

# A Woeful Knowledge of the Bible

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A Barna Research Group survey conducted among a random probability sample of 641 adults demonstrated that many Americans have a woeful knowledge of the Bible. Among Christians in the survey, 22% thought there actually is a Book of Thomas in the Bible, and 13% said they did not know whether Thomas is a book of the Bible or not. 65% correctly stated that Thomas is not a book of the Bible. 61% knew that Jonah is a book of the Bible, while 27% said it is not, and 12% had no idea. Among non-Christians, only 29% knew that the Book of Jonah could be found in the Bible, while 27% said it could not, and 34% were not sure. Three quarters of the Christians surveyed knew that the Book of Isaiah is located in the O.T., while 11% thought it is in the N.T., and 13% did not know where Isaiah could be found. Half of the non-Christians knew that Isaiah is located in the O.T.

61% of all Americans named Bethlehem as the city where Jesus Christ was born. Among non-Christians, 55% knew Christ was born in Bethlehem. Seven out of 10 Christians answered this question correctly, while 16% named Jerusalem as Jesus' birthplace, 8% said it was Nazareth, and 6% did not hazard a guess.

The question that gave the most people trouble was "Is the expression 'God helps those who help themselves' in the Bible?" Only 38% of all Christians correctly stated that that phrase cannot be found anywhere in the Scriptures. Forty-two percent thought that this was a Biblical quotation, and 20% had no idea. Among non-Christians surveyed, 40% said that axiom was part of the Word, 26% knew it was not, and 34% were not sure.

Why is there so much ignorance about the Bible? Most likely, it comes from a lack of Bible readership. Half of all Americans do not read the Bible. The majority of all born-again Christians read the Bible once or twice a week, or not at all. The survey found that only 18% of all Christians said they read the Word every day, while another 18% read the Bible between three and six days a week, 37% read it once or twice a week, and 23% said they do not read the Bible at all. Among non-Christians, 70% do not read the Bible. Is this because many people do not own a Bible? No. Our research has shown that 93% of all American own at least one Bible, and most own more than one.