



Bible Access List

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

North Korea

BWL Access Rank: **4**

EXTREME ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

BWL Shortage Rank: **45**

Bible needs estimate between fifty and one hundred thousand



An Overview of Bible access in North Korea

North Korea remains one of the most spiritually isolated and hostile environments for Christians in the world. Among its estimated 26 million people, the Christian population is believed to be just over 100,000, though the number could be higher. By rough estimates, only around 10% of Christians have access to Scripture, but it could easily be worse, due to the fact that access to the Bible is practically nonexistent for nearly all believers.

In North Korea, the Bible is not just banned—it is feared. The regime sees Christianity as a threat to the personality cult surrounding Kim Jong Un and his family, a direct challenge to the state’s ideological control. The possession, importation, printing, storing or distribution of Bibles is forbidden by law. Under the Anti-Reactionary Thought and Culture Law, these actions are punishable by execution or life imprisonment. Even children have been indoctrinated to report their own parents if they are suspected of religious activity. The penalty extends beyond individuals: entire families can be arrested or sent to labor camps under the country’s guilt-by-association policy.

Though North Korea claims a 100% literacy rate, its citizens are denied access to any literature that could challenge the regime’s ideology—including the Bible. Internet access is limited to an elite few (fewer than 10,000 users), and digital surveillance is intense. Foreign Christian media, radio broadcasts, and Bible apps are all inaccessible for the vast majority. Even foreign tourists are strictly monitored and allowed only a single personal Bible, which must never be shared.

Until today, North Korea has consistently ranked as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. The regime’s totalitarian grip has only tightened in recent years, with increased emphasis on ideological purity, digital surveillance, and public propaganda. Christians must live in total secrecy, often unable to share their faith even with their children. The regime’s hatred of the Bible is not just political—it is spiritual warfare at the most extreme level.

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

How can I pray for North Korea?

- **Pray for Divine Intervention.** Ask for God’s miraculous protection over the hidden Bibles in the country, that they remain unseen during raids, and that the Word of God continues to find its way into the hands and hearts of believers.
- **Pray for Protection of the Faithful.** North Korean Christians face relentless danger. Pray for their strength, endurance, and courage to hold on to their faith, even when isolated or imprisoned.
- **Pray for Open Borders and Provision.** Pray that God would open North Korea’s borders for humanitarian aid and allow safe channels for Bibles to be delivered. Ask for international pressure to translate into meaningful religious freedom.

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

Bible Access Restrictions



Extreme Access Restrictions

- No Importing
- No Printing
- No Storage
- No Ownership
- No distribution

Other Limiting Factors



Severe Other Factors

- Extremely poor
- Extremely poor internet access
- Extremely poor infrastructure
- 50-70% of population access to electricity

Bible Shortages Among Believers



- Bible ownership is extremely low, **estimated** Bible need is between 50 and 100 thousand

Main religion: Agnostic

Country population: 26,245,000

Christian population:

107,000, 0.41% of total population

World Watch List: #1

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN NORTH KOREA?

Criminalization of Bible Possession

In North Korea, Bible access is not merely restricted—it is criminalized. Under the "Anti-reactionary thought law," simply owning or distributing a Bible is considered a political crime, punishable by lengthy imprisonment, hard labor, or execution. This law is enforced through routine home inspections, informant networks, and constant surveillance, especially in border regions and cities.

Surveillance and Secrecy

Everyday life in North Korea is marked by intense surveillance. State security forces and neighborhood informants maintain constant watch over citizens, and raids or interrogations can occur without warning. In this atmosphere of fear, Christians must worship in absolute secrecy. Many dare not even bow their heads in prayer or keep a physical Bible in their homes. Some resort to memorizing portions of Scripture and then destroying the written material to avoid detection.

Digital and Border Restrictions

Access to Christian content through digital means is also blocked. The vast majority of North Koreans have no access to the global internet, and even local mobile networks are tightly controlled. Attempts to import Bibles or Christian materials across the border are met with strict punishment.


Foreign visitors are allowed to bring in only one Bible for personal use, and only under close supervision. Any effort to smuggle in additional materials, even electronically, is considered a serious threat to state security.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in North Korea


North Korea	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
Persecution Engines →	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○
Persecution Drivers ↓	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Very strong	Not at all	Very strong	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									

Reference


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.




Very Strong



Strong



Medium



None

In North Korea, the persecution of Christians is driven by an unrelenting combination of **dictatorial paranoia** and **communist and post-communist oppression**. These are enforced primarily by government authorities and the ruling Workers' Party but also involve ordinary citizens and even family members who have been indoctrinated to report "subversive" behavior.

The World Watch List by 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 North Korea?

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.



Worshipping Dictatorship

North Korea's dictatorship, now in its third generation under Kim Jong Un, is held together by a state-enforced personality cult. This cult demands absolute loyalty to the leader, with no tolerance for any competing allegiance—including to God. Christians are not merely seen as adherents to another belief system; they are branded as enemies of the state.

This paranoia is codified in law. The *Anti-Reactionary Thought Law*, particularly Articles 28 and 29, criminalizes the possession or distribution of "superstitious" material—explicitly including the Bible—with punishments ranging from long-term labor camp sentences to execution. In one of the few documented incidents in 2023, five believers gathered for prayer in Suncheon city were arrested and dozens of Bible booklets were seized. These were not foreign missionaries—they were North Koreans worshipping in secret.

The government operates on the principle of guilt-by-association. If one person is caught with a Bible, their entire family—sometimes across three generations—can be imprisoned or banished to remote villages. Even children are taught to report family members who show signs of "superstition" or unauthorized beliefs. As a result, many Christian parents wait until their children are teenagers before even hinting at their faith.



A System Designed to Erase Christianity

Though Communist ideology in its traditional form has diminished, the state structure and administrative controls remain rigidly Communist. The Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) governs every sphere of life, from education to employment, and views Christianity as a Western, imperialist threat meant to destabilize the regime.

Christians are placed in the lowest rungs of the Songbun caste system, where they are denied access to decent education, employment, and health services. They cannot join the military, apply for university, or participate in any aspect of public life. Even the suspicion of Christian ancestry can lead to discrimination or arrest.

Surveillance is ubiquitous. North Korea's "inminban" neighborhood watch units track every move in each residential block. Homes are searched without warning, often once or twice a year. If Christian material is found, even a USB containing Scripture, it can result in immediate detention and harsh interrogation. Christians found in possession of Bibles are often executed or sent to prison camps where many die due to inhumane conditions.

The situation is worsened by the state's increasing digital surveillance capabilities, imported from or supported by China and Russia. The regime uses facial recognition, signal jammers, and tightly monitored intranet systems to block all foreign or religious content. These systems are especially concentrated along the China border, where many North Koreans used to access Christian resources through USB drives or Chinese cell signals. Such activity is now exponentially more dangerous.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN NORTH KOREA

In a nation where nearly every public expression of Christianity is met with punishment, access to Scripture is not only rare, an estimated number of at least **50,000 Bibles** is an urgent lifeline for Christians. Even one Bible can mean the difference between spiritual growth and total isolation for underground believers who risk everything to read God's Word.

Bible Formats for Unique Needs

When it comes to Bible formats, **printed Bibles** remain the highest priority. In a country where electricity is unreliable and surveillance is rampant, print offers the safest form of access, particularly when digital signals are tracked and smartphones are monitored.

Audio Bibles serve those who cannot read or must consume Scripture discreetly, while digital and **internet-based** Bibles, though extremely risky, still offer some North Koreans a lifeline to the Word in urban and elite circles.

There's really no way around it. While these are the formats recommended, each still carry enormous risk and danger.

The Translation Gap

Linguistically, the gap is smaller than in other nations, but still critical. Of the 9 languages spoken by Christians in North Korea:

- **6** have a full Bible translation
- **1 language remains without any Scripture translation at all**

For a nation so hostile to Christianity, even the absence of one translation leaves entire communities cut off from God's Word.



Spoken Languages with Believers in North Korea

THE CLARION CALL

This is an urgent call to the global church: North Korea represents one of the most spiritually starved places on earth. Here, Scripture is not just rare—it is resisted at every level of society, from government oppression to family betrayal. And yet, the light continues to shine in the darkness. Every hidden believer clings to hope, sometimes memorizing fragments of Scripture for fear of being caught.

Now is the time to respond. By prioritizing discreet Bible distribution efforts, advancing translation projects, and strengthening secure networks, we can ensure that no believer in North Korea remains without the Word of God. The need is real. The time is now.

