



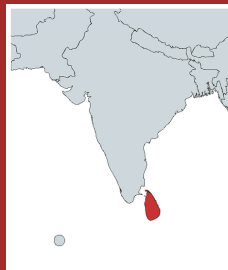
Bible Access List

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

Sri Lanka

Bible Restrictions Rank: **75**
MINIMAL ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **39**
Bible needs estimate between fifty and one hundred thousand



An Overview of Bible access in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's Christian community comprises nearly 10% of its population of almost 22 million people, amounting to around 2 million believers. However, estimates indicate that less than half of these Christians currently have to a Bible, highlighting a significant need despite minimal legal restrictions on Bible ownership and distribution.

Although Sri Lanka's constitution guarantees religious freedom and there are no official limitations on importing, printing, or storing Bibles, practical and social factors can restrict Bible access. Traditional Christians generally experience little difficulty owning Bibles openly, but the situation changes dramatically for converts from Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds. These believers face intense pressure and persecution from family and community members, compelling them to keep their faith—and consequently any Bibles they own—hidden.

Bible distribution is generally safe within churches and urban environments. However, rural areas pose distinct challenges, as opposition from Buddhist and Hindu fundamentalists can prove to be intense. To avoid conflicts or violence, distribution in these regions typically remains discreet and limited to church settings. This rural-urban divide impacts around half of the Christian community, requiring a certain level of caution to navigate safely.

Sri Lanka also faces infrastructure and socio-economic challenges impacting Bible access. Despite a high literacy rate, only half of the population has internet connectivity, limiting the effectiveness of digital Scripture distribution. Thus, physical Bibles remain critically important.

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

How can I pray for Sri Lanka?

- **Courage and Protection.** Pray especially for converts from Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds who face intense family and community pressures. Ask God to grant them courage, safety, and wisdom as they navigate their faith journey.
- **Open Doors for Bible Distribution.** Pray for safe and effective strategies to distribute Bibles in rural areas where opposition from religious fundamentalists is strongest and ask God to soften hearts and reduce hostility.
- **Strategic Solutions.** Pray for innovative approaches to overcome infrastructural limitations like limited internet access, enabling believers in all regions to receive Scripture through the formats most accessible and effective for them.

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

Bible Access Restrictions

Minimal Access Restrictions



Ownership restrictions for part of the country



Distribution restrictions for part of the country

Other Limiting Factors

Some Other Factors



Poor



Poor internet access



Poor infrastructure

Bible Shortages Among Believers



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

Main religion: Buddhism

Country population: 21,949,000

Christian population:



2,162,000, 9.58% of total population

World Watch List: #61

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN SRI LANKA?

Religious Nationalism and Societal Pressure

The primary barrier to Bible access in Sri Lanka is religious nationalism, deeply rooted in the belief that all ethnic Sinhalese must adhere to Buddhism, and ethnic Tamils to Hinduism. Conversion to Christianity is perceived as a betrayal of family and cultural heritage, particularly among converts from Buddhist and Hindu backgrounds.

This societal attitude results in converts being severely harassed, discriminated against, and pressured by their own families and communities to abandon Christianity, thereby hindering their ability to openly access and possess Bibles and Christian materials

Government and Constitutional Restrictions

Although Sri Lanka's constitution officially grants freedom of religion, it simultaneously prioritizes Buddhism as holding a "foremost place" among the country's religions. This inherent contradiction often justifies subtle yet very apparent restrictions against Christians.

The Supreme Court rulings of 2003 and 2017 explicitly stated that Buddhism alone warrants state protection, and that the right to propagate one's religion (including Christianity) is not constitutionally protected. Such rulings empower local authorities to use ambiguous legal grounds to restrict Bible distribution and the public practice of Christianity.

Hostility from Local Authorities and Buddhist Monks

Local government officials, influenced heavily by Buddhist monks and mobs, frequently act as gatekeepers against Christian activities, including Bible access. In several rural areas, authorities have supported local demands to stop Christian gatherings, detain pastors, or disrupt the construction of churches. Such actions severely restrict Bible distribution and prevent new believers from safely owning or studying Christian texts.

Violence and Threats Against Christians

Bible access is further hindered by an increasing number of violent incidents targeting Christians. Reports include pastors being physically assaulted, churches and homes being vandalized, and Christian meetings being violently disrupted.

Fear generated by these incidents severely restricts Christian gatherings and Bible distribution, especially in rural and predominantly Buddhist or Hindu regions.

Economic and Social Discrimination

Christians often face economic discrimination and social exclusion, exacerbating their vulnerability. Government benefits and educational opportunities have been systematically denied or limited to Christian families and children, often forcing poorer Christians to relinquish their faith due to economic survival pressures.

This economic persecution indirectly limits Bible access by isolating Christians and cutting them off from the support networks essential for acquiring Christian materials.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka	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 ↓	Very weak	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Weak		Not at all	Weak	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										

Sri Lanka faces significant obstacles to Bible access primarily due to **religious nationalism**. The principal drivers behind this persecution include government officials, extended family members, non-Christian religious leaders (especially Buddhist monks), normal citizens, violent religious groups, and political parties.

The World Watch List 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 Sri Lanka?

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.



Buddhist Hostility Towards Christians

Buddhist nationalism is deeply entrenched in Sri Lankan society and significantly restricts Bible access among Christians. Although Sri Lanka is constitutionally declared a secular state, Buddhism holds a privileged position, explicitly affirmed by the constitution. Buddhism's primacy sets the stage for systematic marginalization of Christians, especially those from Buddhist or Hindu backgrounds who have converted to Christianity.

The societal expectation that all ethnic Sinhalese must be Buddhist and Tamils Hindu means that converts to Christianity are viewed as traitors to their ethnic and religious heritage. Families and communities respond harshly, employing threats, violence, and severe social pressure, pushing many Christians into isolation or secrecy. This societal hostility severely limits their ability to access Bibles openly or participate freely in Christian activities.

Government officials frequently align with the demands of Buddhist monks and village mobs, participating directly or indirectly in persecution by enforcing restrictive regulations on religious gatherings and by turning a blind eye to violent attacks on Christians. Police and local authorities regularly disrupt church meetings, detain pastors, and confiscate Christian literature, including Bibles.

Here are some examples that illustrate the stark reality of religious nationalism's impact:

- **December 2023:** 25 Buddhist monks threatened a pastor, demanding he cease all Christian gatherings or face physical violence.
- **March 2024:** Villagers distributed letters falsely accusing a church of unethical conversions, leading to aggressive demands for the church's closure.
- **June 2024:** Seven church leaders were detained by local police after Buddhist monks and villagers complained about the construction of a building intended for Christian worship.
- **July 2024:** A pastor was violently attacked and seriously injured following false allegations regarding foreign funding for church construction.

Religious nationalism in Sri Lanka has created a climate of intimidation, fear, and overt persecution, greatly hindering access to Bibles and the ability of Christians, particularly converts and evangelical communities, to worship freely and openly express their faith.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka faces a pressing and critical need for Bibles among its Christian communities.

Current estimates suggest that fewer than half of Sri Lanka's Christians possess their own Bible. For existing believers, the estimate is that between 50-100,000 are needed. Further, considering the ongoing interest among seekers, additional Bibles are needed as well to accommodate the growth of the church.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

The Bible need aligns directly with the recent growth of Christianity across Sri Lanka. In the past five years, the Christian population has expanded. This highlights an even more urgent call to equip and support new believers with Scripture, enabling them to grow in their faith and contribute meaningfully to their communities amidst the ongoing persecution and societal pressure.

Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

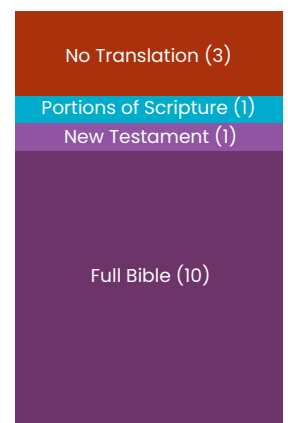
Meeting these demands requires attention to format and language diversity. Although digital and audio formats are important supplementary tools, **printed Bibles remain the highest priority** due to their accessibility and reliability, especially in rural areas.

Bridging the Translation Gap

Sri Lankan Christians collectively speak at least **15 distinct languages**, underscoring the complexity and urgency of translation efforts. Among these languages:

- **10** already have complete translations of the Bible
- **1** currently has only the New Testament
- **1** has only a small portion translated
- **3 languages still have no biblical texts available at all**

This translation gap not only impedes personal spiritual growth but also hampers effective evangelism and discipleship efforts among unreached communities.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Sri Lanka

THE CLARION CALL

Now is the time for the global church to rise and respond. Just as the believers in Sri Lanka courageously stand firm in their faith amidst persecution and hardship, we too must respond boldly and compassionately. By equipping our brothers and sisters with the Scriptures they desperately need, we can strengthen and empower the Sri Lankan church for generations to come.

This is not merely an appeal for resources: this is a clarion call to action, a sacred invitation to partner in God's ongoing work. Let us unite in prayer and provision, ensuring that every believer in Sri Lanka has access to the life-changing, transformative power of God's Word.



2.6%
Annual Church
Growth



Bibles needed for both
**Believers
& Seekers**



50-100k
Bible needs estimate



**Printed
Bible**
Preferred Format



**Audio &
Internet Bible**
Format 2nd Priority