



Bible Access List

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

Iran

Bible Restrictions Rank: **9**

EXTREME ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **37**

Bible needs estimate between one hundred and two hundred fifty thousand



An Overview of Bible access in Iran

In Iran, the body of Christ represents a small fraction of the population, estimated at just over 1.5% of the nearly 88 million people. At a glance, this seems like a small number—but it still equates to over one million believers navigating one of the most restrictive religious environments in the world. Rough estimates suggest that only around 3 out of 4 believers have access to a Bible, but important to monitor these numbers as it can easily worsen given the tightening restrictions, heightened surveillance, and renewed crackdowns on Christian activity.

Legally, only the Armenian and Assyrian Orthodox communities are permitted to use the Bible in their respective languages. Even so, recent reports show that these communities have also faced increased difficulty importing or producing printed Bibles. Bibles translated in Farsi remain strictly prohibited. All other Christians, especially Muslim Background believers or MBBs, house church members, and evangelicals, are not only denied official permission but face the constant risk of harassment, arrest, or worse.

Iran's digital and technological infrastructure might suggest some opportunity for access. Sure, most people have electricity and internet, but online religious content is heavily censored, monitored, and filtered by the government. Platforms and websites offering Farsi Bibles are routinely blocked, and possession of such material, especially when printed or downloaded in large quantities, is treated as evidence of subversion.

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

How can I pray for Iran?

- **For Safety and Protection.** Pray for the protection of Christians as they navigate the risks associated with owning and sharing Bibles. Ask for God's intervention to shield them from those who might do them harm, both within their country and in their homes.
- **For Global Partnerships.** As the number of Christians grows, so does the need for Bibles. Pray for the resources and networks from the global Christian community to emerge that can supply Bibles to those who need them, overcoming the barriers to distribution.
- **For Opportunities for Bible Access.** Pray for wisdom and guidance for Iranian Christians seeking Bibles. Ask that God provides clear paths and resources for them to safely obtain Scripture, navigating the complex restrictions with discernment and courage. Pray for encouragement and strength as they seek to deepen their understanding of the faith through access to God's Word, despite the challenges.

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

Bible Access Restrictions



Extreme Access Restrictions

- No Importing
- No Printing
- No Storage
- Ownership restrictions for part of population
- No distribution

Other Limiting Factors



Some Other Factors

- Extremely poor infrastructure

Bible Shortages Among Believers



- Bible ownership is over 50%, **estimated** Bible need is between 100 and 250 thousand

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 89,810,000

Christian population:

953,000, 1.06% of total population

World Watch List: #9

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN IRAN?

Government Control and Legal Suppression

Access to the Bible in Iran is tightly restricted by the government. While Farsi (Persian) translations of the Bible exist, their possession, especially in quantity, is dangerous and often viewed as intent to distribute to Muslims.

All Christian literature must be approved by authorities, but such approval is almost never granted for Persian-language content. Christians found with Bibles can be charged under national security laws, particularly amended Penal Code Articles 499 and 500.

Ban on Distribution and Publishing

No public channels exist for distributing Bibles in Iran. Bookstores do not sell them, and Christian publishing is forbidden. Churches are banned from using Farsi in services or from receiving Muslim-background believers, which cuts off Bible access for most Iranians.

Even recognized Armenian and Assyrian churches may only use their ethnic languages and are legally prohibited from evangelizing or sharing materials in Persian.

Monitored Digital Access to the Bible

Digital access to Scripture is also risky. The Iranian government closely monitors Christian-related content online. Believers have been interrogated over social media posts, and digital evidence has been used against them in court.

Online activities, like viewing Christian material or interacting with foreign Christian networks, can lead to arrest or fines to cease Christian activity. Accessing Christian materials online is not technically illegal, but it is heavily surveilled and can result in state action.

Church Restrictions on Bible Use

Even legally recognized churches face strict limitations. Services must not be conducted in Persian, and they are prohibited from welcoming MBBs. Church leaders who defied these orders in the past were imprisoned or forced into exile. Persian-speaking churches have been shut down entirely. Christian gatherings in private homes (house churches) are targeted, with members frequently arrested, interrogated, and sentenced.

A Climate of Fear and Persecution

Owning a Bible in Iran is a huge risk. MBBs caught with Christian materials have been imprisoned or forced to sign statements renouncing their faith. In several cases, Christians were required to pay exorbitant bail amounts ranging from \$8,000 to \$40,000. Those unable to pay remained imprisoned. Christians also risk losing their jobs or being expelled from university upon discovery of their faith. Many are forced to flee the country entirely, abandoning their homes and possessions.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Iran

Iran	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>
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 Iran, Bible access is severely restricted due to overlapping persecution engines, including **Islamic oppression** and **dictatorial paranoia**. These forces are primarily driven by the government, state-affiliated religious leaders, political parties, military groups, and some additional pressure from extended family and the broader community. These actors collectively suppress Christian expression and target anyone involved in Bible ownership, distribution, or translation.

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 Iran?

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 Christianity at Its Roots

In Iran, Islamic oppression plays a central role in criminalizing any Christian activity that diverges from state-sanctioned Islam. This is especially intense for MBBs. They are denied access to any form of public Christian worship or discipleship, and owning a Bible in Persian—the national language—is considered illegal. The government views these Bibles as tools of Western influence.

One concrete example is the prohibition and seizure of Persian-language Bibles, which are banned by law and considered a threat to national security. MBBs found in possession of such materials are often arrested and interrogated. Even online access to the Bible is heavily restricted; authorities routinely monitor and block Christian websites, including digital Bible platforms.

Because only Armenian and Assyrian Christians are legally recognized, they are the only groups technically allowed to have places of worship. However, even they are barred from sharing the Bible or their faith with Persian-speaking Iranians, including their own children, under threat of arrest or church closure. This silencing of intergenerational Bible transmission has devastated access for younger Christians.



The State Sees Scripture as a Threat

The Iranian government operates with deep suspicion and hostility toward Christianity, especially where it intersects with ethnic Persian identity. The regime sees Bible distribution and church growth as existential threats to Islamic rule and national cohesion. As a result, house churches are labeled as “enemy groups” or “Zionist cults” and are frequently raided.

Christian leaders are especially vulnerable. The Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) has conducted systematic surveillance and arrests targeting anyone involved in Bible translation or underground church networks. For example, a number of Christians have been sentenced to long prison terms simply for “membership in an illegal group” or “promoting Zionist Christianity.” These charges often stem from their role in facilitating Bible study or distributing Scripture. In 2024 alone, eight Christians were sentenced to a combined 45 years in prison.

The regime also deploys informants within Christian circles, increasing fear and self-censorship among believers. Some Christian prisoners report being forced to reveal the names of others who participated in Bible-related activities. The ripple effect of this repression stifles access, not only through fear but through the systematic dismantling of networks that could deliver Bibles to believers.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN IRAN

To meet the current need in Iran, an estimate between **100,000 and 250,000 Bibles** can make a huge difference to bridge the gap and encourage growth. The number may be even higher when considering the high risk and underground nature of most Bible distribution efforts.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

The need is further intensified by the growth of the underground church. The expansion, largely fueled by dreams, visions, and personal encounters with Christ, desperately requires solid biblical grounding. But for many, discipleship is happening without Scripture in hand.

Bible Formats for Unique Needs

When it comes to Bible formats, the **Bible app** has become the priority. Due to surveillance and the danger of being caught with a printed Bible, many believers rely on digital Scripture for personal study and sharing the gospel discreetly. Yet **printed Bibles** are still sought after for teaching, home gatherings, and those without digital access.

The Translation Gap

In terms of translations, believers in Iran speak around 35 languages. Of these languages:

- Only **23** languages have a full Bible translation.
- **2** languages only have the New Testament translated.
- **5** languages have just a portion of Scripture translated.
- **5 more still lack any translation at all**

This lack of full Scripture translation underscores the urgent need for both distribution and translation. Every community deserves the opportunity to encounter God's Word in the language they understand best.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Iran

THE CLARION CALL

Now is the moment for the global Church to respond. In Iran, where persecution is severe but hunger for truth is greater, the Bible is not just a book—it is a lifeline. What's amazing is: the Church in Iran is growing, despite the daily risks.

But without access to Scripture, many new believers are left vulnerable. Let us rise to meet this need with courage, generosity, and urgency—so that every Iranian believer can hold, read, and live out the life-transforming message of the Gospel.

