



Bible Literacy Report

What do American teens **need** to know and what **do** they know?

Commissioned by Bible Literacy Project, Inc. under a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

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What do American teens **need** to know and what **do** they know?

- A qualitative study of 41 leading high school English teachers by

Marie Wachlin, Ph.D., principal investigator

Byron R. Johnson, Ph.D., scholarly advisor

- An analysis of Gallup survey results by

Bible Literacy Project, Inc.

- A nationally representative survey of 1,002 teenagers by

The Gallup Organization

Commissioned by Bible Literacy Project, Inc. under a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

About the Report: This report summarizes results from two separate research projects funded by the John Templeton Foundation: 1) a qualitative research project on what English teachers believe their students need to know about the Bible conducted and authored by Marie Wachlin, Ph.D., and 2) an analysis of a nationally representative survey by The Gallup Organization on what American teens currently know about the Bible and other religious literature of the world, authored by the Bible Literacy Project, Inc. The full text of the survey results, authored by the Gallup Organization, is reprinted as an appendix. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

About Dr. Marie Wachlin: Marie Wachlin, Ph.D., a former public high school English teacher in Oregon, is currently a supervisor at Concordia University College of Education. Her academic essays include “The Bible—A Classic in a Class by Itself,” *English Journal* (February 1998) and “The Place of Bible Literature in Public High School English Classes,” *Research in the Teaching of English* (February 1997).

About the Bible Literacy Project: The Bible Literacy Project is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to research and public education on the academic study of the Bible in public and private schools. In 1999 it co-published a consensus statement with the First Amendment Center, “The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide.” For more information visit www.bibleliteracy.org.

About The Gallup Organization: The Gallup Organization has studied human nature and behavior for more than 70 years. Gallup employs many of the world’s leading scientists in management, economics, psychology, and sociology. Gallup performance management systems help organizations increase customer engagement and maximize employee productivity through measurement tools, coursework, and strategic advisory services. Gallup’s 2,000 professionals deliver services at client organizations, through the Web, at Gallup University’s campuses, and in 40 offices around the world.

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The Bible Literacy Project, 122 W. 14th Street PMB 332 , Front Royal, VA 22630

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What do American students know about the Bible, and what do they need to know in order to get a good education?

This research project consists of two parts: (I) a qualitative research study of what the best high school English teachers think their students need to know about the Bible and (II) the only recent nationally representative survey of American teens' religious knowledge to uncover what American students currently know about the Bible (and other religious texts).¹

The Qualitative Research Findings:

In a diverse sample of high school English teachers in 10 states, 40 out of 41 teachers said Bible knowledge confers a distinct educational advantage on students. Ninety percent of high school English teachers said it was important for *both* college-bound and "regular" students to be biblically literate. An Illinois teacher stated: "I think from the standpoint of academic success, it is imperative that college-bound students be literate. For the others, I think it's important for them to understand their own culture, just to be well-grounded citizens of the United States—to know where the institutions and ideas come from."

Conversely, many teachers reported that students in their English classes who were *not* familiar with the Bible were disadvantaged. One California teacher said: "Students who don't know the Bible are certainly at a disadvantage. It's harder for them. They're not as familiar with it, and it takes more time for them to understand what it is." Teachers reported students without Bible knowledge take more time to teach, appearing "confused, stumped, and clueless."

These English teachers reported that among their students Bible illiteracy is common. The majority of high school English teachers in this sample estimated that fewer than a fourth of their current students were Bible literate. Only 4 of the 30 public schools in the study (compared to all four private schools) offered a unit or course about the Bible. Economically advantaged school districts in this sample were far more likely to offer academic study of the Bible than less-advantaged school districts.

The Nationally Representative Gallup Survey: Bible Literacy Project Analysis

This Gallup Survey is based on a nationally representative sample of 1,002 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18, who were interviewed between May 20 and June 27, 2004. It represents the first extensive, nationally representative survey of the Bible and religious knowledge among American teens in recent years.

Forty out of forty-one high school teachers said Bible knowledge confers a distinct educational advantage on students.

¹ A third part—a qualitative research study into what university and college professors believe their students need to know about the Bible, also funded by the John Templeton Foundation—will be released in 2006.

**Substantial minorities
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The good news is that strong majorities of American teens recognize the basic meaning of widely used Judeo-Christian terms such as “Easter,” “Adam and Eve,” “Moses,” “The Golden Rule,” and “The Good Samaritan.”

However, substantial minorities lack even the most basic working knowledge of the Bible. Almost one out of ten teens believes that Moses is one of the twelve Apostles. About the same proportion, when asked what Easter commemorates, or to identify Adam and Eve, respond “don’t know.”

However, only a minority of American teens appear to be “Bible literate,” reaching the level of knowledge similar to that defined by high school English teachers as necessary to a good education. For example: Fewer than half of teens (49 percent) knew what happened at the wedding at Cana (Jesus turned water into wine). Nearly one out of four refused even to guess. Given a choice of four quotations from the Bible, almost two-thirds of teens could not correctly identify a quotation from the Sermon on the Mount. Similarly, fewer than a third of teens could correctly identify which statement about David was not true (David tried to kill King Saul). One-quarter of teens believed that the statement “David was king of the Jews” was false.

Only 8 percent of teens in public schools in this sample reported that their school offered an elective course on the Bible, and just one out of four public school students (26 percent) said that a unit or section on the Bible was offered in an English or social studies class.

The Bible Literacy Project analysis of the Gallup data concludes “[N]o controversy among adults, however heated, should be considered an excuse for leaving the next generation ignorant about a body of knowledge crucial to understanding American art, literature, history, language, and culture.”

INTRODUCTION: Why this report?

What do American students know about the Bible—and what should they know, in order to be well educated? What do American public schools teach about the Bible, and what should they teach?

This report is the culmination of an important new research project that seeks to understand how well our current public school curriculum addresses the educational needs of an increasingly diverse student body. The Bible has long been acknowledged to be one of the most influential texts in the English language. According to a 1986 study by Anne Juhasz and Leslie Wilson, for example, when college English professors were asked what book they wished incoming freshmen to have read before entering the university, the most frequently named was the Bible.² Few other books have been so influential in American culture, history, language, arts, and letters, and at the same time so likely to generate controversy among educational elites, especially when it comes to public schools.

² Anne Juhasz and Leslie Wilson, “Should students be well read or should they read well?” *NASSP Bulletin* 70: 488 (March 1986): 78–83.

In one sense, this is understandable. After all, one reason for the Bible's enduring influence on American history and culture is that it is not merely a work of philosophy or literature; for millions of American Christians and Jews, the Bible is (in whole or in part) sacred text. In the past, legitimate concerns about the separation of church and state, religious tolerance, and community consensus have led many educators and communities to edit this book out of public school curricula. We have been able to find no recent estimates on what proportion of American public schools teach Bible courses, based on nationally representative surveys. However, prior qualitative research with educators suggests that relatively few American students have access to courses in Bible literacy. In one 1997 study, for example, though more than 80 percent of a convenience sample of high school English teachers reported that it was important to teach some Bible literature, only 9 percent said they taught such a Bible unit or course.³

In recent years, a growing number of educators, scholars, and reformers have expressed dissatisfaction with this solution to the problems raised by teaching about the Bible in a public school setting. In 1999, a group of 20 educational and religious organizations (including the American Federation of teachers, the National School Boards Association, and the National Education Association) issued a consensus statement on the academic study of the Bible in public schools:

■ Educators widely agree that study about religion, where appropriate, is an important part of a complete education. Part of that study includes learning about the Bible in courses such as literature and history. Knowledge of biblical stories and concepts contributes to our understanding of literature, history, law, art, and contemporary society. . . . The Supreme Court has held that public schools may teach students about the Bible as long as such teaching is "presented objectively as part of a secular program of education."⁴

The purpose of this research project is to provide new scientific information on an important educational and civic question: What do students know and what do they need to know about the Bible in order to receive a high-quality education?

This research consists of two parts: (I) a qualitative research study of what the best high school English teachers think their students need to know about the Bible, authored by Marie Wachlin; and (II) a new, nationally representative Gallup survey of American teens' religious knowledge, to uncover what American students currently know about the Bible (and other religious texts).⁵

While religious attitudes, affiliation, and practices have been well studied, religious knowledge remains a relatively understudied field. We anticipate that this report will mark the beginning, not the end, of important new research into these questions. Together, these two pieces of research will also help educators and scholars to establish baseline standards of Bible literacy.

³M. G. Wachlin, "The Place of Bible Literature in Public High School English Classes," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 31 (February 1997): 18–19.

⁴"The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide," (Nashville, TN: The First Amendment Center and New York, NY: Bible Literacy Project, 1999): 5–6.

⁵A third part—a qualitative research study into what university and college professors believe their students need to know about the Bible, also funded by the John Templeton Foundation—will be released in 2006.

I. WHAT HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS THINK STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BIBLE:

Results from a qualitative study of the best American English teachers

About the study: Our primary goal in this qualitative research project was to establish *whether* the “best” English teachers—as defined by referrals from colleagues, lists of high school teachers of the year, and similar sources—think that their students need to know about the Bible in order to master the literature they are already being taught. A second goal was to help establish a definitive list or canon of *what* teachers believe their students ought to be taught about the Bible, in the course of a good education. A third goal was to uncover what barriers (if any) kept teachers who believe that knowledge of the Bible is important from teaching about it in their own schools.

Our target sample was primarily English teachers who in the judgment of their colleagues were among the best teachers in their subject. To secure the names and contact numbers of some of the best American high school English teachers, websites of state departments of education, school districts, and high schools were consulted, as well as rosters of “State Teachers of the Year.” In addition, fellow teachers, administrators, former students, and parents of students were asked to recommend the “best” English teachers in their school districts. The 41 high school English teachers who participated in the study comprised a diverse sample in terms of geographic location, school, gender, age, ethnicity, and religious affiliation.

In all, our sample consisted of 41 high school English teachers (22 women and 19 men) from 34 schools in 10 states (including California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin). Teachers were recommended by their colleagues (13 teachers), by current or former students (8 teachers), by parents of students (4 teachers), by their administrators (3 teachers), by admiring friends (3 teachers), and by colleges of education that had worked with the teachers (2 teachers). Thirty-six of the teachers had earned a master’s degree; one had earned a doctorate.

Ninety percent of the teachers who participated in the study identified themselves as non-Hispanic whites (Caucasian). Five percent were African-American, 2.5 percent Asian, and 2.5 percent Hispanic. When it came to religious affiliation, 19 said they were Protestant, and 11 indicated that they had no religious affiliation. The remainder included 4 Catholic, 1 Christian Scientist, 2 Jewish, 1 Mormon, 1 Transcendentalist, and 1 Unitarian teacher. One teacher chose not to disclose a religious affiliation.

High schools were located in a variety of settings, from a small rural community (population: 300) to large cities of 3 million. The size of each school ranged from 50 students to 4,200 students. Most of the schools (30 of 34) were public. Of the 30 public schools in the study, 27 were comprehensive neighborhood schools; three were magnet schools with selective enrollment. Of the magnet schools, two were college preparatory and one was vocational-professional. Of the four private schools, two were Christian (one Catholic and one Protestant) and two were non-sectarian. All of the schools were coeducational except for the Catholic school, which was all male.

We gathered information from the teachers in three ways:

- 1) A *demographic questionnaire* requesting information about the teacher's academic background, years of teaching, courses taught, religious affiliation, ethnicity, and age group. In addition, the questionnaire asked about the inclusion of Bible literature at the teacher's school.
- 2) A *personal, semi-structured interview* with high school English teachers. Interviews were typically conducted at the schools and lasted from 15 minutes to two hours.
- 3) A *Bible literacy checklist* consisting of 253 items compiled from three different scholarly sources,⁶ as well as from pilot interviews with teachers. Teachers were asked to check any—whether none, some, or all—of the items they believe that high school students need to know. Forty out of 41 teachers completed the Bible literacy checklist.

RESULTS

Bible literacy: "Is it an advantage for students in your class to know about the Bible?"

We asked all 41 teachers: "Considering the literature you are teaching, how does it advantage or disadvantage a student to know about the Bible?" Forty out of 41 high school English teachers said Bible knowledge confers a distinct educational advantage on students.

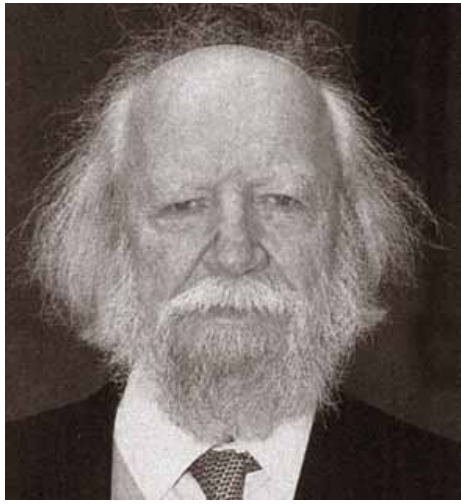
"The biggest gap in education," one Chicago public high school English teacher told us, "is lack of Bible knowledge." He said American students have an "inability to understand literature, and even the underlying meanings of literature, to figure out the philosophical bent or message of an author by the way they use biblical or non-biblical allusions."

The following are representative responses from the teachers:

- "It makes a big difference in understanding many, many allusions in poems. And it's not just recognizing the allusions, it's also recognizing the philosophy behind the allusions—helps a great deal—especially with poetry, but also with some of the Shakespeare plays." (Protestant)
- "Actually I think it's very, very important because basically, in my opinion, the Bible is almost embedded in every single one of those works [that I teach]. And it's not overt. But it really helps for students to be able to recognize something." (No religious affiliation)
- "It would certainly advantage. . . . A lot of the texts make references to—whether expressions, or sayings, or teachings, or characters—the Bible as well." (Religious affiliation undisclosed)
- "Well, it would be a tremendous advantage to know about the Bible, because literature is so full of allusions. So when they don't have biblical knowledge, they're really missing part of what the author has to say." (Protestant)

**Bible knowledge
confers a distinct
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⁶ (a) M. Bevilacqua, E. Israel, and R. Timoney, *AP Literature and Composition: Preparing for the Advanced Placement Examination*. (New York: Amsco School Publications, 2002): pages 48–63S. (b) E. D. Hirsch, Jr., J. F. Kett, and J. Trefil, *A New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 3d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002). And (c) M. Macrone, *Brush up your Bible*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).



WILLIAM GOLDING
1911–1993

All but one of the teachers agreed that Western literature was steeped in biblical references.

- “So many references to the Bible—it’s impossible to understand Western literature without it.” (Protestant)
- [In] “Our AP class—it is absolutely incumbent upon those kids to have a very solid understanding, because that’s what the AP curriculum and the AP test expect.” (Teacher of the Year)

Ninety percent of high school English teachers said it was important for *both* college-bound and “regular” students to be biblically literate: “I think from the standpoint of academic success, it is imperative that college-bound students be literate. For the others, I think it’s important for them to understand their own culture, just to be well-grounded citizens of the United States—to know where the institutions and ideas come from.” (Protestant)

Conversely, many teachers reported that students in their English classes who were *not* familiar with the Bible were disadvantaged. The teachers said:

- “Students who don’t know the Bible are certainly at a disadvantage. It’s harder for them. They’re not as familiar with it, and it takes more time for them to understand what it is, what’s going on, what it’s about.” (California)
- “So when they don’t have biblical knowledge, they’re really missing part of what the author has to say. And typically, I don’t have time to go back and explain all the biblical allusions.” (Illinois)

All but one of the teachers in the study agreed that Western literature was steeped in biblical references. In fact, the response to this interview question was typically an unhesitating, unqualified yes. English teachers responded with words and a tone of voice that reflected strong affirmation: “Absolutely” (seven teachers), “Definitely” (three teachers), “Very much” (two teachers), “Certainly” (one teacher), “No doubt about it” (one teacher), and “Without a doubt” (one teacher).

Some interviewees thought this question was so unbelievably simple, and the answer so obvious, that perhaps it was a trick question. A couple of teachers laughed uproariously—or in the case of one interviewee, answered with mock contemplation: “Well, gee, let’s see. *East of Eden* by Steinbeck. Hmmm. Just talked about *Lord of the Flies* [by William Golding]. Hmmm.”

The teachers said:

- “It is difficult to pick up a work of literature that doesn’t have some reference to the Bible.” (Wisconsin)
- “It is! It is! I think all of the more complex works of literature reference it.” (Teacher of the Year)
- “Great authors steal—they don’t borrow—and make allusions to things, and I think that clearly both British and American cultures have come from a biblically based, Judeo-Christian tradition. And, of course, that’s going to carry forth, you know, in the literature that it’s created. So!” (Oregon)
- “Well, obviously. So many people learned to read with the King James Bible, it’s pretty hard for them not to be steeped in allusions. And that’s one of the things

that I say in my class—that since the Bible is one of the major teaching tools for 300 years, that colors the thinking as well. It’s not just the allusions—the whole thinking, the whole mindset.” (Illinois)

- “I wouldn’t say steeped with it. It’s saturated with it.” (Illinois)
- “There are certain historical events, there are certain texts, there are certain realities that have affected everything that followed it. And so the Bible is one of those things, and since it played such a central role, even authors who don’t necessarily or obviously discuss the Bible, if they are Western—and depending on their historical period—they themselves grew up in an era when the Bible was important and therefore influenced the way they thought, regardless of how much it ends up being in their literature.” (California)

The one teacher who disagreed with the statement that American and British writings are steeped in references to the Bible answered: “I would strongly disagree with that. I don’t think that [they are steeped]. I think that they are trickled with references from the Bible.”

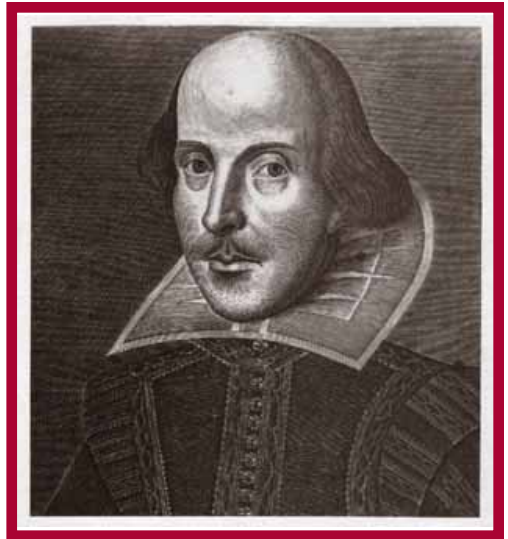
Another teacher had an answer for anyone who might disagree with the “steeped” statement: “Yes, of course [the statement is true]. That’s obvious. People who wouldn’t say that are the people who don’t recognize that they’re there.” (Maryland)

Many teachers volunteered examples of specific works of literature they teach, which high school students have difficulty fully mastering when they lack basic Bible literacy. Shakespeare figured prominently.

- “Hamlet compares himself with Abraham and Isaac; it also includes orders of angels—it goes on and on.” (No religious affiliation)
- “For example, today I used the reference, which they’re not going to have on their unit test tomorrow, when Romeo buys the potion he spends 40 pieces of gold for the poison. And modern audiences don’t get that because they’re not as keyed into the biblical reference. Whereas Shakespeare’s audience would have said immediately, ‘Forty, not 30–40! Not silver—gold!’ Romeo is committing heresy now. He’s out-Judas-ing Judas, who sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver and then went and hanged himself. Romeo’s spending 40 pieces of gold, and then he’s drinking the poison and killing himself.” (Catholic)

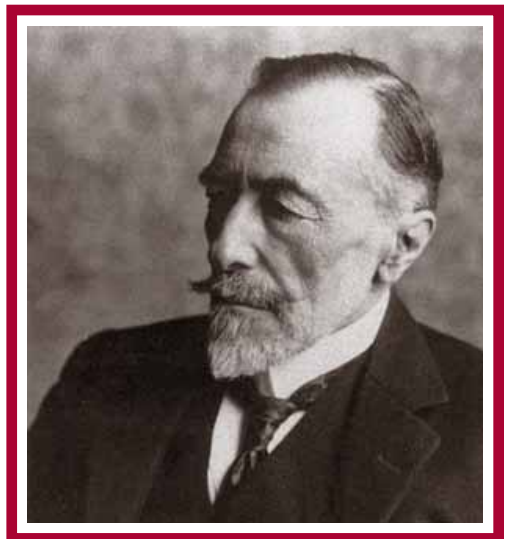
Teachers also made reference to many other classics of American and English literature they teach that they felt would be a challenge for Bible-illiterate students to master.

- “There’s no doubt that it’s an advantage because you understand. Look at all this stuff [on the checklist. . . . If you don’t know what he’s talking about, it’s like reading Greek.” (No religious affiliation)
- “*Heart of Darkness* [by Joseph Conrad] has oblique references to biblical figures and biblical studies and to mythology. Lazarus in the sepulcher, the city as being entombed. Kids that know the Bible pick that up right away.” (No religious affiliation)



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
1564–1616

Many teachers reported that students in their English classes who were not familiar with the Bible were disadvantaged.



JOSEPH CONRAD
1857–1924



NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE
1804–1864

■ “*The Grapes of Wrath*, the whole idea of the title of it.⁷ Because one of the big questions I always ask kids: ‘Why do you suppose that author picked that name? What is that all about?’ It’s fun to listen to them, and so every now and then there’s a good reason. And sometimes kids can get it, if they’ve had that background of Bible stories.” (No religious affiliation)

■ “When I taught sophomore English, obviously, *Animal Farm*—Moses the raven, who was trying to lead the animals out of their slavery. There are a lot of them [students] that will jump up and say, after I say, ‘In the Bible you remember where?’ they’ll remember.” (Protestant)

■ “Currently, a quick example would be reading *Animal Farm*. And there’s the Seven Commandments of the Animal Farm. Well, if kids have the cross-reference of the Ten Commandments and sort of hold that metaphorically, they get a much richer reading of the depth of that part and the actual changing of these commandments, right, and sort of altering history. We would never dream

of altering the Ten Commandments, right? So if they have those two things, they can read the irony much more clearly.” (Catholic)

■ “*A Separate Peace*. And generally as we are reading the story, the kids are clueless to the biblical allusion of Cain and Abel, or the forbidden tree being the tree of knowledge and evil.” (Catholic)

■ “In [Charles Dickens’s] *Great Expectations*, there’s a character named Abel Magwitch. But they don’t understand the reference to Abel as a biblical allusion to Cain and Abel, so I have to go through and explain the Cain and Abel story and how Abel was a victim in that story. And it really makes a difference in understanding his character.” (Protestant)

Regarding contemporary literature, a teacher stated: “What’s interesting to me, though, is that even contemporary American literature . . . people will think, ‘Oh sure, Hawthorne and, you know, the Puritans and all of that’—but modern writers are using those allusions as well.” (Wisconsin) Other examples of modern classics mentioned by teachers as being steeped with allusions to the Bible include:

■ “I was reading *The Sound and the Fury* today. And it was just amazing how often Faulkner even has little footnotes about references to the Bible. And I think any student that doesn’t explore those references is losing a significant part of the meaning.” (Protestant)

■ “We just finished *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It talks about ‘Let the dead bury their dead.’” (Protestant)

■ “Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, in our philosophy and literature class—of course, the biblical reference for that is powerful and essential.” (Catholic)

■ “Most recently in—let me think about this—the second chapter of *Brave New World*. In the novel . . . the students in the novel are being taken on a tour of the conditioning areas, both prenatal and postnatal. And at one point when the World Controller is speaking, some little children come up and they interrupt him, and so one of the directors starts to send the kids away. The World Controller says, ‘Suffer the little children.’ And that’s it! That’s all he says. But, of course, it’s a huge, huge allusion. I mean, this whole idea that he’s putting himself in a God-like position. He’s making himself Jesus in that case.” (Unitarian)

⁷ “[T]heir grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter.” Deuteronomy 32:32.

- “What’s the one I’m doing? [T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred] Prufrock?”⁸ John the Baptist—because Prufrock mentions laying a head upon a platter.”⁹ (Protestant)

Teachers reported that both the presence and the absence of biblical knowledge among students affected how high school English teachers taught literature. In general, if students had basic Bible knowledge, the classroom was affected in a positive way. High school English teachers reported that students who had Bible knowledge were easier to teach and more willing to learn. These students were able to “pick up” things more easily in the literature they taught than students who were not familiar with the Bible and could appreciate biblical references more. A California teacher explained:

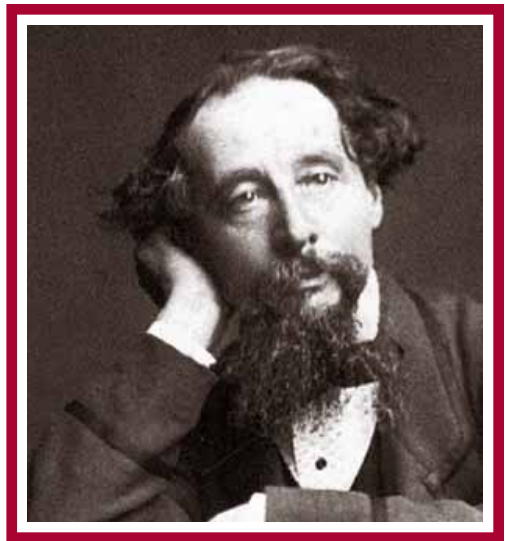
- “When we’re talking about—I’m just thinking of *Hamlet* because we did that recently—and I want to discuss where some of Shakespeare’s moral underpinnings came from, why *Hamlet* is being punished for certain things, why he’s not being punished for others. It comes from a Christian, biblical background of Shakespeare. Again, those students who are here are just going to be able to pick up on that easier than students who are not familiar with that. But like anything, the job of the teacher is to challenge those who already have a familiarity with whatever concept you are teaching, introduce and bring up to a certain level those who don’t. And so that’s what you do with biblical knowledge, as you would do with grammar or mathematical concepts or anything else.”

The teachers reported that the absence of Bible literacy created obstacles to learning in their classrooms. Some teachers described the effects as difficulties, some as challenges, and some as opportunities. Still, regardless of how the teachers described their students’ lack of biblical knowledge situation (difficulty, challenge, or opportunity), teachers reported similar experiences in dealing with Bible illiteracy in their classrooms:

Teachers can no longer assume that students know certain basic Bible stories and/or that they will recognize biblical allusions that occur in literature. Example: “I’ll make comparisons, you know, I’ll say: ‘You know, like Noah and the ark or like Moses or . . . you know . . .’ and I’ll have kids kind of look at me: ‘Who’s Noah?’ or ‘Who’s Moses?’ and then you have to step back.” (Protestant)

Students without Bible knowledge take more time to teach. Example: “Yeah, I mean, students come to this classroom with different advantages and disadvantages. And we have students who are not from America and Europe, and they are unfamiliar with the Bible and it is not their religious text. So they’re certainly at a disadvantage. It’s harder for them. They’re not as familiar with it and it takes more time for them to understand what it is, what’s going on, what it’s about.” (No religious affiliation)

Teachers need to explain more. Example: “In *Cry, the Beloved Country* [by Alan Paton], one of the characters is Absalom, the son. I had to explain the significance of Absalom in the Bible. Bring that in and we talked about it, and then it really helped them understand his role in the book much more. Sometimes the names, you know, are so specific and meaningful.” (Protestant)

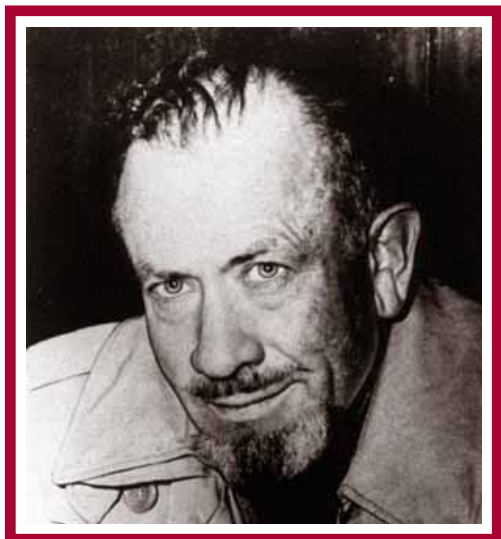


CHARLES DICKENS
1812–1870

Teachers reported that the absence of Bible literacy created obstacles to learning in their classrooms. Students without Bible knowledge take more time to teach.

⁸ “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T. S. Eliot (1888–1965).

⁹ “Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter . . .” (line 82).



JOHN STEINBECK
1902-1968

The majority of high school English teachers estimated that less than a fourth of their current students were biblically literate.

Students who are biblically illiterate often appear “confused, stumped, clueless.” Example:

- “Well, today with freshmen we were reading *The Pearl*. Do you remember that, by John Steinbeck? The characters are Catholic. You know, they’re ancient people that have an ancient tribal religion which was magic, but the Spanish imposed the Catholic religion on them. So the lady is saying the ‘Hail Mary,’¹⁰ and she’s also making magic chants over the baby, to get it better. And one of the kids raised his hand and asked, ‘Why would they want to put hail on Mary? Who’s Mary, anyway? Is that her name? I thought her name was Juana. Now she’s Mary.’ They were all confused because they didn’t know who Hail Mary was. Then someone else thought Hail was Mary’s first name. Hail! Like Gail. It was so bizarre! I couldn’t believe it. Well, it was not sensible. They truly didn’t have any religious . . . I mean, they obviously hadn’t heard that term ‘Hail Mary’ before. Didn’t know what it was.”

In some cases, students’ lack of basic Bible knowledge actually limited the literature that teachers included in their course curriculum. Example:

- “But again, I had to quit teaching the book [*True Grit* by Charles Portis] because the kids were so stumped.”

Despite these perceived negative effects from students’ lack of Bible literacy, many of the teachers chose to look upon the lack of Bible literacy among their students as a challenge, rather than an obstacle. An Oregon teacher said: “I don’t necessarily look at a student not having knowledge of a certain idea as a detriment. It’s an avenue for discussion and further exploration, so I don’t perhaps look at it as a detriment as much as it creates opportunities for further discussion, and as a common reference point.”

How much do students know about the Bible? English teachers’ estimates

The majority of high school English teachers estimated that less than a fourth of their current students were biblically literate.

Predictably, a teacher at a Catholic college-preparatory school said confidently that 100 percent of his students were biblically literate. Another teacher—at a Texas public school—also gave her students a high Bible literacy score. She estimated that 90 percent of her students were biblically literate. Eleven teachers felt that more than half of their students were biblically literate.

However, an English teacher at a private, non-sectarian, alternative high school in the Bible Belt estimated that 0 percent to 10 percent of students there were biblically literate. An English teacher at a larger, comprehensive public high school in the same region also estimated that 0 percent of her students were “really knowledgeable about the Bible. . . . Some think they know, but if you ask them any questions, you find out that they know less than nothing.”

¹⁰Luke 1:28.

A representative comment: "I don't know. I have a lot of kids with a good, solid background. I've never taken a poll or seen percentages, but there are always enough kids that when I bring up points that someone has something to offer I've never said, 'Does anyone know the story of King Solomon?' and had just dead silence. Not even half. Maybe a quarter. If that." (Public, comprehensive high school)

The majority of high school English teachers estimated that less than a fourth of their current students were biblically literate.

Table One

Teachers' Estimate of Their Students' Biblical Literacy

<u>BIBLICALLY LITERATE STUDENTS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF TEACHERS</u>	<u>PERCENT OF TEACHERS</u>
100-75 %	.5	.12 %
74-50 %	.6	.15 %
49-25 %	.8	.20 %
24-0 %	.22	.54 %
Mode		10 percent
Median		20 percent
Mean		30 percent

High school English teachers did not express a consensus about recent trends in Bible literacy. Sixteen of the 41 teachers felt that high school students' Bible knowledge had decreased, 12 reported that there was no change, and 3 reported that Bible knowledge of their students appeared to have increased in recent years. Ten gave mixed responses:

- "Far less. Much reduced. [I've been] in the same school. Twenty-five years ago, I could count on more students knowing the Cain and Abel story. Knowing the Abraham and Isaac story. And knowing other allusions. Now, for example, in *All the King's Men*, there's a reference to Saul on the road to Damascus. Now I'm lucky if one student knows it." (Taught 26 years)

A veteran teacher of 33 years said:

- "That depends on the kids in my class. I sometimes get Pentecostal kids or religious Muslim kids who seem to know a lot, have a background. And then it's sort of like another year, I don't have that many. Over the years, I haven't seen any great shift."

Table Two

Trends in Bible Knowledge of Students

<u>TEACHERS SAID</u>	<u># OF TEACHERS</u>	<u>% OF TEACHERS</u>
Less Bible Knowledge	16 teachers	39 %
No Change in Bible Knowledge	12 teachers	29 %
More Bible Knowledge	3 teachers	7 %
Other	10 teachers	24 %

My experience changed:

- ... I'm at a different kind of school.
- ... I'm in a different community.

Something else:

- ... Students are more open about their faith.
- ... More students are in Bible clubs.
- ... Religion gained importance after 9/11.
- ... This is a Christian school with unchanged religious curriculum.
- ... Religion is strong among our growing immigrant population.

One pattern that emerged was the presence of Bible literature classes in what might be termed economically and academically successful communities.

Barriers to Bible literacy

We asked teachers: “Does your school teach about the Bible (for example, as part of an English or humanities course)?” The majority (58 percent) said that either no Bible literature or “a little” Bible literature was taught at their high schools.

Teachers at all four private schools reported that Bible literature was taught at their respective schools. Teachers at two public schools reported that their schools offered an elective course on the Bible as literature.

One pattern that emerged was the presence of Bible literature classes in what might be termed economically and academically successful communities. Those high schools in which teachers reported as including Bible literature in their curricula tended to be located in high-end communities, with a high percentage of graduates enrolling in college. For example, the high school in the highest-income zip code reportedly had 97 percent of its graduates enroll in college—and Bible literature was part of “many courses” at that high school.

Conversely, the poorer communities offered no Bible literature courses. A common gauge of the socio-economic level of a school is the percentage of students who receive a free or reduced-price lunch. In this sample, schools at which 9 percent or more of the student body received free or reduced-price lunches had no Bible literature courses.

Why isn’t the Bible taught more? A majority of the interviewed English teachers (56 percent) said that there were no political or legal obstacles to teaching about the Bible in their school or district. The teachers in the study recognized that they had personal religious beliefs and non-beliefs and that their students had different religious beliefs. Teachers differentiated between the academic study of Bible literature and a personal, spiritual study of the Scriptures. This is how three teachers expressed it:

- “I make sure that we relate it strictly to the literature—and you and I know that you can’t fully separate it. I do not espouse any particular faith. I wouldn’t do that. But I can espouse understanding.”
- “I am not there to advocate. I’m there to educate.”
- “Literacy is separate from belief.”

However, among schools that do not teach about the Bible, eight teachers reported that there were political or legal obstacles to teaching about the Bible at their school. It was not uncommon for educators to hold erroneous beliefs about the legality of using the Bible and Bible literature in public school classrooms. The following are some of the misconceptions reported.

Two teachers initially were reluctant to participate in this study on “The Bible and Education,” implying that it would be illegal to mix the “Bible and public education.” When first contacted for an interview, they said—emphasizing the word *public*:

- “I’m a *public* ed teacher.” (Washington)
- “You know this is a *public* school.” (Georgia)

Teachers also had students who questioned the legality of using this book in a public school. Said one teacher:

- “As I approach it, inevitably there’ll be a question from a kid, ‘Can you teach this in public school?’” (Oregon)
- “The kids seem to think there is a very strict division and that the Bible is not allowed in school.” (Illinois)

Some educators expressed fear and discomfort over the issue of teaching the Bible in school. Their desire to benefit their students, by teaching this important work, was not as strong as their fear of getting in trouble for doing so. This is how teachers described their fears:

- “There’s the issue of not wanting to get in trouble. And that’s just big. It’s gigantic.” (Catholic)
- “I tend to stay away from it [the Bible] to cut down the confusion. Sometimes I feel real guilty.” (Protestant)
- “This year, with my sophomores, I did use some Bible passages. And that’s been very interesting, but they approached it from a very objective point of view. So it wasn’t a problem. But we’re always nervous.” (Protestant)

Interestingly, when teaching Bible literature in the classroom, having a student who was a practicing Christian was viewed by some teachers as an obstacle, or a challenge. The most common problem with such students was that they became upset if the teacher referred to stories in the Bible as “myths.” Said an Oregon teacher:

- “I did find that a couple students got a little bit upset because I called it a myth. . . . They kind of got a little touchy when I called it a myth. I think there’s a stigma attached to the word *myth*, that it’s not true, so they automatically get a little tense about it.”

A few teachers described other obstacles they encountered in teaching the Bible, including political-correctness issues, lack of time, lack of support materials, misunderstanding of terms, being sensitive to and respecting differing opinions, misunderstanding of church and state separation, and parents who objected. Three teachers said that though they had encountered no obstacles in teaching the Bible as literature, they could imagine a scenario where problems would develop over teaching the Bible in school.



TONI MORRISON
1931–

A few teachers expressed indignation over the notion that it was OK to teach about other religious documents, but not OK to teach about the Bible.

TABLE THREE

Obstacles Associated with the Teaching of Bible Literature

<u>OBSTACLE REPORTED</u>	<u>BY # OF TEACHERS</u>	<u>BY % OF TEACHERS</u>
No political or legal obstacles	23	56
Christian obstacles	8	20
. . . concern with the literary term <u>myth</u> .		
. . . concern with the approach <u>as literature</u> [rather than <u>as doctrine</u> or <u>as belief</u>].		
Political correctness as an obstacle	3	7
Other obstacles	8	20
. . . not enough time.		
. . . lack resource or reference book.		
. . . when a son didn't want to study Bible literature, the parent then objected to all students studying Bible literature.		
No obstacles, but "there could be—"	5	12
. . . if teacher might be seen as favoring one religion over another.		
. . . if one person complains.		
. . . if the Bible is taught [rather than the Bible as literature].		
. . . if the teacher taught morals and ethics.		
Possibly an obstacle	3	7
. . . but teacher unaware of obstacles.		
. . .but teacher stays "under the radar."		

The total is greater than 100 percent because some teachers shared more than one obstacle or potential obstacle.

A few teachers expressed frustration and indignation over the notion that it was OK to teach about other religious documents, but not OK to teach about the Bible. They said:

- "You can teach excerpts from the Koran."¹¹ You can teach excerpts from Buddhism, from New Age stuff. You can do all those things. Teachers will teach things like *The Exorcist*¹² in class, and then you can't teach the Bible? That's ridiculous! You cut out this whole segment of culture and history and thought and literature, because of a silly notion." (Protestant)
- "Our fervor for separation of church and state has sort of alienated Christianity. The students themselves feel like their religion is taboo. That it's something to be quiet about and not talk about. And that's not really fair." (No religious affiliation)

¹¹ The holy scripture revealed by Allah to Muhammad. The word *Koran* means readings or recitations.

¹² Novel by William Peter Blatty (1928-), author and screen-writer who gained international fame with the theological horror tale *The Exorcist* (1971), in which a small girl is unaccountably possessed by the devil and turned into a repellent monster.

DEFINING BIBLE LITERACY: “What is Bible literacy?”

Forty of the 41 interviewees defined a high school student’s biblical literacy in terms of practical Bible knowledge, as referenced in both speech and writing. Indeed, a remarkable similarity emerged in the teachers’ definitions of Bible literacy. Teachers from differing backgrounds, generations, geographic regions, ethnicities, and teaching experiences used the same terms and concepts.

The teachers defined biblical literacy as basically consisting of five components: (a) knowing the book the Bible, (b) being familiar with common Bible stories, (c) being familiar with popular Bible characters, (d) being able to recognize common biblical phrases, and (e) being able to connect that knowledge to references in literature. “I think one should know that there are two different testaments. There’s one that’s part of the Christian tradition. I think they should know that the Old Testament is not the Jewish name for it and that what we read in the Old Testament, in the King James, is not exactly what is in the Jewish Bible.”

Seventeen of the interviewed teachers specifically mentioned *stories* in their definition of Bible literacy—“major stories,” “main stories,” “key stories,” “stories alluded to in other literature,” “basic stories,” “important stories.” One teacher included in his definition:

- “Certainly, the major stories. Knowing the Moses story, Abraham . . . yes, the great stories.”

Eleven teachers specifically mentioned Bible figures:

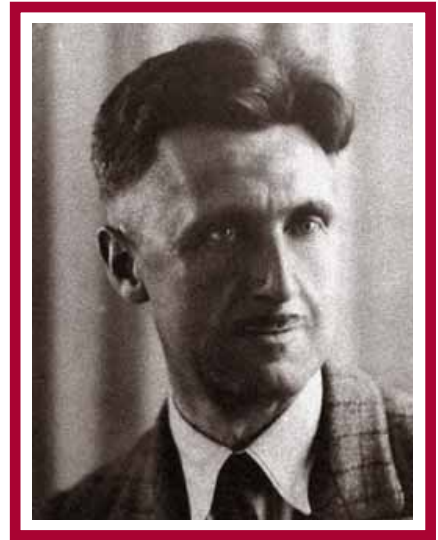
- “People. And so I’d say, in a general sense: Who are they? What did they do? Where did they go? And, what were their conflicts? And knowing some of the major names of characters.”

In defining Bible literacy, seven teachers referred to the checklist that they had been given with this study:

- “Certain phrases, that they understand what those things mean, like *annunciation*—they know what that event was.”

According to these high school English teachers, Bible literacy requires recognizing biblical references in context and making connections:

- “And I really think a lot of students, while they might have a general understanding of the biblical story, I’m not sure they know the meaning or the moral behind it. They know, you know—I forgot who turned about and whose wife turned to salt¹³—they know the story, but what does that mean?” (No religious affiliation)



GEORGE ORWELL
1904–1950

Bible literacy requires recognizing biblical references in context and making connections.

¹³ Story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 18:1–19:29. “But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” Genesis 19:26, NIV.

Twenty-five of the biblical items students need to know are found in the book of Genesis; twenty-five are in Matthew.

A Bible Literacy Checklist

The high school English teachers were also given a list of Bible items that some scholars have suggested may be important. Teachers were asked to check any, none, some, or all of the items that they believe high school students need to know. Forty of the 41 interviewed teachers completed the checklist.

One item on the Bible literacy checklist—the Ten Commandments—was checked by 38 of the 40 teachers (95 percent). Seventy-two biblical items were considered essential for students to know by 50 percent or more of the teachers. The two books of the Bible that may provide the best time investment are Genesis (the first book of the Old Testament) and Matthew (the first book of the New Testament). Twenty-five of the biblical items that half of the teachers agreed students need to know are found in the book of Genesis; twenty-five are in Matthew.

TEN COMMANDMENTS	EYE FOR AN EYE	ARMAGEDDON
CAIN AND ABEL	HELL	SODOM AND GOMORRAH
CHRIST	LET THERE BE LIGHT	TWENTY-THIRD PSALM
GARDEN OF EDEN	PSALMS, BOOK OF	ABRAHAM AND ISAAC
GENESIS	AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?	GOSPELS
JESUS	APOCALYPSE	JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS
ADAM AND EVE	EXODUS	LORD'S PRAYER
BIBLE	FALL OF MAN	MAGI
MOSES	NOAH'S ARK	MARY [THE VIRGIN], THE MOTHER OF JESUS
DAVID AND GOLIATH	OLIVE BRANCH	PROMISED LAND
LAST SUPPER	PRODIGAL SON	SERPENT
NOAH AND THE FLOOD	SECOND COMING	APOSTLES, THE TWELVE
OLD TESTAMENT	HEAVEN [OR HEAVENS]	IN THE BEGINNING
GOLDEN RULE	ORIGINAL SIN	JACOB AND ESAU
NEW TESTAMENT	PARABLES	JONAH AND THE WHALE [BIG FISH]
CRUCIFIXION	PARTING OF THE RED SEA	NATIVITY
DO TO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU	PONTIUS PILATE	PASSOVER
GOOD SAMARITAN	TOWER OF BABEL	RENDER UNTO CAESAR THE THINGS WHICH ARE CAESAR'S
JOB	WALKING ON WATER	RESURRECTION
JUDAS ISCARIOT	CAST THE FIRST STONE	REVELATION, BOOK OF
LUCIFER	JEWS	ROOT OF ALL EVIL
SATAN	JUDGMENT DAY	SABBATH
TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL	LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF	SOLOMON
CREATION	MESSIAH	TIME TO BE BORN AND A TIME TO DIE

CONCLUSION

Forty of the 41 teachers interviewed agreed that Bible literacy is a significant educational advantage. The majority of high school English teachers estimated that fewer than a fourth of their current students were biblically literate.

Relatively few public schools offer students access to Bible literacy. The majority of teachers reported that their schools offered “little or no” academic study of the Bible. Only 4 of the 30 public schools in the study (compared to all four private schools) offered a unit or course about the Bible. There was a pronounced trend toward inequality in access to Bible literacy: The educationally and economically advantaged school districts in this sample were far more likely to offer academic study of the Bible than were less-advantaged school districts.

More research with nationally representative samples is needed to come to definitive conclusions about the prevalence of Bible literacy in American students and its relation to wider educational accomplishment.

¹⁴ See, for example: Thomas Ashby Wills et al., "Buffering effects of religiosity for Adolescent Substance Abuse," *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 17(1): 24–31 (2003); Gail Ironson et al., "The Ironson-Woods Spirituality/Religiosity Index is associated with long survival, health behaviors, less stress and low cortisol in people with AIDS," *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 21(1): 34–48 (2002); Byron R. Johnson, "A Tale of Two Religious Effects: Evidence for the Protective and Prosocial Impact of Organic Religion" (New York: Institute for American Values, 2002); J.M. Wallace, "Is Religion Good for Adolescents' Health?" (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, 2002); W. Bradford Wilcox, "Good Dads: Religion, Civic Engagement, and Paternal Involvement in Low-Income Communities" (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, 2002); Byron R. Johnson et al., "Religion and Delinquency: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 16: 32–52 (2000); J. S. Young et al., "The Moderating Relationship of Spirituality on Negative Life Events and Psychological Adjustment," *Counseling and Values* 45(1): 49–57 (2000); H. G. Koenig et al., "Does Religious Attendance Prolong Survival? A Six Year Follow-Up Study of 3,968 Older Adults," *Journal of Gerontology* 54A: M370–377 (1999); Arland Thornton and D. Camburn, "Religious Participation and Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Attitudes," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51(3): 641–653 (1989).

II. WHAT DO AMERICAN TEENS KNOW:

An Analysis of New Gallup Survey Results by the Bible Literacy Project

What do American students know about the Bible and other important religious texts?

While our study of high school English teachers suggests a wide consensus on the importance of Bible knowledge for understanding American literature and culture, we could find very little recent information on how many American schools try to educate the next generation about the Bible, or about religious literacy in general, based on nationally representative survey data.

While there is a relatively large body of research on the religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices of teenagers (and other Americans), the question of teens' religious *knowledge* has received surprisingly little attention from scholars, social scientists, or polling firms.

Reputable surveys (such as Gallup and the Pew Poll) periodically investigate trends in, for example, religious affiliation, belief, and practice. But after a diligent search, we could come up with no similar research organization that regularly tracks trends in the next generation's knowledge of the Bible and other important religious texts, or indeed, in religious literacy in general.

The scientific study of religion is now a burgeoning field. Scholars of religion have investigated correlations between spiritual beliefs and/or practices and a wide variety of outcomes—from political identification to juvenile delinquency, quality of parenting, physical and mental health, and marital success, to name just a few of the domains studied.¹⁴ But so far, there has been relatively little investigation into baseline standards of religious literacy for American high school students, or into the likelihood that students in public or private schools will have access to academic study about the Bible or religion.

This study thus fills an important void in our base of knowledge concerning both American education and American religion. It is, as far as we can ascertain, the first serious, scholarly effort to ascertain how American students fare when it comes to religious knowledge, to establish the baselines necessary for documenting trends in biblical and religious literacy, and to gauge the extent to which American schools educate—or avoid educating—the next generation in this important field of study.

Working with The Gallup Organization and scholar Byron R. Johnson, under a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, the Bible Literacy Project undertook the first nationally representative survey of knowledge about the Bible (and other world religions) among this generation of American teens.

About the Study

The Gallup survey, “Teenagers’ Knowledge of the Bible” (which is reproduced in full as an appendix to this report), is based on a nationally representative sample of 1,002 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18, who were interviewed between May 20 and June 27, 2004.

The largest proportion of respondents (46 percent) were in seventh to ninth grade, with 35 percent in tenth or eleventh grade, and 16 percent in grade 12 or higher. Seventy-one percent of teens identified themselves as white, 13 percent as Black, 7 percent as Hispanic, and 4 percent as Asian. (Two percent said “other,” and 3 percent declined to answer). Forty-six percent of teens identified themselves as Protestant, and 37 percent of all teens described themselves as born again or Evangelical. Twenty-eight percent of teens were Catholic, 3 percent were Jewish, 9 percent were some other religion, and 5 percent did not identify with any religion. Students were evenly distributed among the 28 percent who said that they were near the top of their class academically, the 34 percent who said that they were above average, and the 33 percent who described their academic standing as average. Only 2 percent of the teens surveyed felt that they were academically below average. Twenty-one percent of the teens surveyed were from the East, 22 percent from the Midwest, 33 percent from the South, and 24 percent from the West.

Eighty-five percent of teens attended public schools, while 11 percent attended private or parochial schools, and 2 percent were homeschooled. The full sample’s responses to questions on religious knowledge are reported in the Gallup report, reproduced in full in the second section of this report. In this section, we focus on comparing the responses given by American teens in public schools with those given by teens attending private schools.

How many public schools teach about the Bible?

Public school students were much less likely to report that academic study of the Bible or religion was a regular part of the school curriculum. Only 8 percent of teens in public schools reported that their school offered an elective course on the Bible, and just one out of four public school students (26 percent) said that a unit or section on the Bible was offered in an English or social studies class. By contrast, 51 percent of teens in private schools said that their school offered an elective course on the Bible, and 63 percent said that their school included a unit or section on the Bible in an English or social studies class. Overall, students in public schools were only half as likely as students in private [not public] schools to say that their school offered any religious course or unit of study at all (45 percent of teens in public school, versus 90 percent of teens in private schools).

In general, there was only modest evidence that religious or Bible knowledge increased with the length of time teens stayed in school. In general, students in the upper high school grades (10th to 12th) were only slightly more knowledgeable than younger teens.¹⁵

Only 8 percent of teens in public schools reported that their school offered an elective course on the Bible.

¹⁵ For example, 8 percent of all students in 10th to 12th grade incorrectly identified Moses as one of the 12 Apostles, compared to 8 percent of all 7th to 9th graders. Ninety-three percent of 10th to 12th graders correctly identified Adam and Eve as the first man and woman in the Bible, compared to 87 percent of younger teens. However, 40 percent of 10th to 12th graders correctly identified the Koran as the sacred book of Islam, compared to 22 percent of younger students. Thirty-eight percent of all 10th to 12th graders could correctly identify Cain as the man who said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” compared to 29 percent of 7th to 9th graders. Exactly identical proportions of younger and older classmates could correctly identify statements about King David (32 percent), and about the same proportion (48 percent of younger teens versus 51 percent of older teens) knew what happened at the wedding at Cana. See Technical Appendix of Gallup report for more details.

Basic religious literacy

In an open-ended response, only one out of ten public school students could name all five major world religions—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam—(9 percent) compared to about one out of six private-school students (15 percent). Fifteen percent were unable to name ANY of the great religions of the world.

When it comes to basic religious knowledge, American students (unsurprisingly) are better at identifying the basics of Christianity and the Bible than those of other world religions and religious texts.¹⁶ Strong majorities of American teens recognize the basic meaning of widely used religious terms such as “Easter,” “Adam and Eve,” “Moses,” “The Golden Rule,” and “The Good Samaritan.”

For example:

- Eighty percent of teens correctly identified Easter as associated with “the resurrection of Jesus.”
- Seventy-two percent of teens correctly identified Moses as “the man who led the Israelites out of bondage.”
- Nine out of ten public school students correctly identified Adam and Eve as the first man and woman of Genesis.
- Eight out of ten teens correctly identified the Golden Rule as “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- Seven out of ten teens (69 percent) knew that the Good Samaritan in the New Testament was “someone who helps others.”

¹⁶ When asked, for example, to name the sacred book of Islam, fewer than one out of three students correctly identified the Koran. Only 36 percent of teens correctly identified “Ramadan” as an Islamic holy month.

THE BIBLE ILLITERATES

Significant minorities of American students have not yet achieved even a rudimentary level of Bible knowledge. Eight percent of American teens believe that Moses is one of the twelve Apostles. About the same proportion, when asked what Easter commemorates, or to identify Adam and Eve, respond “don’t know.”

Bible Literacy: Beyond the elementary

Beyond these most rudimentary levels of knowledge, very few American students appear to have the grounding in Bible literacy that high school English teachers in our survey identified as basic to a good education.

For example: Fewer than half of Americans teens (49 percent) knew what happened at the wedding at Cana (Jesus turned water into wine). Nearly one out of four refused even to guess.

Given a choice of four quotations from the Bible, almost two-thirds of teens (63 percent) could not correctly identify a quotation from the Sermon on the Mount (“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God”).

Two-thirds of teens don’t know that the road to Damascus is where St. Paul was blinded by a vision of Christ (and subsequently converted to Christianity).

Similarly, fewer than a third of teens could correctly identify which statement about David was not true (David tried to kill King Saul). One-quarter of teens believed that the statement “David was king of the Jews” was false.

Perhaps surprisingly, born-again and Evangelical teens were often only slightly more likely than other teens to display Bible literacy. In the whole sample surveyed, just 44 percent of born-again teens could correctly identify a quote from the Sermon on the Mount, compared to 37 percent of all American teens.

Conclusion:

Despite the burgeoning scientific study of religion in America, relatively few scholarly studies have focused on Americans or young Americans’ religious knowledge, as opposed to their religious beliefs, identities, and practices.

According to this—the first extensive, nationally representative survey of the Bible and religious knowledge among American teens in recent years—the good news is that a majority of American teens have a rudimentary knowledge of the Bible. However, substantial minorities lack even the most basic working knowledge of the Bible.

Meanwhile, relatively few American teenagers display the depth of knowledge of the Bible recommended by the best high school English teachers. Even the majority of born-again and Evangelical teens appear to lack in-depth Bible knowledge. Relatively few public schools appear to teach about the Bible (or other religious texts), and public school students appear to be less likely than their private- and parochial-school counterparts to be knowledgeable about the Bible.

Few American students appear to have the grounding in Bible literacy that English teachers identified as basic to a good education.

While teachers agree that students need to know the Bible, schools and school districts need to offer their students non-doctrinal, elective opportunities to actually study the Bible.

The Bible as a text has generated considerable controversy in American life, society, and education. In many public schools, the Bible now occupies a place once reserved for texts like *The Origin of Species*, a controversial book banned as inappropriate for schoolchildren. However, as our qualitative research with high school English teachers suggests, knowledge of the Bible is not merely optional to a good education. There is a pressing need for Bible and religion courses that will bring the academic study of these subjects to the next generation—in a way that is sensitive and fair to *all* faith traditions.

As the interfaith group of educators and religious organizations that endorsed “The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide” noted, “Ending the confusion and conflict about the Bible and public schools . . . will not be easy because Americans have been divided about this issue since the early days of the common-school movement.”¹⁷

Nevertheless, no controversy among adults, however heated, should be considered an excuse for leaving the next generation ignorant about a body of knowledge crucial to understanding American art, literature, history, language, and culture.

We hope that this report marks only the beginning of the scientific study of religious knowledge in American society and that American educators, scholars, parents, and reformers of all faith traditions will find the common ground necessary to put the educational needs of an increasingly diverse American student body, first.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For educators, school districts, teacher’s colleges, and educational support groups:

1. **Provide Bible curriculum support to high school English teachers.** High school English teachers need and desire professional support, in the form of both clear policy and user-friendly materials. Many of the teachers we interviewed felt a lack of knowledge and a lack of ready resources for teaching about the Bible. For example, though it has published articles and hosted conference presentations about the Bible, the English teachers’ leading professional organization—the National Council of Teachers of English, which has a membership of 75,000 middle school, high school, and college instructors worldwide—has no Bible policy.¹⁸
2. **Offer elective Bible courses to high school students.** While high school English teachers already agree with scholars and other supporting evidence that students need to know the Bible, schools and school districts need to offer their students non-doctrinal, elective opportunities to actually study the Bible. Preferred is (a) a credited course in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, (b) taught by a qualified, state-certified teacher, (c) whose study includes biblical topics that high school students need to know, as defined by a sampling of the nation’s best teachers. If time is limited, the study of Genesis in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and Matthew (in the New Testament) provides a large proportion of the basic Bible knowledge necessary to the comprehension of American and British literature.

¹⁷ “The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide,” *op. cit.*, reference 1.

¹⁸ According to a spokesperson in the NCTE information office, the professional organization for English teachers has no policy regarding the Bible (telephone conversation, November 19, 2002).

For parents and students:

3. **Be proactive in seeking biblical literacy.** Schools that offer Bible literacy tend to be academically and economically advantaged. Parents who want educational advantages for their children need to advocate for the inclusion of an elective course about the Bible in their children's curriculum.

For educational and religious scholars and elites:

4. **Acknowledge the importance of the study of this book to understanding American and Western history, culture, religion, arts and letters, language, and public rhetoric.** No other book of comparable influence and importance could be deliberately excluded from public school curricula without drawing sharp criticism from the educational and scientific elites. Apply the same high standards to academic study of the Bible. Regardless of faith affiliation, educated people need to know about the Bible. Safeguarding students from religious pressure and proselytizing is important, but adult disputes over religion must not become an excuse for ignorance and illiteracy among America's increasingly diverse generations of students.
5. **Investigate educators' awareness about Bible literacy.** Do teachers and administrators believe (erroneously) that it is illegal to teach about the Bible, or believe that it is something to be avoided? Do teachers have adequate Bible knowledge to teach the biblical references occurring in literature? This information has implications for the literacy and scholarship of high school students.
6. **Determine the current major challenges to teaching Bible literature, and then explore creative, practical solutions for meeting those challenges.** No teacher in this study felt that the Bible was absent from their school's curricula due to "lack of importance" or "lack of community support." At schools that did not teach about the Bible, the reason most frequently cited by the surveyed teachers was, "Too politically difficult."
7. **Explore the possible correlation between scholastic and economic success and the inclusion in curricula of Bible literature study.** Are students in schools of medium- and low-end communities discriminated against by not being offered the opportunity to study Bible literature? Is it possible to help reduce economic disparity through Bible literacy?
8. **Investigate trends in religious knowledge, in addition to those in religious and spiritual beliefs, affiliations, and practices.** What the next generation knows about religion—their own and other peoples'—is a significant question for the study of religion that we hope will receive more and more regular attention in the future from serious scholars and educators.

APPENDIX

Teenagers' Knowledge of the Bible

A SURVEY

The Gallup Organization
Princeton, NJ
Published by the Bible Literacy Project
May 20 to June 27, 2004

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The following report is based on the findings of a nationwide survey of teenagers regarding their knowledge of the Bible. The study was conducted for The Bible Literacy Project to better understand teenagers' awareness and use of the Bible at home and in school.

The survey was conducted by The Gallup Organization, Inc. and based on 1,002 telephone interviews with a national sample of teenagers age 13–18. The questionnaire was developed in consultation with representatives from The Bible Literacy Project and The Gallup Organization. Interviewing was conducted by telephone during May 20 to June 27, 2004. Households were screened for a young adult between the ages of 13–18. A three-call design was used, that is, one initial call and up to two additional calls were made to reach an eligible respondent at home. This was especially important given the timing of the survey where in some regions of the country teenagers may have been preparing for examinations or other end-of-year school activities. Call-backs allowed teenagers to respond to the survey at a time more convenient for them. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be plus or minus three percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias in the findings of opinion polls.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

Religious Study in School

Overall, one in every six (16%) teenagers surveyed said their school offered some required study of religion. However, this was mainly among teenagers enrolled in private schools (80%) as opposed to those attending public schools where only seven percent said their school offered a required study of religion.

Public school students are more likely to say their schools offers a unit or section on the Bible in an English class or social class (31%) or an elective course in religious studies or world religions (29%) rather than required study of religion or an elective course on the Bible.

Awareness of Five Major Religions of the World

More than three-quarters (78%) of teenagers, when asked, can name Christianity as one of the five major religions of the world. And, 83% cited either Christianity or a specific Christian denomination. Buddhism was recalled by 54% and Judaism by 47%. While 54% could name at least three of the major religions, no more than one in ten (10%) could name all five religions and 15% could not name any of the five major religions.

Male students were more likely to name Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism than were female students.

Christianity	78%
Buddhism	54%
Judaism	47%
Islam	41%
Hinduism	32%
Could name all five	10%
Could not name any of top five	15%

General Knowledge of Religions

- While a large majority (80%) of teenagers are aware that Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus, no more than 36% know that Ramadan represents the Islamic holy month.
- In an open-ended (unprompted) question, 31% of the teenagers surveyed knew the name of the sacred book of Islam, correctly naming the Koran. Two-thirds (66%) said they did not know. Students who reported they were academically near the top of their class were more likely to name the Koran (42%).

Biblical Knowledge

- Approximately seven in ten (72%) correctly knew that Moses was the man who led the Israelites out of bondage. Among those attending private schools, 90% named Moses vs. 70% among the public school students.
- The vast majority—90% of teenagers—named Adam and Eve as the first man and woman according to Genesis.
- When asked who said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” slightly more than half attributed either Cain or Abel to this quotation from Genesis (34% correctly named Cain and 19% thought it was Abel).
- Three in every four (74%) correctly knew that “do not divorce” was not one of the Ten Commandments.
- One-third (32%) of the teenagers correctly answered that according to the Books of Samuel, David did not try to kill King Saul.
- Nearly one in every two (49%) were familiar with the story of the wedding in Cana, saying that according to the New Testament Jesus turned water into wine. Nearly one in four did not offer a response, and 28% gave incorrect answers.
- Roughly seven in ten (69%) knew that the Good Samaritan in the New Testament was someone who helped others.

- Teenagers were less familiar with a quotation from the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Most teenagers either responded that they did not know (27%) or incorrectly (36%) believed some other quotation presented to them was from the Sermon on the Mount.
- Eighty-one percent were aware that the Golden Rule is “to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- When asked about the biblical story of the road to Damascus, one-third (34%) of the teenagers were aware that this story speaks of Saint Paul being blinded by a vision from God. Most, however, gave incorrect responses (43%) or said they did not know (23%).

Sources of Information about the Bible

- Unprompted, teenagers cite their church as the source of their information about the Bible. More than half named their church as a first response and 72% mentioned their church in total. Information from parents or home and family was the second most frequently mentioned source (13% named them as a first response and 40% in total). Reading the Bible, religious classes in school, and Bible study groups were the other sources most often named as sources of information on the Bible.
- Those most likely to cite their church as a source of information on the Bible include those who described themselves as “born again” or evangelical. Female students were more likely than male students to mention their church or parents and family members as their source for information on the Bible.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Religion/Bible Study In Classrooms

Q1: Does your school offer any of the following? How about:

- An elective course in religious studies or world religions
- An elective course on the Bible
- A unit or a section on the Bible in an English class or social studies class or in some other class
- Any required study of religion

One in six (16%) teenagers interviewed said that their school offered some required study of religion in their school and/or an elective course on the Bible. However, the vast majority of these students attended private schools. Among students attending private schools, 80% said their school required the study of religion. In contrast, among public school students only seven percent said their school required religious courses.

A unit or a section on the Bible in an English class or social studies class, mentioned by 31%, or an elective course in religious studies or world religions, were each mentioned by approximately three in ten students as courses offered in their school. The vast majority (90%) of students in private schools report that their school offers at least one of these courses.

Courses Offered in School that Teenager Attends

COURSE	TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED			
	Total %	Public %	Private %	Private/Homeschooled %
A unit or section on the Bible in an English class or social studies class or in some other class	31	26	63	63
An elective course in religious studies or world religions	29	25	61	59
Any required study of religion	16	7	80	74
An elective course on the Bible	15	8	51	55
NET: School offers at least one of the above	50	45	90	88
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(848)	(111)	(133)

Awareness of Five Major Religions of the World

Q2: Can you name any of the five major religions of the world?

Most teenagers (83%), when asked, can name either Christianity or some specific denomination of Christianity as a major religion of the world. Buddhism is the religion that is second most frequently recalled, followed by Judaism mentioned by 47%. Approximately four in ten cite Islam and one-third mention Hinduism.

Teenagers reporting higher academic standings than others and those attending private schools were more likely to be able to name more than one of the major religions. No more than ten percent of the teenagers surveyed could name all five religions. With the exception of Christianity and Judaism, a higher percentage of male students were able to name each of the religions than female students.

Awareness of Five Major Religions of the World

RELIGION	Total %	TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED			ACADEMIC STANDING		
		Public %	Private %	Private/ Homeschooled %	Near the Top %	Above Average %	Average/ Below Average %
Christianity	78	78	83	80	88	79	70
Christianity/Other Christian religion	83	83	88	86	94	85	74
Buddhism	54	53	61	62	63	57	45
Judaism	47	46	58	56	58	50	36
Islam	41	39	57	57	53	45	28
Hinduism	32	30	49	46	42	34	23
% Could name all five	10	9	15	15	13	11	6
% Could name at least three	54	52	71	69	69	59	39
% Could not name any of the five	15	15	7	9	5	12	23
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(848)	(111)	(133)	(280)	(344)	(345)

Awareness of Five Major Religions

CORRECT RESPONSES	Total %	GENDER		TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED			ACADEMIC STANDING		
		Male %	Female %	Public %	Private %	Private/ Homeschooled %	Near the Top %	Above Average %	Average/ Below Average %
Name one	13	12	14	14	9	8	7	12	18
Name two	19	16	21	19	13	15	19	17	21
Name three	24	26	22	24	25	27	30	28	18
Name four	20	22	17	19	31	27	26	20	15
All five	10	11	9	9	15	15	13	11	6
Could not name any correct answers	15	12	17	15	7	9	5	12	23
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(471)	(531)	(848)	(111)	(133)	(280)	(344)	(345)

Awareness of Event Easter Commemorates

Q3: Do you happen to know what event "Easter" commemorates?

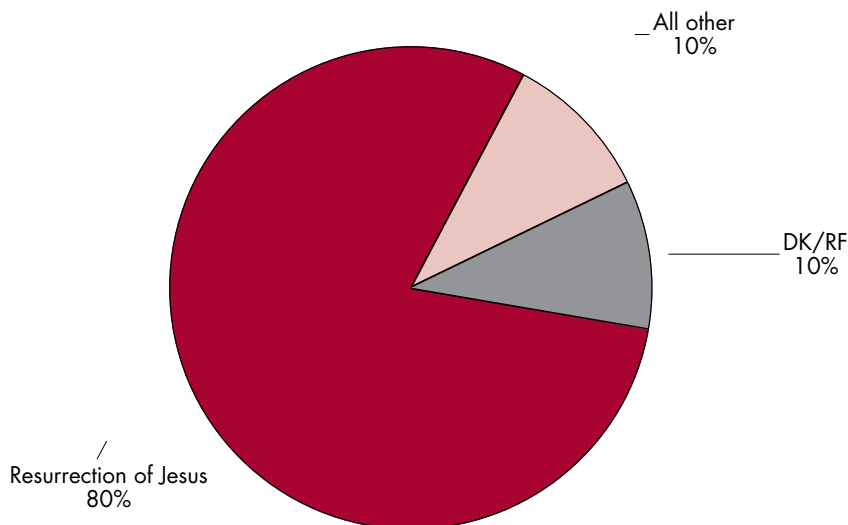
Would it be:

- The resurrection of Jesus
- The return of spring
- The Garden of Eden
- The Last Supper

A large majority (80%) of teenagers surveyed know that Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. Ten percent said they "didn't know" and one in twenty (5%) mentioned The Last Supper. Few incorrectly thought Easter commemorated the return of spring or The Garden of Eden.

There was little variation in responses among the teenagers surveyed.

Event that Easter Commemorates



Awareness of Ramadan

Q4: Which of the following best describes Ramadan?

- The Hindu festival of lights
- A Jewish day of atonement
- The Buddhist word for heaven
- The Islamic holy month

Slightly more than one-third (36%) of the teenagers know that Ramadan is the Islamic holy month. Seventeen percent felt it was a Jewish day of atonement, while 12% believed it was the Hindu festival of lights. Eight percent believed it to be the Buddhist word for heaven. Nearly one in three (27%) did not venture a guess saying they didn't know.

Not surprisingly, students who described themselves as academically at the top or near the top of their class in school were more likely than others to be aware that Ramadan was the Islamic holy month (47% among teenagers who said they were at the top of their class).

Awareness of Ramadan (n=1002)

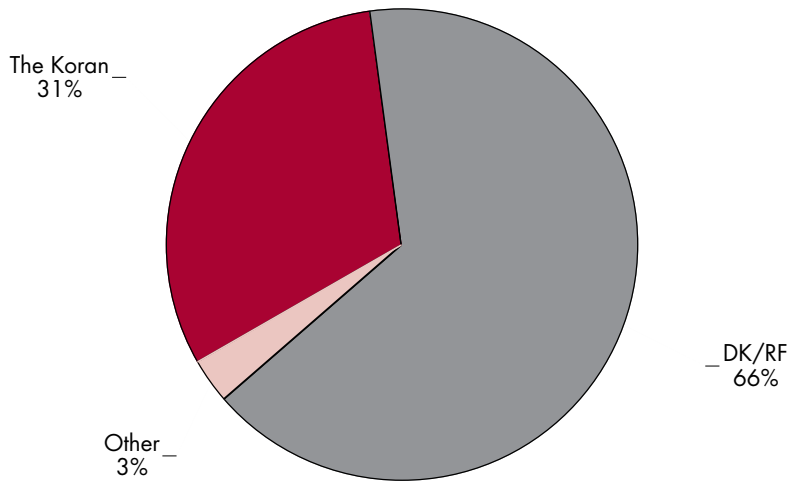
	Total %	TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED			ACADEMIC STANDING		
		Public %	Private %	Private/ Homeschooled %	Near the Top %	Above Average %	Average/ Below Average %
The Islamic holy month	36	35	40	38	47	36	27
A Jewish day of atonement	17	18	18	17	16	18	19
The Hindu festival of lights	12	13	6	6	11	11	13
The Buddhist word for heaven	8	8	7	9	6	7	11
Don't know/Refused	27	26	29	30	20	28	30

Awareness of Sacred Book of Islam

Q5: Do you happen to know what is referred to as the sacred book of Islam? What is this book called?

In an open-ended (unprompted) question, 31% knew the name of the sacred book of Islam, correctly naming the Koran. Two-thirds (66%) said they did not know. A few, two percent, thought it was the Torah. Students in private schools were more likely than those in public school to know the sacred book of Islam is the Koran (41% vs. 30%) as were students who said they were academically near the top of their class (42% cited the Koran).

Awareness of the Sacred Book of Islam (n=1002)



Percent Naming Koran as Sacred Book of Islam

	%
TOTAL	31
TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED	
Public	30
Private	41
Private/Homeschooled	42
ACADEMIC STANDING	
Near top	42
Above average	33
Average/Below	22

Knowledge of Moses

Q6: Which of the following best describes Moses? Was Moses:

- One of the Twelve Apostles
- A Pharaoh of Egypt
- The man who led Israelites out of bondage
- An angel of God

Approximately seven in ten (72%) correctly knew Moses was the man who led the Israelites out of bondage (90% among those attending private school). Eight percent thought Moses was one of the Twelve Apostles, while seven percent thought Moses was a Pharaoh of Egypt.

Knowledge of Moses (n=1002)

	TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED			
	Total %	Public %	Private %	Private/ Homeschooled %
The man who led Israelites out of bondage	72	70	90	88
One of the Twelve Apostles	8	9	1	1
A Pharaoh of Egypt	7	7	3	4
An angel of God	5	6	0	0

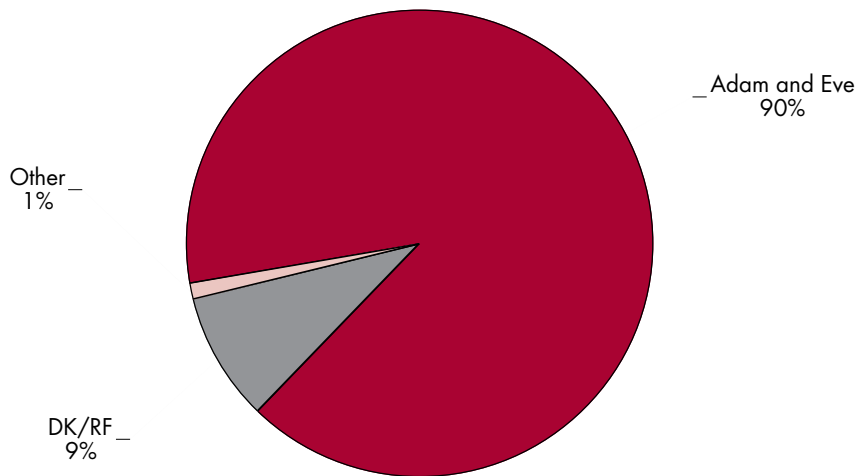
Awareness of First Man and Woman According to Genesis

Q7: According to Genesis, what were the names of the first man and woman?

A large majority (90%) of teenagers interviewed named Adam and Eve as the first man and woman according to Genesis.

Who Said, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?"

Names of First Man and Woman According to Genesis (n=1002)



Q8: According to Genesis, who said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Was it:

- Cain
- Noah
- Abel
- King David

Slightly more than half of the teenagers surveyed attributed either Cain or Abel to this quotation from Genesis. Twenty-two percent said they didn’t know, and the rest gave incorrect answers (11% named Noah and 14% named King David) when asked about the quotation, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Still, one-third (34%) correctly named Cain while 19% thought it was Cain’s brother, Abel.

Teens either in private school or those being homeschooled were more likely than those in public school to associate Cain with having asked this question.

Who Said, “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?”

	Total %	BORN AGAIN/ EVANGELICAL		TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED		
		Yes %	No %	Public %	Private %	Private/ Homeschooled %
Cain	34	43	33	32	44	48
Abel	19	20	20	19	23	19
King David	14	13	17	15	7	8
Noah	11	10	11	11	10	9

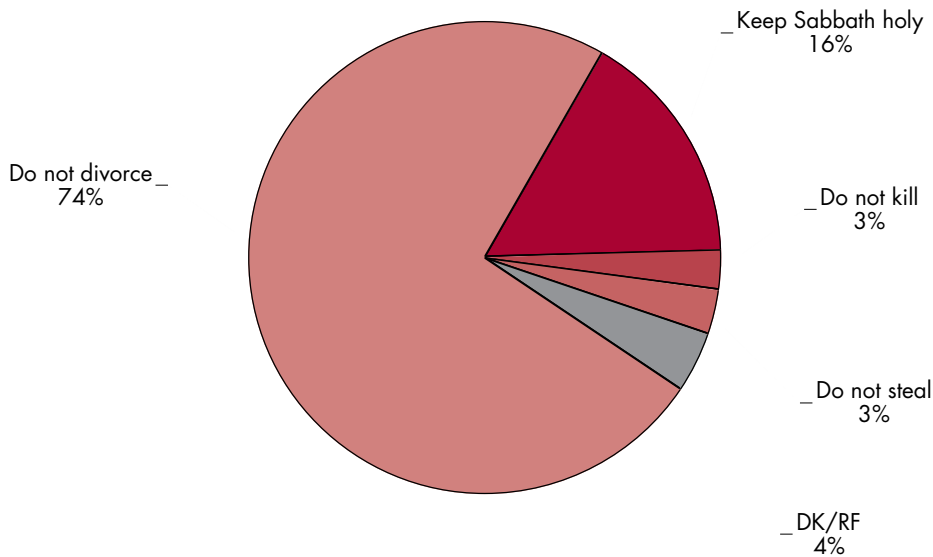
Knowledge of Ten Commandments

Q9: And which of the following is NOT one of the Ten Commandments?

- Do not kill
- Do not divorce
- Keep the Sabbath holy
- Do not steal

When asked which of the statements listed above was not true, three-quarters (74%) correctly knew that “do not divorce” was not one of the Ten Commandments. Sixteen percent incorrectly thought that “Keep the Sabbath holy” was not one of the Ten Commandments.

Knowledge of Ten Commandments (n=1002)



Which is NOT One of the Ten Commandments?

	Total %	TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED		
		Public %	Private %	Private/Homeschooled %
Do not divorce	74	72	91	92
Keep the Sabbath holy	16	18	6	5
Do not steal	3	3	0	0
Do not kill	3	3	3	3
Don't know/Refused	4	4	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(848)	(111)	(133)

David and the Books of Samuel

Q10: According to the Books of Samuel, which of the following statements about David is NOT true?

- David was a king of the Jews
- David killed Goliath
- David tried to kill King Saul
- David loved Bathsheba

One-third (32%) of the teenagers correctly answered that according to the Books of Samuel, David did not try to kill King Saul. One in four believed that David was not a king of the Jews. One in five (19%) did not think David loved Bathsheba.

Statement About David That is Not True

	Total %	TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED		
		Public %	Private %	Private/ Homeschooled %
David tried to kill King Saul	32	28	53	56
David was a king of the Jews	25	26	18	17
David loved Bathsheba	19	20	16	14
David killed Goliath	8	9	3	2
Don't know/Refused	16	17	10	11
Total	100	100	100	100
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(848)	(111)	(133)

The Wedding at Cana

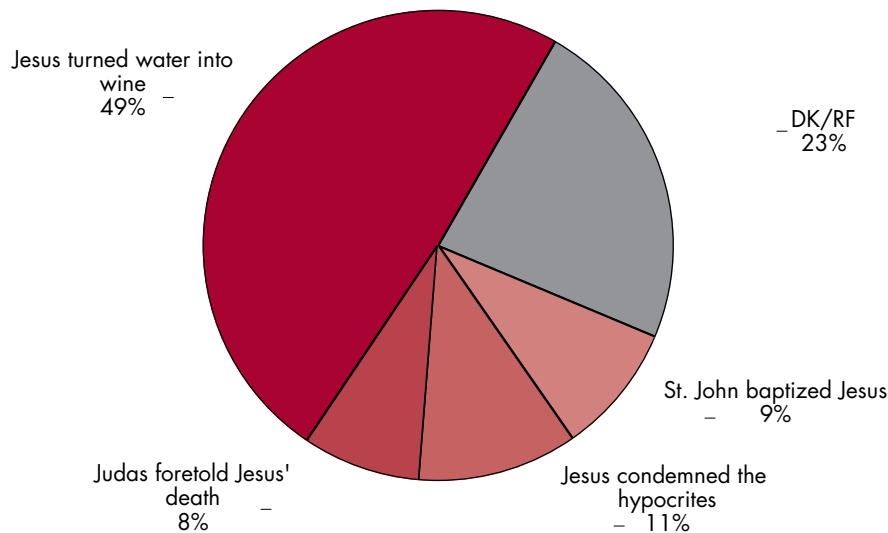
Q11: According to the New Testament, which of the following happened at the wedding in Cana?

- St. John baptized Jesus
- Jesus turned water into wine
- Jesus condemned the hypocrites
- Judas foretold Jesus' death

Nearly one in every two (49%) of the teenagers interviewed were familiar with the story of the wedding in Cana saying that in the New Testament, at the wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine. Nearly one in four (23%) did not offer a response, while 11% believed Jesus condemned the hypocrites.

Again private and homeschooled children were more likely to be aware of the New Testament story of the wedding in Cana. Those who described themselves as "born again or evangelical" were also more likely than those who were not to be aware of this New Testament story.

Event at Wedding at Cana (n=1002)



Event that Occurred at Wedding at Cana

	Total %	TYPE O F SCHOOL ATTENDED		
		Public %	Private %	Private/ Homeschooled %
Jesus turned water into wine	49	47	63	66
Jesus condemned the hypocrites	11	12	5	6
St. John baptized Jesus	9	8	13	11
Judas foretold Jesus' death	8	8	7	6
Don't know/Refused	23	25	12	11
Total	100	100	100	100
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(848)	(111)	(133)

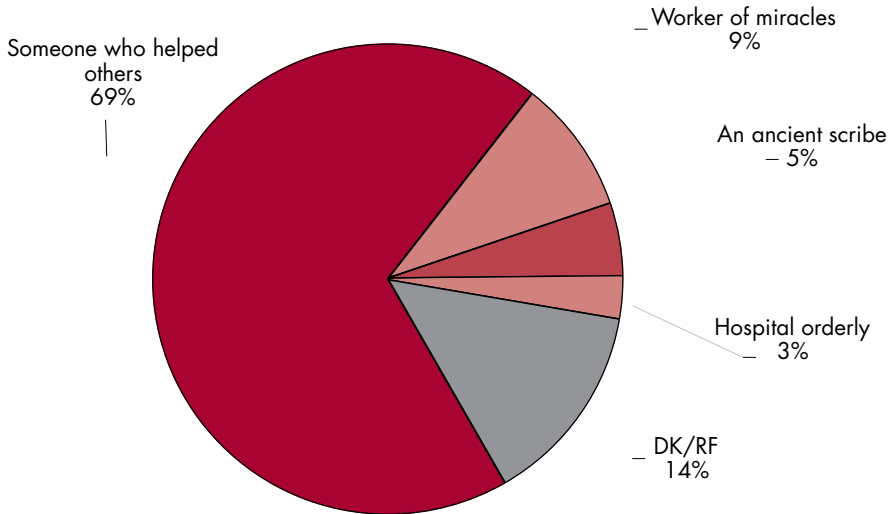
Knowledge of the Good Samaritan Story

Q12: There is a story of the Good Samaritan in the New Testament. Who was the Good Samaritan? Was the Good Samaritan:

- A hospital orderly
- Someone who helped others
- A worker of miracles
- An ancient scribe

Roughly seven in ten (69%) teenagers surveyed knew that the Good Samaritan in the New Testament was someone who helped others. Fourteen percent said they didn't know and 17% gave incorrect responses.

Awareness of Good Samaritan in New Testament
(n=1002)



Sermon on the Mount

Q13: And which of the following quotes is from the Sermon on the Mount?

- Physician, health thyself
- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
- My father’s house should be a house of prayer
- Fear not, I bring you tidings of great joy

Most teenagers (63%) either did not know (27%) or incorrectly (36%) answered this question. Thirty-seven percent believed that “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” was a quote from the Sermon on the Mount. One in six thought it was “My father’s house should be a house of prayer,” while 14% felt it was “Fear not, I bring you tidings of great joy.”

Sermon on the Mount

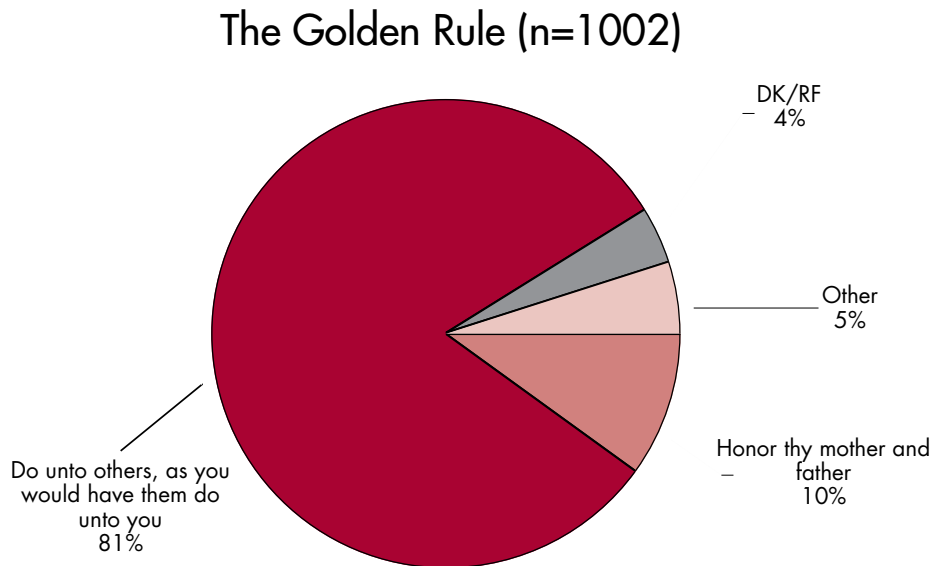
	Total %	ACADEMIC STANDING			BORN AGAIN/ EVANGELICAL	
		Near Top %	Above Average %	Average/ Below Average %	Yes %	No %
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven	37	47	36	29	44	36
My father’s house should be a house of prayer	16	14	18	18	16	18
Fear not, I bring you tidings of great joy	14	14	15	12	15	15
Physician, heal thyself	6	5	4	9	6	8
Don’t know/Refused	27	20	27	32	19	23
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(280)	(344)	(345)	(363)	(417)

The Golden Rule

Q14: From what you've heard or read, what is the Golden Rule? Is it:

- Waste not, want not
- Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you
- Honor thy mother and father
- Money is the root of evil

A large majority (81%) were aware that the Golden Rule was "to do unto others, as you would have them do unto you." Ten percent thought it meant "to honor thy mother and father."



The Road to Damascus

Q15: What happened on the road to Damascus?

- Jesus was crucified
- Mary met an angel of the Lord
- Saint Paul was blinded by a vision from God
- Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss

When asked about the biblical story of the road to Damascus, one-third (34%) of the teenagers interviewed were aware that this story speaks of Saint Paul being blinded by a vision from God. However, most gave incorrect responses (43%) or said they did not know (23%).

The Road to Damascus

	Total %	SCHOOL ATTENDANCE			BORN AGAIN/ EVANGELICAL	
		Public %	Private %	Homeschooled %	Yes %	No %
Saint Paul was blinded by a vision	34	31	52	55	44	32
Mary met an angel of the Lord	16	17	12	10	13	20
Jesus was crucified	15	17	7	7	16	16
Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss	12	12	11	11	13	11
Don't know/Refused	23	23	18	17	14	21
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of Interviews	(1002)	(848)	(111)	(133)	(363)	(417)

Source of Information about the Bible

Q16: Where do you get your knowledge about the Bible?

In an open-ended (unprompted) question, teenagers were asked where they get their knowledge about the Bible. More than seven in ten (72%) mention their church as the source of their information about the Bible, followed by family and parents (40%). Religious classes and Bible study groups are each mentioned by 18%, while 19% say they get their knowledge from reading the Bible.

Other sources include classes (non-religious) in school, conversations with fellow students, and movies and television.

Source of Information About the Bible (n=1002)

	1ST RESPONSE %	ALL RESPONSES %
Church	51	72
Parents/home/family	13	40
Reading Bible	8	19
Religious classes in school	9	18
Bible study group	6	18
Through other classes, not religious, in school	4	11
Conversations with fellow students	1	5
Movies	1	3
Don't know/Refused	5	5

*Table lists mentions of 3% or more

Source of Information about the Bible (n=1002)

	Total %	GENDER		TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED		
		Male %	Female %	Public %	Private %	Private/Homeschooled %
Church	72	69	76	74	68	70
Parents/home/family	40	33	47	39	48	49
Reading Bible	19	19	20	19	20	24
Religious classes in school	18	18	17	12	63	57
Bible study group	18	17	18	16	29	32
Conversations with fellow students	5	4	6	5	6	5
Through other classes, not religious, in school	11	10	12	11	17	15
Movies	3	3	3	3	3	4
Don't know/Refused	5	6	4	4	2	2

*Table lists mentions of 3% or more

BACKGROUND OF TEENAGERS SURVEYED

Type of School Attended

85% said they attended public school
11% attended private school, and
2% were homeschooled

Grade in School

46% were in 7th–9th grades
35% were in 10th–11th grades
16% were in 12th grade or higher

College Plans

The vast majority (92%) said they plan on attending college

Religious Preference

More than one-third (37%) described themselves as born again or evangelical
46% identified themselves as Protestants
28% identified themselves as Roman Catholic
3% as Jewish
9% other religion
5% did not identify with any religion

Academic Standing

Students were evenly distributed between the 28% who said they were near the top of their class academically, 34% above average, and 33% average. Only two percent felt they were academically below average.

Region of Country

East 21%
Midwest 22%
South 33%
West 24%

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Sampling Tolerances

In interpreting survey results, it should be borne in mind that all sample surveys are subject to sampling error, that is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole population had been interviewed. The size of such sampling errors depends largely on the number of interviews.

The following tables may be used in estimating the sampling error of any percentage in this report. The computed allowances have taken into account the effect of the sample design upon sampling error. They may be interpreted as indicating the range (plus or minus the figure shown) within which the results of repeated samplings in the same time period could be expected to vary, 95 percent of the time, assuming the same sampling procedures, the same interviewers, and the same questionnaire.

The first table shows how much allowance should be made for the sampling error of a percentage:

**Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Percentage
In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)***

	S A M P L E S I Z E					
	1000	700	500	300	200	100
PERCENTAGES NEAR 10	2	2	3	4	5	6
PERCENTAGES NEAR 20	3	3	4	5	6	9
PERCENTAGES NEAR 30	3	4	4	6	7	10
PERCENTAGES NEAR 40	3	4	5	6	7	11
PERCENTAGES NEAR 50	3	4	5	6	8	11
PERCENTAGES NEAR 60	3	4	5	6	7	11
PERCENTAGES NEAR 70	3	4	4	6	7	10
PERCENTAGES NEAR 80	3	3	4	5	6	9
PERCENTAGES NEAR 90	2	2	3	4	5	6

* The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figure shown.

The table would be used in the following manner: Let us say a reported percentage is 33 for a group which includes 1000 respondents. Then we go to row "percentages near 30" in the table and go across to the column headed "1000". The number at this point is 3, which means that the 33 percent obtained in the sample is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3 points. Another way of saying it is that very probably (95 chances of 100) the true figure would be somewhere between 30 and 36, with the most likely figure the 33 obtained.

In comparing survey results in two samples, such as, for example, men and women, the question arises as to how large a difference between them there must be before one can be reasonably sure that it reflects a real difference. In the tables below, the number of points which must be allowed for in such comparisons is indicated.

Two tables are provided. One is for percentages near 20 or 80; the other for percentages near 50. For percentages in between, the error to be allowed for is between those shown in the two tables.

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference between 20% and 80%:

In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)*

	S A M P L E S I Z E					
	1000	700	500	300	200	100
1000	4					
700	4	5				
500	5	5	5			
300	6	6	6	7		
200	7	7	7	8	9	
100	9	9	9	10	11	12

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference between 50% and 50%:

In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)*

	S A M P L E S I Z E					
	1000	700	500	300	200	100
1000	5					
700	5	6				
500	6	6	7			
300	7	7	8	9		
200	8	9	9	10	11	
100	11	12	12	12	13	15

*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figure shown.

Bible Literacy Project
122 W. 14th Street PMB 332
Front Royal, VA 22630