.” It is extremely enlightening to the believer and offers one a sobering perspective. Those who embrace such organizations as Freemasonry do not have such an inclination because they do not want to expose themselves to biblical Truth that would subsequently call them to restructure their thought life/beliefs.

Another key that we cannot over look is the fact that many

within the church are ignorant of the spiritual disconnect between Christianity and fraternal organizations such as Freemasonry. The result of this disconnect renders the church body impotent where biblical orthodoxy is concerned and its application in the church at large.

I trust you will find my thoughts beneficial in your attempt to understand the incongruence of those who embrace occult teachings and their continued leadership within the church.

May our Lord bless your study and enrich your faith!

Russ Wise

See Also *Probe Answers Our Email*:

["How Do I Talk to Family Members About Freemasonry and Edgar Cayce?"](#)

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"Am I Judging When I Recognize Sin in a Friend's Life?"

Dear Sue,

My question is about judging. There are several of us friends and we are all Christians but go to different churches. One of our friends was widowed several years ago. After several

failed relationships where she became sexually intimate with each of the men, she is now in another relationship with what seems like a nice man. She is also very active in her church and is involved in a discipleship ministry. After she leaves the meetings to prepare for these discipleship events, she leaves town to go stay the weekend with her new friend.

I told one of the other friends that I did not think it was right that she was doing that and that may be why she had problems with her relationships, and that I felt it was wrong that she would be speaking before another group of women on this retreat. My other friend told me I was judging and that only God should do that and no one is without sin and that one sin is no greater than any other sin. I do not interpret the bible that way. I feel that if she is putting herself before others as a leader of God she should be striving to live sin free and be repenting when she does sin. Am I judging when I recognize a sin in another person's life? I do not want to be a judgmental person and am very confused about this. Please help me to understand and how I should have responded to her.

You are right. There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems to stop with "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus' call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24 He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother's eye (Matt. 7:5)? That's about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another's sin, *not* to ignore other people's behavior.

But then there's the "big daddy" passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this

world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. (News to your other friend, I'm sure!) Judging doesn't mean condemning, though; in the case of your immoral friend, it would be a matter of comparing her behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of her choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

It might sound like, "This is a hard conversation but I need to talk to you because I care about you. You're making decisions that are not consistent with the Christ-follower and the woman of God I know you want to be. Sexual immorality is still sin, and sin has consequences, and I don't want you to be hurt. But even more than that, you are dishonoring the Lord by your disobedience to His word. I am concerned that you are continuing in a leadership position while you are engaged in unrepented, continual sin. James 3:1 says that teachers will be judged more strictly, and I am concerned for what that might look like for you down the road. I just want to plead with you to choose chastity and integrity, and make choices that honor both God and yourself."

If she gets defensive and starts pushing back, making comments like, "And you're so perfect yourself?" I would counsel you to not get defensive yourself. Just say something like, "You

know, I'm aware that I'm a sinner in need of God's mercy and grace every single day. I would hope that if my eyes were blinded by my own feelings and sin and I were headed toward a cliff, you would love me enough to warn me and challenge me to live consistently with who God says I am."

I'm so glad you wrote. I hope you find this helpful.

Sue

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