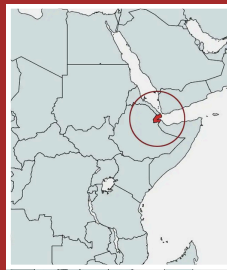




Djibouti

Bible Restrictions Rank: **36**
CONSIDERABLE ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **73**
Bible needs estimate is less than ten thousand



An Overview of Bible Access in Djibouti

In Djibouti, a nation of just over 1.1 million people located in the Horn of Africa, Christians make up a very small minority, estimated at around 1% of the population. This amounts to roughly 12,000 believers, most of whom belong to historical Christian communities like the Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches, along with a smaller group of Protestants and unaffiliated Christians. Yet, even among this small community, the ability to access the Bible remains severely limited due to considerable restrictions.

Estimates suggest that fewer than half of Djibouti's Christians have access to Scripture, and for many, that access comes with significant risk. Sharia law shapes the country's legal framework, and while the constitution technically provides for religious freedom, it is not applied equally. Christian materials, including Bibles, face heavy legal and social restrictions. Printing Bibles is not permitted, and only churches are allowed to produce materials internally; but even that is severely limited. Distribution is only legally acceptable within traditional churches and among expatriates; for Muslim Background believers or MBBs, possession of a Bible can result in persecution, social ostracization, or worse.

Importing Bibles remains very restricted. While some expatriates and existing Christians manage to bring in personal copies, it is not possible to freely import large quantities. For Muslim-background believers (MBBs) and Muslims, the risks of import, ownership, and distribution are especially high. Bibles are allowed in French or local languages among historical Christian communities; but not in Arabic, the primary language of most citizens, further cutting off access for many. As a result, most local Christians live under constant pressure, often practicing their faith in secrecy and resorting to self-censorship to avoid endangering themselves or their families.

On top of these legal and religious barriers, Djibouti faces significant socio-economic challenges. Although the government has made strides in infrastructure and digital expansion, nearly half the population is unemployed, and poverty remains widespread. While internet penetration is growing—with about two-thirds of the population online—access remains uneven and costly but can be considered a strategic channel to increase access.

Before we continue, would you take a pause to pray for Djibouti?

How can I pray for Djibouti?

- **For Divine Provision.** Ask God to make a way for physical and digital Scriptures to reach those seeking Him—even under tight restrictions. Pray for global partnerships to support Bible provision efforts, especially for those who cannot afford them.
- **For Protection and Wisdom.** Lift up the expatriate Christian community and traditional churches that have limited permission to worship. Pray they are shielded from harm and equipped with wisdom to share the Gospel effectively and safely.
- **For Creative and Innovative Solutions.** With low literacy, poverty, and infrastructure challenges, pray for new strategies—audio Bibles, SD card Scripture distribution, and discreet digital access—to flourish in Djibouti.

After praying for Djibouti, continue reading on the next page to learn more.

Bible Access Restrictions

Some Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions for part of population
- No Printing
- Storage restrictions for part of population
- Ownership restrictions for part of population
- Distribution restrictions for part of population

Other Limiting Factors

Considerable Other Factors

- Pockets of poverty
- Poor infrastructure
- 50-70% of population access to electricity
- 50-70% literacy

Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is low, **estimated Bible need is <10 thousand**

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 1,152,000

Christian population:

12,300, 1.07% of total population

World Watch List: #57

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN DJIBOUTI?

Legal and Structural Barrier

Although Djibouti's constitution formally provides for religious freedom, Islam is the state religion, and all laws are shaped by Sharia philosophy. Public proselytizing by any religion is illegal, and conversion from Islam is not officially recognized or protected. Churches face severe limitations on legal recognition.

Only a few long-established groups, like the Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches, are permitted to operate. New or independent churches, such as the Ethiopian Protestant Church, operate without formal registration, which casts a shadow of fear over congregants and limits their ability to function openly.

Community Pressure and Social Risks

Djibouti's conservative, Muslim-majority society places intense pressure on MBBs. They often face rejection from their extended families, social ostracization, and loss of inheritance rights. In rural areas, the communal and tribal lifestyle makes privacy nearly impossible, making it dangerous for believers to own or read a Bible.

Community monitoring is widespread, and MBBs risk being reported to authorities or harassed by neighbors and religious leaders. These pressures have forced many Christians to keep their faith secret, limiting opportunities for worship and Bible study.

Discrimination in Daily Life

Christians face discrimination in public services, government employment, and education. There are no Christians in high-level government positions, and Christians report difficulties when interacting with authorities, including being denied promotions or treated unfairly in legal matters.

Known believers, especially MBBs, experience harassment at work and may be barred from participating in community events or forums. Christian children are sometimes harassed at school or pressured to participate in Islamic teachings.

Restricted Access to Scripture

The availability of Bibles is tightly controlled. Only a small number of authorized Christians are allowed to distribute or sell Christian materials, which significantly hinders access to Scripture. Government authorities monitor Christian preaching, teaching, and the dissemination of religious literature, both offline and online.

Churches are not permitted to organize public Christian activities outside of their buildings, and Christian use of media (radio, internet, or television) for faith-based messaging is highly restricted.

Digital Limitations and Infrastructure Challenges

While internet access is growing—with approximately 65% of the population online—connectivity is still limited in rural areas. Djibouti Telecom holds a monopoly over all telecommunications, leading to high costs and limited digital accessibility for many citizens.

For Christians without physical access to Bibles, digital alternatives may still be out of reach due to economic and infrastructural constraints.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Djibouti

Djibouti	Islamic Oppression	Religious Nationalism	Ethno-religious hostility	Clan oppression	Christian denominational oppression	Communist and post-Communist oppression	Secular intolerance	Dictatorial paranoia	Organized corruption and crime	Reference
Persecution Engines →										<p>The more fully shaded the circle in orange, the stronger the level of persecution. The number of "+" signs indicates the frequency or intensity of the driving factors behind it.</p>
Persecution Drivers ↓	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Not at all	
Government officials								+++		
Ethnic group leaders				++++						
Non-Christian religious leaders	++++			+++						
Christian religious leaders										
Violent religious groups										
Normal citizens	++++									
Extended family	++++									
Political parties								+++		
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups										
Organized crime										
Multilateral org. & Embassies										

In Djibouti, the forces that restrict Bible access are driven by three key factors: **Islamic oppression**, **clan oppression**, and **dictatorial paranoia**. These are enforced by actors across society—non-Christian religious leaders, extended families, ethnic group leaders, government officials, and political parties.

The World Watch List of Open Doors sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we have to ask the question: How does this affect Bible access? Furthermore, where can we pinpoint the problem so we can address the need and demand for Bibles in Djibouti?

A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES

A persecution engine is simply this: the source of persecution in the country. A persecution driver (or actor) is the one “driving” the persecution. Taking a closer look at these engines and drivers, in proper context, will give us insight on how we can solve the problems of Bible access in the country.



Enforcing Religious Conformity

In Djibouti, where almost 98% of the population is Muslim, Islam is not just a religion. It is deeply embedded in the national identity. This makes any deviation, such as conversion to Christianity, a serious offense in the eyes of society.

Known MBBs are targeted by religious leaders, publicly shamed, and sometimes attacked. Imams and sheikhs have been documented preaching hostility toward Christians, fostering an environment of fear and animosity. These sermons are so influential that the government actively monitors Friday preaching content to contain radicalism—but the societal pressure remains intense, especially in rural areas where community structures are tightly bound.

Radical Islamic sentiment has been growing, influenced in part by the rise of extremism in neighboring Somalia. This has emboldened Djiboutian leaders to more closely align religious conformity with national loyalty. MBBs have been denied participation in family activities and even physically assaulted for refusing to recant. Family members are known to act not only out of religious conviction but to avoid collective shame and societal backlash.

The government permits only a limited number of Christian missionaries to distribute materials, and only in designated locations like a single bookstore in Djibouti City. As noted in the 2023 US State Department report, no new Christian groups were registered that year, and only select Christian materials are allowed for sale under strict oversight. This creates an environment where Bible access is both physically restricted and socially dangerous—particularly for Muslim-background believers, who must hide their faith to avoid rejection or worse.



Betrayal of Bloodlines

Clan identity in Djibouti is deeply interwoven with Islam, especially among the dominant Issa and Afar ethnic groups. MBBs are seen not only as religious traitors but as clan betrayers. Ethnic leaders and extended families often act swiftly and harshly when someone is suspected of becoming Christian.

Persecution ranges from social exclusion to physical violence. In 2024, one female MBB reported being kidnapped by her family and forced to marry an older Muslim cleric. This tactic is used as a means of re-Islamization and is not uncommon, particularly among the Afar tribe where arranged marriages serve both religious and political purposes. The practice, known as *absouma*, binds villages and tribes through enforced marital alliances. If a woman refuses the family's chosen partner, she is often rejected or punished.

These communal structures severely limit the ability of Christians to share or even own a Bible. In refugee camps, MBBs have been discriminated against and harassed for their faith. One report notes that even in humanitarian spaces, Muslim-background believers must remain underground for safety. Public proselytizing is illegal, and MBBs have to worship in secret, making the distribution and storage of Bibles a dangerous task. In tight-knit communities, secrecy is nearly impossible, and the consequences for discovery are severe.



Political Control and Religious Marginalization

President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh has ruled Djibouti since 1999, maintaining power through authoritarian control. The ruling party suppresses dissent and maintains a tight grip on civil society, including religious organizations. Freedom of religion may be guaranteed in the constitution, but in practice, Christians experience routine discrimination and limitations on public expression.

Government officials make it exceedingly difficult for churches to gain legal recognition. For example, the Ethiopian Protestant Church continues to operate without official registration, leaving its congregation vulnerable to legal uncertainty and potential shutdown. Without legal status, churches cannot openly distribute Bibles, organize public gatherings, or operate outreach programs. This effectively cuts off access to Scripture for many believers, particularly MBBs and isolated Christians.

Christian preaching, teaching, and printed materials are subject to close scrutiny. Churches face surveillance of sermons, vetting of distributed materials, and bans on using mass media platforms to spread their message. All religious content must be pre-approved by the Ministry of Islamic and Cultural Affairs. The government has even denied a request to open a second Ethiopian Orthodox church, indicating tight control over religious expansion. These policies, combined with state surveillance and self-censorship, create an environment where Bible distribution must occur underground or not at all.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN DJIBOUTI

Against the backdrop of persecution, poverty, and technological limitations, Bible access in Djibouti remains critical even for a minority group of Christians. To meet the spiritual needs of this community, an estimate of even less than **10,000 Bibles** can already make an impact in supporting our brothers and sisters in Djibouti.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

Despite the challenges, the Church in Djibouti has experienced growth the past five years. This growth, fueled in part by quiet conversions and underground Christian networks, has increased the demand for Scripture as believers seek to strengthen their faith and disciple others. In a climate where open expression of Christianity is risky, even small growth represents a powerful movement of the Gospel. But it cannot thrive without access to God's Word.

Bible Formats for a Discreet and Digital Generation

Due to social pressure, safety concerns, and a growing urban population with rising internet access, **Bible apps** can be the most practical and discreet format for distribution. Djibouti's relatively high mobile penetration and internet usage make digital Scripture delivery a vital solution, particularly for isolated believers and secret MBBs.

The Challenge of Bible Translations

Christians in Djibouti speak at least 9 different languages. Of these languages:

- Only **6** of these have a full Bible translation.
- **1** language has only a portion of Scripture available.
- **1** more language without any translation at all

This gap in access continues to isolate entire communities from experiencing the Bible in their heart language, a crucial barrier to both evangelism and personal spiritual growth. But only one more translation is needed!



Spoken Languages with Believers in Djibouti

THE CLARION CALL

The Christian community in Djibouti is small but growing, and their hunger for God’s Word is undeniable. Providing Bibles is more than an act of charity. It is a lifeline for believers navigating fear, rejection, and cultural hostility.

As the global Church, we must rise to meet this need. By supporting Bible translation efforts, expanding digital access, and developing safe distribution channels, we can equip every believer in Djibouti with the hope and truth of Scripture.

Let us act with urgency, compassion, and boldness to answer the call. No believer in Djibouti should be left without the Word of God.



2.8%
Annual Church Growth



Bibles needed for both
Believers & Seekers



<10k
Bible needs estimate



Bible App
Preferred Format