

30 Percent of Americans Take Bible Literally

Three in 10 Americans interpret the Bible literally, saying it is the actual Word of God. That is similar to what Gallup has measured over the last two decades, but down from the 1970s and 1980s.

A 49 percent plurality of Americans say the Bible is the inspired word of God but that it should not be taken literally, consistently the most common view in Gallup's nearly 40-year history of this question. Another 17 percent consider the Bible an ancient book of stories recorded by man.

These results are based on a May 5-8 Gallup poll. The high point in the percentage of Americans favoring a literal interpretation of the Bible was 40 percent, recorded in 1980 and 1984. The low point was 27 percent in 2001.

Among most major U.S. subgroups, a plurality or majority holds the view that the Bible is the inspired word of God, rather than the actual word of God or a book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts. Highly religious Americans and those who have less formal education are exceptions to this general pattern. A majority, 54 percent, of those who attend religious services on a weekly basis believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible, more than twice the percentage of those who attend church less often.

Belief in a literal interpretation of a Bible declines as educational attainment increases. Forty-six percent of Americans with a high school education or less take the Bible literally, compared with no more than 22 percent of Americans with at least some college education. The majority of Americans with at least some college education believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God.

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