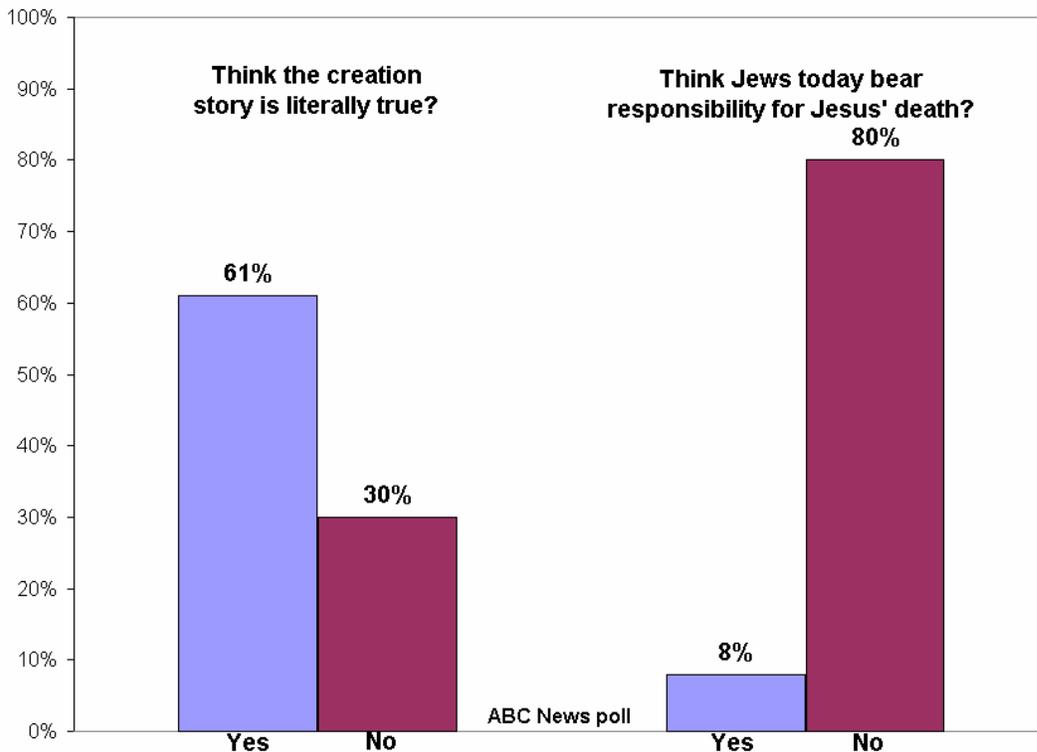


Six in 10 Take Bible Stories Literally, But Don't Blame Jews for Death of Jesus

Most Americans believe some of the best-known Bible stories are literally true – but at the same time a vast majority rejects the Biblical suggestion that Jews bear collective responsibility for the death of Jesus.

Six in 10 in this ABC News PrimeTime poll say the Biblical accounts of Moses parting the Red Sea, God creating the world in six days and Noah and the flood happened that way, word for word. Evangelical Protestants are even more apt to hold this view; about nine in 10 of them take these accounts literally.

But fewer than one in 10 Americans say all Jews today are responsible for the death of Jesus, as some literal interpretations of the Bible suggest. Eight in 10 say otherwise, apparently adopting a looser interpretation of the Biblical quote, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” (Matthew 27:25.)



The debate over the role of Jews in the death of Jesus has been rekindled by the Mel

Gibson film, “The Passion of the Christ,” which Gibson discusses in an exclusive interview on the ABC News program PrimeTime, airing Monday, Feb. 16, at 10 p.m. Eastern. Gibson’s film is scheduled for Feb. 25 release.

At the center of the debate is the verse in Matthew, in which Jewish elders surrender Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and demand that he be executed. When Pilate says he doesn’t want Christ’s blood on his hands, the crowd responds, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” A scene based on this exchange was removed from the film after complaints from Jewish groups, but some critics still contend that Gibson unfairly portrays Jews and their role in the death of Jesus.

While religious belief is a strong factor in a literal reading of the Bible, it plays far less of a role in views of collective responsibility for Christ’s death. Across the board, three-quarters of Americans or more – evangelical and non-evangelical Protestants, Catholics and others – reject the notion that all Jews today bear responsibility for the death of Jesus.

	Are Jews today responsible for the death of Jesus?	
	Yes	No
All	8%	80%
Catholics	6	82
Protestants	11	78
Evangelical Protestants	12	77
Non-evangelical Protestants	12	83
No religion	3	83

BIBLE STORIES – Overall, 64 percent believe the story of Moses parting the Red Sea is “literally true, meaning it happened that way word-for-word.” About as many say the same about creation (61 percent) and Noah and the flood (60 percent). About three in 10 say, instead, that each of these is “meant as a lesson, but not to be taken literally.”

There is wide variation in the numbers of literal readers across groups, but much of it is driven by two factors – religious belief and frequency of practice.

Literal belief peaks among evangelical Protestants, and especially among evangelical Protestants who attend church at least once a week. In that group, 96 percent take the Red Sea story literally. It’s a still-high 85 percent among evangelical Protestants who attend church less often.

	“Literally true”		
	Red Sea	Creation	Noah
All	64%	61	60
Catholics	50	51	44
Protestants	79	75	73
Evangelical Protestants	91	87	87
Non-evangelical Protestants	59	55	50
No religion	32	24	29

Nearly every group that's more apt to believe in a literal interpretation – Protestants, Southerners, blacks, lower-income and less-educated Americans – are also more likely to be evangelicals.

Three in four Protestants or more take these biblical stories as literally true, compared with half of Catholics or slightly fewer. One reason for the difference is that Protestants are nearly three times more likely than Catholics to consider themselves born-again or evangelical Christians, 58 percent to 21 percent.

But even among Catholics, church attendance helps shape views of the Bible. Those who attend Mass at least once a week are 15 to 21 points more likely to believe in the literal truth of these stories.

About eight in 10 adult Americans are Christians; a quarter are evangelical Protestants, about one in five are non-evangelical Protestants, just over one in five, Catholics; and about one in 10, other Christians. About one in 10 profess no religion.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News PrimeTime poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 6-10, 2004, among a random national sample of 1,011 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by David Morris.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Poll_Vault/Poll_Vault.html

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Results follow:

1. I'm going to ask about a few stories in the Bible. First is... (READ ITEM). Do you think that's literally true, meaning it happened that way word-for-word; or do you think it's meant as a lesson, but not to be taken literally? How about (NEXT ITEM)?

2/10/04 Summary Table

	Literally true	Not literally true	No op.
a. The story of Noah and the ark in which it rained for 40 days and nights, the entire world was flooded, and only Noah, his family and the animals on their ark survived.	60	33	7
b. The creation story in which the world was created in six days.	61	30	8
c. The story about Moses parting the Red Sea so the Jews could			

escape from Egypt.

64

28

8

2. On another subject, do you think all Jews today bear responsibility for the death of Jesus, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
2/10/04	8	80	12

END