



Bible Access List

Where Bible access is most difficult, and Bible shortage is greatest

Iraq

Bible Restrictions Rank: **34**
CONSIDERABLE ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **59**
Bible needs estimate between ten and twenty five thousand



An Overview of Bible access in Iraq

In Iraq, where Christians make up barely half a percent of the population—approximately 187,000 out of over 46 million people—Bible access remains fraught with danger and difficulty. While more than half of Iraq’s Christians can access Scripture, the broader picture reveals alarming disparities, especially for Muslim background believers (MBBs), for whom even possessing a Bible can be life-threatening.

In theory, the importation and printing of Bibles is possible, but the reality is far more complex. Printing locally is costly and often poor in quality. And while importation is allowed for Christians, it remains nearly impossible and dangerous for non-Christians and MBBs. The risk is higher in the central and southern provinces, including Baghdad, where nearly 70% of Iraq’s Christians reside and where storing Bibles is outright dangerous.

For Christians from historic denominations, workarounds exist—churches often provide Bibles to their communities quietly and internally. However, even this access is uneven. In central and southern Iraq, access through Christian bookstores is shrinking, and recent efforts to expand distribution remain limited in scope. Distribution to Muslims or even perceived proselytization remains illegal and severely punished. This climate of fear silences Christian witness and shrinks the reach of the Gospel.

Geopolitical instability only deepens the crisis. Iraq continues to experience armed conflict involving Turkish airstrikes in the north, Iranian-backed militias in central regions, and residual ISIS activity throughout the country. These forces have directly targeted Christian communities and continue to destabilize areas where Bible access is most needed. Most of the Iraqi Christian minority has left the country, from just over 1 million Christians in the mid-1990s (>3% of the population to less than 200,000 (0.5%) today. Former strongholds in Baghdad and Mosul no longer exist. Most Christians now live in the Kurdish area and in the Nineveh plain.

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

How can I pray for Iraq?

- **Provision for Bible Shortage.** Pray for the fulfillment of the substantial need for Bibles among Iraqi Christians, especially for those in remote or restricted areas. Ask God to provide safe channels for Scripture distribution and discipleship.
- **Global Partnerships.** Let’s seek God’s hand in raising up and equipping global partners to find creative, secure, and sustainable ways to deliver Bibles across Iraq—even into the most challenging areas.
- **Peace and End of Conflict.** Intercede for a lasting peace in Iraq. Pray for an end to the violence that threatens Christian communities, and that God would pave the way for the free flow of Bibles in every corner of the country.

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

Bible Access Restrictions

Considerable Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions for part of the country
- Print restrictions for part of the country
- Storage restrictions for part of the country
- Ownership restrictions for part of the country
- Distribution restrictions for part of the country

Other Limiting Factors

Some Other Factors

- Poor infrastructure

Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is over 50%, **estimated** Bible need is between 10 and 25 thousand
- Impacted by armed conflicts

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 46,524,000

Christian population:

187,000, 0.40% of total population

World Watch List: #17

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN IRAQ?

Despite the long-standing presence of Christianity in Iraq, access to Bibles remains difficult due to a complex web of legal, political, and socio-economic factors that continue to destabilize the region and marginalize Christians.

Legal and Bureaucratic Barriers

While Iraq's constitution upholds freedom of religion, Islamic law significantly influences the legal framework. Christians, particularly those from a Muslim background, face legal challenges when trying to live out their faith. For instance, under Iraq's Civil Status Law, children must be registered as Muslim if one parent is Muslim, even in cases of rape. This leaves many Christians, especially Muslim Background believers or MBBs, without legal recognition of their faith and unable to openly raise Christian families.

There are also no legal provisions allowing Muslims to convert to Christianity, and Christians registered as Muslims cannot marry outside Islam or legally change their religious status, making it difficult to live a fully Christian life or access faith-based resources, including Bibles.

Political Marginalization and Instability

Christians suffer from weak political representation and systemic marginalization. Although seats in parliament are nominally reserved for Christian minorities, major parties often manipulate the quota system to install their own allies, silencing authentic Christian voices.

In 2024, the Iraqi Supreme Court ruled to abolish 11 minority quota seats in the Kurdish parliament, igniting fears among Christian leaders that their political influence is shrinking further. This marginalization limits their ability to advocate for resources like Bibles or faith-based community support.

Displacement and Poverty

More than a million Iraqis remain internally displaced, some of whom are Christians who fled ISIS or other extremist groups. A large number of these Christians now live in poverty, either as IDPs or as returnees to devastated towns with little infrastructure. Displacement has not only destroyed homes and churches but also the social and logistical systems that has heavily affected the channels where Bibles were once accessed and distributed.

Social Hostility and Pressure

Iraqi society has grown increasingly conservative and Islamic, especially in areas previously controlled by ISIS. Even in the Kurdistan Region, Christians face societal pressure such as veiling campaigns and harassment for religious expression. MBBs, in particular, endure intense family and community pressure, often being isolated, forced into marriage, or facing violence. These social pressures create an environment of fear and silence, deterring individuals from openly seeking or owning a Bible.

Security Concerns Persist

Iran-backed militias, ISIS remnants, and Turkish military operations continue to destabilize regions where Christians live. Churches have been bombed, Christian villages shelled, and Christian properties confiscated. The ongoing instability has disrupted Christian communities and made Bible distribution logistically dangerous or impossible in many areas, especially in the north.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Iraq

Iraq	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 → Persecution Drivers ↓										<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> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> Very Strong </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Strong </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Medium </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> None </div> </div>
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 Iraq, multiple forces of persecution operate simultaneously to restrict Bible access, including **Islamic oppression, dictatorial Paranoia, clan oppression, and organized crime and corruption.** These engines are fueled by government officials, ethnic group leaders, Islamist political forces, radical militias, corrupt government actors, and even local communities and families.

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 Iraq?

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.



Targeting Christian Identity and Witness

Despite the territorial defeat of the Islamic State (IS), the ideology of radical Islam remains deeply entrenched in Iraqi society. ISIS' lingering influence, especially in Sunni-majority areas, creates fear among Christians, including returnees to formerly Christian-majority towns like Qaraqosh. Christians in these areas experience betrayal by Muslim neighbors and face ongoing societal pressure to conform to Islamic norms, including demands for Christian women to veil, as seen in campaigns where posters appeared even on churches stating that veiling is "what Mary did".

Even outside IS territory, the government's Islamic legal framework institutionalizes religious inequality. Islamic law prohibits Muslims from converting to Christianity and enforces automatic religious registration as Muslim for children if just one parent is Muslim—even in cases of rape.

These laws make it nearly impossible for Christians from a Muslim background to access or publicly engage with Scripture. For MBBs, the consequences are dire: men risk expulsion or death, while women may be forcibly married or confined by their families.



Political Systems Undermining Christian Freedom

Iraq remains classified as an authoritarian state, with Christians underrepresented and politically sidelined. Although Christians were once guaranteed five parliamentary seats, the Iraqi Supreme Court ruled in 2024 that these quota seats were unconstitutional. Although five minority seats were later reinstated, Christian leaders warned that these can be manipulated by larger political parties to install their own allies, effectively silencing genuine Christian voices.

Christian communities also face surveillance and intimidation, particularly from Iranian-backed political factions. Christians, especially MBBs, report being watched by Iranian secret services. Some church leaders fear that Iraq is becoming increasingly Islamist under the influence of Shiite parties closely aligned with Iran, putting further pressure on Bible-related activity and public worship.



Family and Community as Gatekeepers

Iraqi society is highly tribal and rooted in honor-shame dynamics. Within this framework, leaving Islam, especially for women, brings disgrace not only to the individual but to the entire family. This results in violent retaliation. For example, in 2022, a 20-year-old MBB woman in Erbil was murdered by her relatives.

MBBs often live in secrecy, unable to publicly access or read a Bible without fear of discovery. Families, community elders, and even employers may serve as informal enforcers of religious conformity. This environment not only isolates believers but actively prevents the distribution and open reading of Scripture, particularly in rural or traditional settings where tribal structures are strong.



Exploiting Vulnerability and Seizing Church Resources

Corruption is deeply embedded in Iraq's political and security landscape, and for Christians, it often becomes a tool of persecution. Properties left behind by Christians who fled war or threats are frequently targeted by organized crime networks linked to political elites, militia groups, and even real estate syndicates. In Baghdad alone, it's reported that nearly 70% of Christian homes have been illegally seized, often through falsified deeds and forged ownership transfers—sometimes resulting in two legally registered owners for the same property.

This pattern is also evident in the Nineveh Plains, where militias and organized networks continue to dominate trade, real estate, and movement. In Tel Keke, once a Christian-majority city, the entire Christian population has disappeared. In Bartella, a previously Christian town, the demographic has been forcibly altered—now majority Shabak (Shia)—as militias entrenched their control through intimidation and the monopoly of violence. Christian-owned land and homes were taken over, often with impunity, while local authorities turned a blind eye.

Even where legal documentation exists, Christians find themselves powerless to reclaim their property. Militia-backed appropriation and systemic bribery discourage restitution. Beyond property, Christians experience job discrimination, forced business closures, and bribe-heavy bureaucratic barriers to church or ministry activity. In this climate, Bible access is not only hindered—it's often rendered impossible.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN IRAQ

Given the dire situation in Iraq, Bible access remains an urgent problem that needs to be solved. An estimate of **10,000 Bibles** will make a huge difference to support and spark hope for our brothers and sisters in Iraq.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

Despite all the difficulties, the church in Iraq is slowly growing. This growth—though quiet, steady, and marked by deep courage—is a hopeful sign, but it also heightens the urgency. As more people turn to Christ, access to the Word must keep pace. Without Bibles, new believers lack the foundation they need to grow in faith, disciple others, and withstand persecution.

Bible Formats for Unique Needs

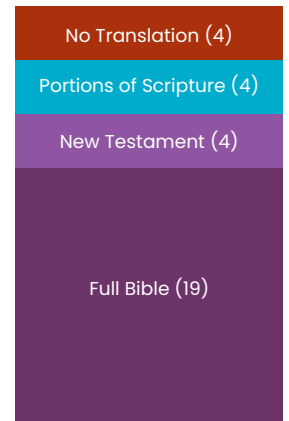
In terms of format, **print Bibles remain the top priority**, especially in regions with low digital infrastructure or mistrust of online platforms. **Audio Bibles** also play a vital role, particularly among the elderly and those who are illiterate.

The Translation Gap

Christians in Iraq speak at least 31 languages. Of these languages:

- Only **19** have full Bible translations.
- **4** languages have only the New Testament translated.
- Another **4** have only portions of Scripture translated.
- **4 more languages have zero Scripture translation**

This leaves entire people groups without any access to the gospel in their heart language.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Iraq

THE CLARION CALL

As the Church in Iraq endures and even grows amidst pressure from Islamic extremism, Iranian-backed militias, and socio-political instability, this is a critical moment.

Let the global Church not look away. Let us answer this call, not just with empathy but with action. The believers in Iraq need the Word to persevere. They need the Sword of the Spirit to stand firm. And they need us to stand with them.

Now is the time to sow generously—through prayer, resources, and strategic partnerships—so that no Christian in Iraq is left without the life-giving power of the Word of God.

