

Editorial: What city is the most ‘Bible-minded’?

January 30, 2014

Texas is the buckle of the Bible Belt, right? Heaven help us; we’re more like a belt loop.

Chattanooga, Tenn., is the most “Bible-minded” American city, according to a survey conducted by the [American Bible Society](#) and the [Barna Group](#), and reported by [Time magazine](#).



Editor Marv Knox “Bible-mindedness” reflects how often respondents claim to read the Bible and how accurate they say they think the Bible is, *Time* explained. “Respondents who report reading the Bible within the past seven days and who agree strongly in the accuracy of the Bible are classified as ‘Bible-minded.’”

For two years running, the Bible Belt buckle snugs down squarely over western Tennessee. This year, in Chattanooga, 51 percent of respondents said they have read the Bible in the past week and believe it’s accurate. Last year’s top city for Bible reading and believing was Knoxville, which fell to 10th this year.

Tennessee and North Carolina tied with two cities each in the top 10.

All Texas’ tall, tall steeples aside, the Lone Star State didn’t even crack the

top 20. The Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex ranked 22nd, and 39 percent of respondents said they believe the Bible is accurate and have read it within the week.

Texas city rankings

Other Texas communities in the survey—along with their national rank and the percentage of people who read and believe the Bible—are:

- San Antonio, 34th/34 percent.
- Houston, 41st/31.
- Waco/Temple/Bryan, 43rd/31.
- Harlingen/Weslaco/McAllen/Brownsville, 46th/30.
- Austin, 48th/29.
- El Paso (with Las Cruces, N.M.), 62nd/26.

In addition to Chattanooga, the top five Bible-minded communities are Birmingham/Anniston/Tuscaloosa, Ala.; Roanoke/Lynchburg, Va.; Springfield, Mo.; and Shreveport, La.

The least Bible-minded cities

The least-Bible-oriented community is Providence, R.I./New Bedford, Mass. Others in the bottom five are Albany/Schenectady/Troy, N.Y.; Boston, Mass./Manchester, N.H.; San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose, Calif.; and Cedar Rapids/Waterloo, Iowa.

OK, so what?

The old adage really is true: Your life is the only Bible some people ever will read. Many small towns may be more Bible-friendly than the cities.

Still, the survey shows few people read and/or believe the Bible.

In Texas, the best you can expect is four in 10 of your neighbors are oriented toward the Bible. And if you reasonably figure most of your church friends actually do read and believe the Bible, then the odds for everyone else actually are worse.

Comments posted at the end of the *Time* article dismally illustrate this point. On and on, readers deride Bible-believers. Dispiritingly often, their opinions of the Bible seem to be based on the actions of people who say they believe the Bible, not upon Scripture itself. For example:

- “All the top ‘Bible-minded’ cities are in bigoted, racist, intolerant Red States that have more in common with Satan than they do Jesus Christ.”
- “There are some significant fornicators and thieves amongst Bible thumpers.”
- “Being a ‘Christian’ here—or simply professing to be—gives you a pass, opens the right doors and includes you in the chosen ones, cult-like. So, of course, there is an awful lot to of obfuscating, lying and tweaking of the truth. Pretty pathetic and sad, really.”
- “Ironical that the ‘least’ Bible-minded cities do a better job of taking care of the poor and vulnerable than the ‘most’ Bible-minded.”

‘Bible-minded’ means ‘self-righteous’ to many

Hard as such comments are to read, we know where people get those ideas. They’ve met self-professed Christians who substitute self-righteousness for self-reflection. They know churchgoers who prefer judgment to mercy and vindictiveness to compassion. They see people who speak love and live hate, who preach discipline and practice greed and gluttony, who speak humility and wear hubris.

Of course, we know all people—including Christians—are sinners. We know we're weak and vulnerable and prone to fail. We know all these shortcomings do not reflect gospel truth.

But we shouldn't be surprised when others do not know that. All they know is what they see.

If we want more people to believe the Bible and, more importantly, follow Jesus, then it's up to us to live out our beliefs and practice our faith in acts of kindness and compassion.

We're the only Bibles many others read. Will they find and fall in love with Jesus because of what they see in us?