

Most Americans claim belief in literal truth of Bible stories, new poll shows_40504

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Most Americans believe in a literal interpretation of biblical stories such as Moses parting the Red Sea, according to an ABC News poll that also showed the vast majority of Americans do not blame Jews for the death of Jesus.

The ABC News PrimeTime poll found that six in 10 Americans surveyed consider biblical accounts of Moses parting the Red Sea, Noah's Ark and God creating the world in six days to be true, “word for word.”

Evangelical Protestants were most likely to hold this view, at about 90 percent.

About 30 percent of those surveyed said the stories are not true “word for word,” but are meant “as a lesson, not to be taken literally.”

Fewer than one in 10 Americans surveyed said Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus, a question thrust into public debate by the controversial Mel Gibson film, “The Passion of The Christ.”

A scene removed from the film after complaints by Jewish groups showed

Jesus' surrender by Jewish elders to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, who says he doesn't want Christ's blood on his hands. The crowd responds, "His blood be on us, and on our children."

The scene was taken from Matthew 27:25.

Church attendance seemed to affect responses, as did denominational differences.

Evangelical Protestants were most likely to hold literal beliefs, and more so if they said they attend church every week.

They also were most likely to blame Jews for the death of Jesus, with 12 percent laying blame on the Jews for the Crucifixion.

Catholics followed a similar pattern.

About half of all Catholics surveyed said all three stories are literally true, but those who attend Mass at least once a week were 15 to 21 percentage points more likely to consider the stories literally true.

Only 6 percent of all Catholics blame Jews for the death of Jesus, the least likely to do so of all the denominations.

About 80 percent of all adults in America identify themselves as Christians.

A quarter are evangelical Protestants, one in five are mainline Protestants, and one in five are Catholic.

About 10 percent belong to other Christian denominations, and another 10 percent identify with no religion.

The poll was conducted by random telephone survey between Feb. 6 and 10, polling 1,011 adults nationwide. The margin of error is three percentage points.

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