



# Bible Access List

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

# Maldives

Bible Restrictions Rank: **12**  
**EXTREME ACCESS RESTRICTIONS**

Bible Shortage Rank: **75**  
**Bible needs estimate is less than ten thousand**



## An Overview of Bible access in Maldives

In the sun-drenched Maldives, known for its beauty and tranquility, the reality for Christians is starkly different. The nation claims to be 100% Sunni Muslim, but a small Christian presence—mostly expatriates and a handful of secret local believers—still exists. Though numbering less than 2,000, they cannot be ignored. Strict laws and social pressure make Bible access nearly impossible, forcing believers to practice in secrecy.

Christianity is completely banned for Maldivians, and leaving Islam comes with severe consequences—loss of citizenship, imprisonment, or exile. For the small Christian community, access to the Bible is extremely difficult. With strict government surveillance, legal bans, and social hostility, less than a third of these believers have a Bible, whether digital or physical, making Scripture a rare and precious lifeline.

While tourists and expatriates may bring a personal Bible for private use, importing multiple copies or any copy in Dhivehi, the national language, is strictly forbidden. Any perceived effort to spread Christianity, even unintentionally, results in detainment, fines, deportation, or imprisonment.

Despite these significant obstacles, the Maldives theoretically presents an opportunity for discreet online Bible access. With around 85% internet penetration and universal electricity access, the potential for digital Bible distribution is high. The very high literacy rate means that those who can access Scripture online are capable of reading it. However, strict surveillance and heavy restrictions make online access just as dangerous as owning a physical Bible. Websites, apps, and Christian content are routinely blocked, and any attempt to access Scripture can lead to severe legal consequences. The complexity of the situation requires urgent innovation to deliver God's Word securely to the small Christian community in the Maldives.

But first, would you take a pause to pray for the Maldives?

### How can I pray for Maldives?

- **Divine Intervention.** Just as Brother Andrew prayed, ask God to "make seeing eyes blind", allowing Bibles—both digital and physical—to enter the Maldives undetected. Pray for the safety of those risking their lives to bring God's Word into this nation.
- **Creative and Innovative Solutions.** Pray for secure, underground digital strategies to help believers access the Bible safely. Ask for wisdom in developing new means to share the Gospel discreetly among both expatriates and Maldivians.
- **Protection and Courage.** Lift up our **brothers and sisters in the Maldives**, who are in isolation and live under constant threat of persecution. Pray that God strengthens them, provides for their spiritual needs, and allows them to find fellowship despite the risks.

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

### Bible Access Restrictions

#### Extreme Access Restrictions

- No Importing
- No Printing
- No Storing
- No Possession
- No Distribution

### Other Limiting Factors

#### Some Other Factors

- Poor infrastructure

### Bible Shortages Among Believers

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

**Main religion:** Islam

**Country population:** 518,000

**Christian population:**

1,600, 0.30% of total population

**World Watch List:** #16

# WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN MALDIVES?

## A Nation Under Tight Religious Control

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The Maldives is constitutionally and legally defined as a 100% Muslim nation, and any deviation from Islam is strictly prohibited. Muslim Background believers or MBBs face extreme consequences, including loss of citizenship, social isolation, and punishment under Sharia law. Non-Muslims living in or visiting the country are prohibited from openly expressing their faith, and all forms of Christian worship are illegal outside private embassy settings.

## Extreme Government Surveillance and Social Pressure

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The Maldives' close-knit island communities act as natural enforcers of religious conformity, making secret Christian worship virtually impossible. Citizens, including family members, are expected to report any deviation from Islam, and anyone showing interest in Christianity faces immediate social ostracism. Government surveillance extends to digital platforms, with laws in place to block Christian websites and media. The 2021 court order mandating internet service providers to shut down all websites promoting any religion other than Islam further restricts access to online Bibles and Christian resources.

## Criminalization of Bible Distribution

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Possessing, distributing, or sharing Bibles in the Maldives is a criminal offense. Tourists are generally permitted to bring personal copies of the Bible, but distributing Christian literature—especially in Dhivehi, the local language—is strictly forbidden. In March 2024, two European tourists were detained for ten days after distributing Bible portions in Dhivehi. Christian expatriates, primarily from India and Sri Lanka, are heavily monitored and risk arrest and deportation if suspected of proselytizing.

While internet penetration in the Maldives is high, access to Christian content is heavily restricted. Websites, YouTube channels, and social media pages that promote Christianity are systematically blocked. Even Christian audio resources, which are essential for illiterate or visually impaired believers, remain inaccessible due to strict government censorship.

## The Risk of Apostasy

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For Maldivians, leaving Islam is not just a religious decision—it carries severe legal and social penalties. Apostates are stripped of their citizenship and can face imprisonment, harassment, or even violence. Families often disown MBBs, and the government enforces Islamic identity through mandatory Sunni Muslim education and laws that forbid non-Muslims from running for office. Even in private, Christians must practice extreme caution, as any hint of conversion can lead to devastating repercussions.

# Isolation and Lack of Christian Fellowship

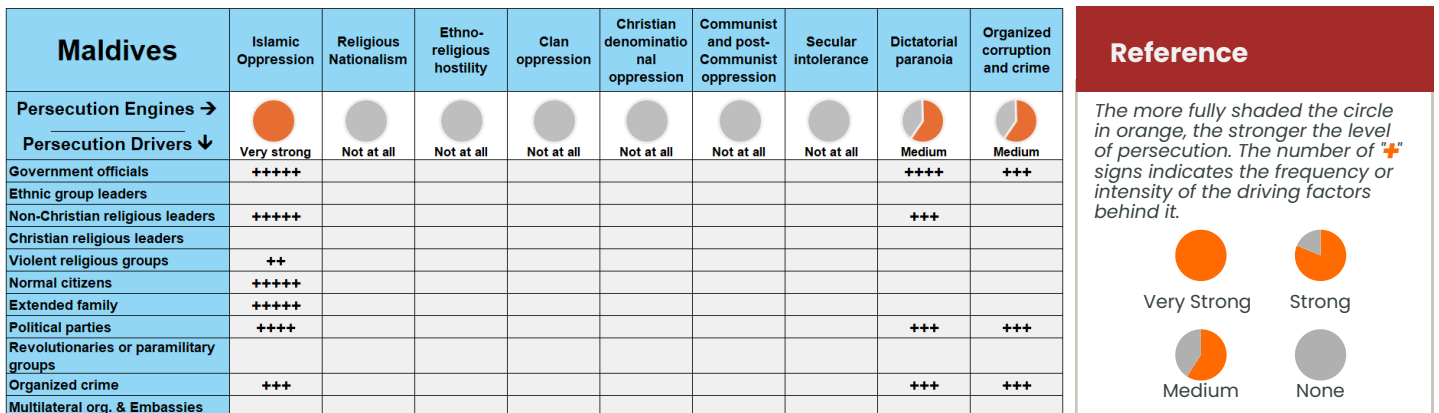
There are no official churches in the Maldives, and Maldivian Christians have virtually no opportunity for corporate worship. Expatriate Christians are permitted to meet discreetly in embassy compounds, but they are prohibited from interacting with Maldivians regarding their faith. The inability to gather for worship, access physical Bibles, or even find digital Scripture creates an environment of extreme spiritual isolation.

## A Climate of Fear

Beyond legal and social restrictions, fear remains a constant barrier to Bible access. Radicalized elements within Maldivian society, some with links to extremist groups, pose a real threat to those suspected of Christian faith. With reports indicating that up to 1,400 Maldivians have been involved in jihadist activities abroad, the risk of violence against suspected MBBs remains high. The government’s alliances with criminal networks and radical Islamic factions further contribute to the suppression of Christianity.

In a nation where religious freedom is nonexistent, the barriers to Bible access in the Maldives are among the most extreme in the world. Owning, reading, or sharing Scripture is a dangerous act—one that could cost a Maldivian their freedom, citizenship, or even their life.

## Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Maldives



As you can see in the chart, Bible access in the Maldives is primarily hindered by 3 main forces: **Islamic oppression**, **dictatorial paranoia**, and **organized corruption and crime**. The primary drivers behind these forces include government officials, non-Christian religious leaders, normal citizens, extended family, political parties, and some pressure also coming from organized crime.

Research from 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 the Maldives?

# A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES



Islamic oppression is the dominant force behind the restriction of Bible access in the Maldives. The country's **constitution mandates that all citizens must be Muslim**, and conversion to Christianity is considered an attack on national identity. The government and religious authorities have established severe **legal and societal barriers** that prevent the introduction, distribution, or personal ownership of Bibles.

- **Legal Barriers:** The Maldives criminalizes the propagation of any religion other than Islam, making Bible distribution and evangelism illegal. Even private possession of Christian materials, including digital versions, can lead to imprisonment, deportation, or other severe punishments.
- **Social Enforcement:** The Maldives has a highly surveilled and close-knit society, where family members, neighbors, and local leaders actively monitor any religious deviation. MBBs risk being reported to authorities, disowned by their families, or physically harmed if their faith is discovered.
- **Radicalized Elements:** While the Maldivian government presents itself as following "moderate Islamic values," segments of the population have become increasingly radicalized. Returning Islamic militants from Syria and Pakistan have contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies, making the environment even more hostile for any non-Islamic presence.

The government and religious leaders actively work to suppress any Christian influence, blocking Christian websites and social media pages and restricting the importation of religious materials. Back in 2021, all Maldivian internet providers were ordered to block Christian content within 72 hours, making access to online Bibles nearly impossible.



While Islamic oppression is the primary force behind Bible restrictions, dictatorial paranoia further entrenches these barriers. The government tightly controls religious expression and uses accusations of being "anti-Islamic" to suppress dissent.

- **Government Control Over Religion:** The Maldivian government dictates religious practices, requiring all imams to deliver state-approved sermons and prohibiting independent religious thought. Any deviation from Sunni Islam is seen as a threat to national security.
- **Targeting of Religious Minorities:** In an effort to maintain power, political leaders use anti-Christian rhetoric to strengthen their Islamic credentials. Christians, even among expatriate workers, are seen as potential threats and are subject to monitoring, harassment, and deportation if they are suspected of evangelism.
- **Surveillance and Intimidation:** The government has increased surveillance of expatriates, particularly those suspected of being Christian. Immigration policies and police watchlists are used to track and control foreign workers, making it nearly impossible for them to bring or access Bibles.



While religious persecution in the Maldives is primarily government-driven, organized crime networks and corrupt officials also play a role in restricting Bible access.

- **Collusion Between Officials and Criminal Elements:** Corrupt officials have been known to work with radical gangs to intimidate and target those deemed to be “un-Islamic.” Gangs have been linked to violent intimidation tactics, sometimes used against perceived enemies of Islam, including suspected MBBs.
- **Bribery and Extortion:** Corruption is rampant in the Maldivian government, and officials accept bribes to allow or block certain activities, including the importation of religious materials. While bribes may allow for some restricted goods to enter the country, they do not extend to Bibles, as any attempt to import Christian materials is seen as a direct attack on national identity.

These systemic issues make it nearly impossible for any Bible distribution efforts to succeed. Even if Bibles were smuggled into the country, the risk of exposure, confiscation, and punishment is extremely high.

## THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN MALDIVES

Against the backdrop of severe restrictions, persecution, and the underground nature of Christianity in the Maldives, Bible access remains critically low. Research indicates that only a small fraction of the Christian community has access to Scripture, reflecting a deep spiritual hunger among the nation’s believers and seekers.

### An Alarming Zero Percent Church Growth

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Although Christianity is nearly invisible in the Maldives, the need for Bibles cannot be ignored. This isn’t just about numbers, but the urgency to penetrate the culture with the gospel of Christ found in God’s Word. Research indicates that hundreds of Bibles are needed---some for known believers who currently lack access to Scripture and others for seekers who are quietly searching for truth. Many Christians struggle to obtain a Bible safely due to legal and social threats, making secure distribution methods essential.

# Bible Formats for Maximum Security

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Traditional print and audio Bibles pose a high risk due to the Maldivian government's tight surveillance and legal bans on Christian materials. Owning a physical Bible could result in imprisonment or even deportation for expatriates.

As a result, safe digital alternatives are the best solution—including secure mobile applications, encrypted online platforms, and discreet digital formats that allow believers to access God's Word without drawing attention. Because of the country's high internet penetration rate, digital access is a viable option for many believers, as long as it strategically evades government-imposed restrictions on religious websites.

## Completing Bible Translation in Dhivehi

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Currently the Bible in the Dhivehi, the local language is only partially available. Currently 31 books of the Bible have been translated. Given the tight restrictions on religious conversion, ensuring that a complete digital Bible is available in Dhivehi for reaching Maldivian Christians and seekers is critical.

## THE CLARION CALL

Providing Bibles in the Maldives is not merely a logistical challenge—it is a **mission to awaken the church and bring them out of hiding**. Christians in the Maldives are completely isolated, practicing their faith in secrecy, knowing that exposure could lead to exile, imprisonment, or worse. By equipping them with digital Scripture in safe and accessible formats, we can sustain and strengthen this underground church.

The demand for Bibles continues to rise as seekers and new believers quietly emerge in one of the most closed-off nations in the world. Meeting this need requires innovation, discretion, and global partnerships committed to ensuring that every believer in the Maldives has access to the life-giving truth of God's Word.

