

## Study Shows Changing Beliefs about the Bible

Adapted and posted by Bob Young\*

According to a research report released recently (October 2009) by the Barna Group, a significant variation exists according to age groups with regard to how the Bible is perceived, specifically measured in attitudes about the Bible and usage of the Bible. Barna defined the following age groups for the study: Mosaic generation as those who are 18 to 25, Busters as those who are 26 to 44, Boomers as those who are 45 to 63 and Elders as 64 and older. The report deals with differences in six general areas. This article reports some of the results in each area followed by my observations.

**The Bible is a sacred book.** While the majority of Americans (84%) see the Bible as sacred, that idea is accepted by 90% of Elders and only 67% of Mosaics.

*Worthy of note is that fully one-third of the current young adult generation does not see the Bible as sacred. This suggests that these see the Bible as secular literature. I take this to mean that these see the Bible as little different from any other piece of literature.*

**The Bible is accurate.** While 58% of Elders believe that the Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches, only 46% of Boomers and only 30% of Mosaics embrace this view. *This phrasing has been used in previous Barna reports and may present a difficulty because of its ambiguity. What does it mean that “the Bible is totally accurate in the principles it teaches”? The phrase can be understood in several different ways. Nonetheless, the responses to this question of biblical accuracy point to an area of concern. Even among those over 64, barely over half affirm the accuracy of the Bible. The Bible affirms for itself inspiration and completeness. While Barna does not include these terms, an inaccurate Bible hardly seems consistent with the affirmations of Scripture.*

**The Bible is different from other religious books.** With regard to the idea that the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon all offer the same spiritual truths, 67% of Elders disagree and 44% of Mosaics disagree. Considered in the form in which the question was posed, 56% of Mosaics agree that the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon all offer the same spiritual truths, compared to 33% of Elders.

*This item again demonstrates a continuing decline in the way the population perceives the Bible, especially as to whether it is the unique communication from God or is only one religious book among many with no unique authority.*

**The Biblical manuscripts are dependable.** Mosaics and Busters are more likely to be skeptical about the original manuscripts than Boomers and Elders.

*The results in this area of the research are not surprising to me, but I believe that they reflect the fact that this area of biblical study is not taught as frequently as in the past. Coupled with less information being presented by churches concerning the development of the Bible, there has been a surge in the number of books that question which manuscripts should be included.*

**Regular Bible reading.** The younger the person, the less likely they are to read the Bible on a regular basis.

*This item presents no real surprise. It is likely (although not a part of the research project) that regular Bible reading or study is generally proportional to the importance one places on the Bible.*

**Desire for more Bible knowledge.** In a possible departure from the other trends of the study, 19% of Mosaics said they would like to increase their knowledge of the Bible while only 12% of Boomers and 9% of Elders made a similar claim.

*What the research does not address is the reason for the desire for more Bible knowledge. Some may want to know more simply from curiosity or as an acknowledgement that they know little about the Bible. The results reported in this item may not be inconsistent with the other results. There is a possible bright spot in this item as churches consider how to reach out to the younger generations in our culture.*

The research was based on five separate studies conducted between 2006 and 2009. You can find the full report at [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

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\*edited and expanded from the Barna report and a report in *Preachers Weekly Bulletin*