

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF BIBLE SOCIETY'S 2015 BIBLICAL LITERACY RESEARCH

Are we losing touch with the Bible?

The Bible first reached New Zealand shores 200 years ago and subsequently had a remarkable impact on the shaping of the modern nation of New Zealand. Two centuries later, and in a very different cultural context, Bible Society New Zealand wanted to find out what kiwi children and their parents know about the Bible.

Our 2015 Biblical Literacy Survey was undertaken by Nielsen in March. 44% of parents indicated they were Christian, in line with the figure from the 2013 Census. We found that 18% of parents surveyed said they couldn't recall or never learned about Bible stories as a child compared to 21% of children that can't recall or have never learned any Bible stories. But when it comes to reading, 52% of children surveyed can't recall or never read Bible stories themselves and 29% either can't recall or have never had a teacher, church member, family member or friend read a Bible story to them. While some children may be learning about Bible stories through television or movies, these results show that many New Zealand children are not encountering any Bible stories through the rich experience of reading.

What do parents and children know about the Bible?

As this is the first time Bible Society has asked these types of questions, we could only guess how many children and parents know the story of Noah, or David and Goliath or Job. It's always been difficult to imagine children not knowing the story of Jesus' birth. But it appears from the research as though many have never encountered this story.

Somewhat surprisingly, the most well known biblical character among New Zealand children is not Jesus. The real celebrity is Noah, with 72% of New Zealand children indicating they've read, seen or heard his story. Among Christian children that figure predictably climbs higher to 90%. But encouragingly, 62% of non-Christian children have also heard this timeless story in some capacity.

The two bookends of Jesus' life, his birth and death, also feature prominently though. Overall, 64% of New Zealand children have read, seen or heard the story of Jesus' birth (90% of Christian children and 47% of non-Christian children) while only about half of children (51%) know the story of his death (rising to 85% of Christian children). Among Christian children who are aware of Bible stories, 42% say the story of Jesus' birth is one of their favourites, almost equal with Noah (43%). Only 10% of non-Christian children who are aware of Bible stories indicated that the story of Jesus' Birth was one of their favourites.

The story of Jesus' death didn't feature nearly as highly among Christian children aware of Bible stories, with only 14% saying this is one of their favourites. Overall, only 7% of all children who are aware of Bible stories noted this as one of their favourites.

Is that story from the Bible?

We anticipated some confusion among children about which stories from a list of 17, including other popular stories, were from the Bible. Results proved the opposite, with 36% of children correctly identifying all the Bible stories in the list, rising to 65% of Christian children.

The story most widely known as being from the Bible is the story of the Birth of Jesus (91% of children correctly identified this as a Bible story), even though over one third of children surveyed have never actually read, seen or heard the story.

Why does Bible literacy matter?

Many might argue that Bible literacy does not really matter; that a decline in biblical knowledge is symptomatic of it being perceived as an historic book of no relevance in a contemporary society. But our research suggests passing on the Bible to the next generation remains important to many New Zealanders.

Overall, 46% of parents believe Bible stories are important because they provide values for a good life. In all, 29% of all parents read Bible stories to their child at least once a year, rising to 54% of Christian parents. Despite not identifying as Christians, 10% of non-Christian parents still read Bible stories to their child at least once a year.

Conclusion

Our 2015 Biblical Literacy Survey has produced some surprising results on the one hand, and some predictable results on the other. Bible stories are still popular among children, but we can conclude that many kiwi children are not encountering any Bible stories through reading.

Survey Methodology

In March 2015, Nielsen undertook this online survey via the Survey Sampling International (SSI) panel. The sample size was as follows:

Sample Profile (two separate samples)	Size	Location	Margin of Error
Parents of children aged between 3 and 16 years	401	Nationwide	+4.9%
Children aged between 8 and 15 years	300	Nationwide	+5.7%

Both samples were weighted by age and region to be representative of the population.

Full report

How many New Zealand children and parents think *The Hobbit* is from the Bible? What about *The Hunger Games* or *Harry Potter*? And which traditional fable caused the most confusion for Christian children when asked if it was in the Bible?

And what do kiwi parents really think about Bible stories? Are they important for their child, and if so, why? What about children? How do they describe Bible stories? Are they important, interesting, confusing or boring? Who finds Bible stories most confusing? The results may surprise.

The full report is available for purchase from Bible Society for \$39.99. This report includes a complete analysis of the survey results along with commentary from Christian leaders. Phone 0800 424 253 or visit www.biblesociety.nz/biblemonth to purchase.