

THE STATE OF THE BIBLE

Every December, the American Bible Society releases its annual *State of the Bible* report filled with research on how Americans perceive and use the Bible. Featured here are a few notable headings from the 2024 edition:

- While Gen-Z (1997-2012) continues to be the least Bible-engaged generation, the rate of young people between the ages of 18 to 27 turning to the Bible is growing more quickly than in other generations.
- Religious involvement tends to heighten charitable giving. Research from data during the COVID-19 pandemic found this trend continued through the pandemic, with people who regularly read the Bible 55 percent more likely to donate to charities.
- In a study on attitudes towards generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the church, 18 percent of respondents agreed AI could produce sermons as well as a pastor or priest, while 20 percent agreed that use of AI in any context goes against Biblical teaching.



CHURCHES HAVE BEEN BURNING SINCE 2020

The beloved Cathedral was quickly investigated and rebuilt. Other burned churches face a different story.

On December 8, 2024, Parisians and world leaders rejoiced as Notre Dame opened its doors for the first time in nearly five years. Videos from the Associated Press showed an archbishop giving an inaugural knock to the door and being met with ethereal choir voices from inside.

The cathedral's renovation marks a triumph in French history, other churches suffering fires carry starker stories.

In 2021, church arsons swept across Canada following reports of over 200 potential unmarked graves at residential school sites. First Nation government division Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc released the reports, saying ground-penetrating radar (GPR) revealed anomalies in the ground, suggesting that they were likely the graves of children forcibly enrolled in Catholic-run residential schools. Over time, the terminology used by the First Nation shifted to using terms like "anomalies," acknowledging that GPR alone cannot 100 percent confirm graves without further excavation. None of the anomalies have been ar-

chaeologically confirmed to be graves.

Government officials and indigenous chiefs alike decried the church arsons.

In 2024, CBC News reported that 33 churches had been burned since the 2021 arsons. Of these, 24 cases were confirmed arson with five suspected of arson.

In 2021, the Canadian government allocated \$7.9 million to investigate the suspected graves. When asked in press conference in March 2024 about future plans to excavate one of the school sites to confirm the radar findings, members of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc stated they were still doing archival research and using "oral tellings with the truth telling part" of investigation.

Elsewhere, in Jaranwala, Pakistan in August of 2023, riots erupted over alleged desecration of a Quran and a TikTok video deemed blasphemous. Pakistan is a Muslim-majority nation and has a strict anti-blasphemy law. As a result, over 80 Christian families lost their homes and belongings, and over 20 churches were vandalized and burned. The BBC reported a Christian crying, "They burnt everything. They destroyed our homes, this house of God."

One year since these attacks against Christian homes and houses of worship, Amnesty International reported 61 families were still awaiting government compensation. Of the 5,213 suspects in the attacks, 380 had been arrested—and 305 of them released.

MEGIDDO MOSAIC COMES TO WASHINGTON

The earliest archaeological reference to Jesus as God is now on display in the U.S.

The Megiddo Mosaic adorned the floor of a Christian worship hall dated to circa 230 CE. It is a remarkable example of Christianity being institutionalized in architecture during a time when the Roman Empire still considered it an illegal religion. It is notable because it is the earliest archaeological evidence referencing Jesus as God. The mosaic is currently on display at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.

The mosaic stands as an extra-Biblical source confirming the early church's belief in Jesus' divinity. The Church did not formally require ascent to belief in Jesus's divinity as an essential doctrine until 100 years after the mosaic's creation, when the Council of Nicea convened to write an official position. Dr. Trey Nation of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary said, "Jesus was acknowledged as God in Christian practice, liturgy, and elsewhere long before that. To me, one of the more fascinating things was that it's a really early testament to the diversity of the community of faith in those early centuries, both in terms of women and men but also the



fact that there are so many Greek and Roman names."

Inscriptions on the mosaic acknowledge a centurion who funded the mosaic and the artist who created it. Gaianus, the centurion, had the mosaic built in the wing of a residential building. Similar prayer rooms may have been typical during the house-meeting era of the early church.

The other five individuals mentioned are women, including one who donated a table in the room. The mosaic states that this woman, Akeptous, "offered the table to God Jesus Christ as a memorial." Christians likely used this table to serve the Eucharist. The Museum of the Bible's description states, "The geometric shapes and patterns, from the borders to the octagon boxes, convey ideas of eternity, symmetry, and perfection."

The mosaic was located in a Roman and Byzantine-era settlement where a Roman Legion once garrisoned. Today, a modern-day prison stands there. Convicts digging in prison-expansion operations discovered the mosaic and later assisted in its excavation during 2003-2005. Experts dated the mosaic



using pottery shards found above and below the mosaic and by studying the inscriptions.

Nation noted, "I'm glad to know this is a situation in which there is a sort of partnership between the place where the object is coming from and the museum itself." The mosaic is on display at The Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. until July 6, 2025. 🇺🇸

News Section by Anne Shearer