

[...think on these things]

Philippians 4:8

The BIBLEⁱⁿ America

What we don't know might hurt us

By Christina Quick

IT has been called the most popular Book of all time. Surpassing any other printed volume, it has sold billions of copies and been translated into more than 2,000 languages worldwide.

Most U.S. households contain at least one copy, and electronic versions are easily found on the Internet. But the Bible's influence on modern American culture can be difficult to measure.

According to pollsters, many Americans accept the Bible as fact. In a 2004 *ABC News* poll, 61 percent of those surveyed said the account of creation in the Book of Genesis is literally true. In addition, 60 percent accepted the story of Noah's ark as historically accurate and 64 percent said the parting of the Red Sea actually happened.

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In a 2004 *Newsweek* poll, 79 percent of respondents agreed that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, without a human father, just as the Bible teaches.

Though skeptics abound, belief in the Bible shows no signs of decline and may even be on the rise, according to Christian researcher George Barna. A 2005 Barna survey found that 45 percent of adults agree strongly that the Bible is completely accurate in all of its teachings compared with 42 percent in 2002 and 35 percent in 1991.

Even as Americans profess a belief in the Scriptures, however, many are at a loss when it comes to demonstrating basic Bible knowledge.

"There is a burgeoning interest in and a significant turn toward acceptance of Bible teachings," says Dr. Benny Aker, chairman of Bible and Theology at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. "Yet it's a strange contradiction in our culture that people would accept something without really knowing what it says or allowing it to change their lives."

In random telephone interviews conducted by *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*, even those claiming church attendance often struggled to answer simple questions about the Bible.

Joe, a 28-year-old Chicago resident, said he is involved in church and regularly attends Bible studies. Yet he couldn't correctly identify Genesis as the first book of the Bible. When asked to name the 12 disciples, he listed five Bible characters: "Paul, Peter, John, Luke and Matthew." (Paul and Luke were not among the 12 disciples.)

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Bettye, a 62-year-old church attendee in Miami, accurately quoted John 3:16, but incorrectly said that John preached the Sermon on the Mount. She also mistakenly stated that Abraham was the brother of Moses.

Edward, a 58-year-old from Boston who said he sometimes attends church, named Corinthians as the first book of the Bible and admitted that he didn't know who Abraham was.

When asked about John 3:16, Edward could recall seeing the citation on signs and T-shirts at televised sporting events, but he didn't know what it meant.

Jessica, a 27-year-old Washington, D.C., resident who doesn't attend church, attempted to name the 12 disciples: "There was Peter, Paul, Simon, and then there was Simon Peter, but I'm not sure if that was the same as Simon or if it was a different guy. And then there was Saul, but that may have been the same as Paul because I think he changed his name when he was converted or something. There was Thomas, Judas, and I feel like there was one that started with a 'B' like Benjamin or Bartholomew, or maybe it was Benedict because the Pope's name is Benedict."

When asked who preached the Sermon on the Mount, Jessica responded: "There's two things that come to mind. One is when Moses came down with the Ten Commandments. That was on a mountain, so maybe it was Moses. And then there was a time when Jesus was on a mountain and He gave a speech and made food and there was enough for everybody. Maybe that was it."

Aker says he isn't surprised by the lack of Bible knowledge in today's society.

"Overall, I get the impression that there's very little biblical literacy," he says. "There are issues related to the Bible that show up in press and politics. There's a certain awareness about things related to the Bible, but most people don't ever make the commitment to study the Bible for themselves."

Sheila Weber, vice president for communications at the Bible Literacy Project in Fairfax, Va., is alarmed by the trend toward Bible ignorance. She says basic Bible facts need to be taught in public schools.

"Bible literacy is critical for a good education," Weber says. "A loss of Bible knowledge among teenagers is hindering their ability to study American literature, art, music, history and culture. Without an understanding of the Bible, this generation and the next will lose their context for understanding the foundation of Western civilization."

Weber's group is trying to rally support for a public school curriculum that would supposedly increase Bible literacy without promoting religion.

In a Gallup poll recently commissioned by the Bible Literacy Project, 98 percent of high school English teachers surveyed said Bible knowledge gives students a distinct academic advantage.

"American literature is filled with allusions and references to the Bible," Weber says. "You cannot have a good understanding of English and literature without knowing the Bible. It is the foundational document for Western civilization."

Nonetheless, the Gallup poll revealed a lack of Bible awareness among teens. In the survey, most

Continued on page 19

WHAT'S YOUR BIBLE IQ?

Put your Bible knowledge to the test by completing the following quiz. Turn to page 19 to check your score.

- Who wrote the Book of Acts?**
 - Matthew
 - Luke
 - John
 - Paul
- On what mountain did Elijah confront the prophets of Baal?**
 - Mount of Olives
 - Mount Horeb
 - Mount Carmel
 - Mount Sinai
- Who was the fourth king of Israel?**
 - David
 - Rehoboam
 - Solomon
 - Jeroboam
- What kind of animal spoke to Balaam?**
 - A donkey
 - A horse
 - A serpent
 - A dove
- Who led the efforts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem after the people returned from captivity in Babylon?**
 - Sanballat
 - Nehemiah
 - Zerubbabel
 - Daniel
- Who was the wife of Hosea?**
 - Lo-ruhamah
 - Gomer
 - Penninah
 - Athaliah
- Who said, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (KJV)?**
 - Jesus
 - Solomon
 - Peter
 - Paul
- In the Book of Judges, who was killed by a tent peg?**
 - Barak
 - Ehud
 - Jael
 - Sisera
- How did Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, learn that he would have a son?**
 - An angel appeared to him.
 - He had a vision.
 - Mary prophesied.
 - His wife, Elizabeth, told him.
- How many people were gathered together in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost?**
 - 99
 - 120
 - 500
 - 15
- Which is NOT one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 1-3?**
 - Smyrna
 - Ephesus
 - Philadelphia
 - Corinth
- From which of the tribes of Israel was Jesus descended?**
 - Ephraim
 - Levi
 - Judah
 - Benjamin
- Whom did Abraham marry after Sarah's death?**
 - Dinah
 - Rebekah
 - Hagar
 - Keturah
- Which son of Noah was the father of Canaan?**
 - Ham
 - Shem
 - Japheth
 - Korah
- Who was raised from the dead after going to sleep and falling from a window during Paul's sermon?**
 - Onesimus
 - Demas
 - Eutychus
 - Titus
- What was Luke's occupation?**
 - Tax collector
 - Doctor
 - Fisherman
 - Priest
- What king's party was interrupted by mysterious handwriting on the wall?**
 - Nebuchadnezzar
 - Cyrus
 - Darius
 - Belshazzar
- Which prophet said the Messiah would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (NIV)?**
 - Isaiah
 - Jeremiah
 - Micah
 - Ezekiel
- Who visited Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem?**
 - Wise Men
 - Shepherds
 - Little drummer boy
 - All of these
- Who wrote the Book of Hebrews?**
 - Paul
 - Peter
 - Mark
 - Unknown

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students were unable to identify a quotation from the Sermon on the Mount. When presented with a list of four possibilities, one in six thought it was, "My father's house should be a house of prayer," while 14 percent said it was, "Fear not, I bring you tidings of great joy." The correct answer was, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In a question about the road to Damascus, only a third of those surveyed correctly associated the site with the apostle Paul. Fifteen percent of students said it was the place where Jesus was crucified.

In an indicting finding, there was often little difference between the responses of churched and unchurched youth.

Aker says such surveys underscore the need for the church to assume a more active role in promoting personal Bible study.

"I think in recent times there has been a sort of anti-education element in the church," Aker says. "Some leaders don't want to push

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people too hard to study their Bibles. As a result, many people get just enough of the gospel to learn how to get saved without ever becoming well acquainted with the Bible or understanding what it means to every aspect of their lives."

Aker maintains that the Bible — when studied and appropriately applied — can affect much more than a student's academic standing.

"The Bible itself says it's the living Word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword," Aker says. "It's anchored or placed in a dynamic context where the Spirit of God makes it alive in ways that are life changing. If we're going to be disciples of Christ, we must be students of the Word." ■

Christina Quick is staff writer for Today's Pentecostal Evangel.

E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.

Answers

Answers to the quiz on page 15.

1. B
2. C (1 Kings 18:19)
3. B (1 Kings 11:43)
4. A (Numbers 22:28)
5. B (Nehemiah 1:5)
6. B (Hosea 1:3)
7. D (1 Timothy 6:10)
8. D (Judges 4:21,22)
9. A (Luke 1:11-13)
10. B (Acts 1:15)
11. D (Revelation 1-3)
12. C (Hebrews 7:14)
13. D (Genesis 25:1)
14. A (Genesis 9:22)
15. C (Acts 20:9-12)

16. B (Colossians 4:14)
17. D (Daniel 5:1-31)
18. A (Isaiah 9:6)
19. B (Luke 2:8-16)
20. D

If you scored...

20-18 You are a true student of the Word. Keep studying to show yourself approved (2 Timothy 2:15).

17-15 You have a solid Bible foundation. Build on it by reading through the entire Bible this year.

14-11 You may be familiar with major

stories and characters, but your overall Bible knowledge is still lacking. If you haven't already established a routine of daily Bible reading, make a commitment to get started.

10 or below At this point in your life, your Bible knowledge is underdeveloped. However, don't let discouragement or intimidation keep you from discovering God's Word. Join a Sunday School class or discipleship group that can help guide you through the Scriptures. Read a Bible with study notes that explain context and difficult passages.