



Bible Access List

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

Saudi Arabia

Bible Restrictions Rank: **18**
SEVERE ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **40**
Bible needs estimate between fifty and one hundred thousand



An Overview of Bible access in Saudi Arabia

In the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a country of over 37 million people, the Christian population totals an estimated 2.3 million, or around 6% of the population. Despite the appearance of modernization and technological advancement, Bible access remains highly restricted. It is estimated that less than half of believers—primarily migrant workers from Asia and Africa—have access to Bibles.

Saudi Arabia enforces some of the most severe Bible restrictions in the world. The country bans the importation, printing, distribution, and public ownership of Bibles. The only partial exception is for expatriate Christians, who are typically allowed to bring a personal copy for private use. However, this is not always respected in practice. Migrant workers, especially those from the Philippines, India, and East Africa, often face verbal harassment or even confiscation of Bibles at customs. Arabic Bibles or materials perceived as evangelistic are almost always confiscated, and those found in possession can face deportation, detention, or worse.

While the nation boasts almost universal internet penetration rate and a highly literate population, digital access to the Bible is no safer. Online activity is closely monitored, and fear of repercussions has forced many to refrain from even searching for Christian resources. Despite the availability of modern infrastructure, the path to accessing God's Word remains fraught with risks.

These restrictions are not merely political; they are deeply embedded in Saudi Arabia's religious, tribal, and authoritarian systems. The government operates under strict Islamic law, and only Wahhabi Islam is permitted to be practiced openly. Muslim Background believers or MBBS face the gravest risks. Saudi nationals who embrace Christianity must live as secret believers, as discovery could mean imprisonment, house arrest, or honor-based violence from their own families. Women, in particular, face isolation, forced marriages, and severe limitations on their movement if their faith becomes known.

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

How can I pray for Saudi Arabia?

- **Opportunities for Believers.** Pray fervently that doors will open for believers in dire need of Bibles. Ask for protection over those who already have them, that they may study and worship in the safety of their homes, away from prying eyes.
- **Wisdom for Expat Christians.** May God give wisdom to Christian expats, that they may find creative and cautious ways to share God's Word, establishing "Bible studies" and strengthening the church's roots in the region without drawing unwanted attention.
- **Spiritual Awakening.** Let us join in prayer for a spiritual revolution within the government and among the leaders of Saudi Arabia. Pray for the hearts of the nation's rulers to be touched by God, leading to a full embrace of the Gospel and an open acceptance of Bible distribution and Christian practices.

After praying for Saudi Arabia, 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 the population
- No distribution

Other Limiting Factors



No Other Factors Identified

Bible Shortages Among Believers



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

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 37,474,000

Christian population:

2,274,000, 6.07% of total population

World Watch List: #12

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN SAUDI ARABIA?

A Nation Where Public Christianity Is Forbidden

In Saudi Arabia, the public practice of any religion other than Islam is forbidden. This makes access to the Bible exceptionally difficult, especially for Saudi citizens. Although expatriate Christians are allowed to practice their faith in private, they are prohibited from evangelizing or gathering publicly. Many live under the constant risk of detention or deportation if suspected of proselytizing or holding unauthorized worship services.

The Hidden Cost of Apostasy

The situation is even more precarious for Saudi Christians from a Muslim background. Apostasy is considered a crime punishable by death under Islamic law, though there have been no recent judicial executions for this. Instead, MBBs often face severe social repercussions: imprisonment, abuse, isolation, and disownment by their families. In some cases, they are placed under house arrest or forced into hiding.

No Churches, No Distribution Channels

Beyond legal and social threats, practical challenges persist. Church buildings are not permitted anywhere in the country, and the importation of Arabic Christian materials is banned. Expatriates may possess personal copies of the Bible in their own language but distributing them or accessing Arabic Scripture remains a serious risk. Christian worship is closely monitored, especially larger fellowships. Any perceived attempt to evangelize is likely to result in deportation or worse.

Surveillance and Social Pressures

Despite recent social reforms, such as the relaxation of the religious police and minor steps toward cultural openness, the reality for most Christians remains one of secrecy and surveillance. Expressions of faith—even online—can lead to arrest, job loss, or being reported to authorities by family or neighbors. The deep entanglement of religious, cultural, and political forces continues to form a formidable barrier to accessing Scripture in Saudi Arabia.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia	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 ↓	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	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 Saudi Arabia, three major forces of persecution combine to create an extremely hostile environment for Bible access: **Islamic oppression**, **clan oppression**, and **dictatorial paranoia**. These are driven by a mix of government authorities, ethnic and religious leaders, family members, and wider society—each playing a critical role in suppressing religious expression and access to the Bible.

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 Saudi Arabia?

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.



Criminalizing Christianity Under State Religion

Saudi Arabia’s legal system is built on Wahhabi Islam and the strict Hanbali school of Sharia. All citizens are presumed to be Muslim, and public worship of any other religion is banned. This foundational reality means no church buildings are allowed; no Christian materials can be imported in Arabic, and the death penalty for apostasy remains on the books, even if not currently enforced.

In 2024, several Christians were arrested due to their conversion from Islam or involvement in missionary activities. In the same period, dozens of Christians were locked away from family and community after their conversion was discovered—a common result of societal pressure blended with state response.

Christian domestic workers, particularly Asian and African women, were subjected to rape and sexual harassment, with at least hundreds of such incidents estimated in 2024 alone, due in part to their faith and vulnerable status as non-Muslims.

One documented example notes that a Saudi MBB's sister was called in for questioning due to a social media post that revealed her faith, showing how online expressions of Christianity can trigger state surveillance and family repercussions.



Family Honor and Tribal Loyalty

Tribal identity shapes much of Saudi social life. When someone leaves Islam, it is seen not only as a religious betrayal but also as a tribal shame. Documented persecution includes forced divorce, forced marriage, confiscation of passports, freezing of bank accounts, beatings, and house arrest, all perpetrated by family or tribal members to restore honor.

In 2024, at least dozens of Christians were forced to relocate either within or outside of Saudi Arabia because of their conversion—a direct result of pressure from families or tribes.

The Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), although publicly weakened, continues to quietly report suspected Christians to authorities or families, especially in more conservative tribal areas.



Enforcing Religious Conformity

Saudi Arabia remains a monarchy where dissent is quickly silenced. The ruling family, especially Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, seeks to preserve the kingdom's Islamic image, particularly as the custodian of Mecca and Medina.

In 2024, two MBBs were arrested. While not all such arrests target Christians specifically, MBBs often draw state response only after community or family members alert the authorities, confirming that the regime acts to enforce religious conformity under pressure.

Additionally, Saudi authorities routinely block or censor Christian media, and Christian organizations are forbidden from using mass media to present their faith. Even sermons in compound-based fellowships have been monitored randomly, especially if there is any suspicion of anti-Islamic content or evangelism.

Despite some softening of religious police powers and social reforms, the public expression of non-Islamic faith remains banned, and no Bible-related material can be distributed legally, especially in Arabic.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN SAUDI ARABIA

Against the backdrop of persecution, censorship, and overwhelming societal pressure, Bible access in Saudi Arabia remains low. An estimated number of **at least 50,000** Bibles are needed to bridge the gap and support the growth of the church.

Slow Growth In Need of God's Word

Despite being one of the world's most restrictive environments for Christians, the church in Saudi Arabia has modestly grown the last five years. This slow hidden growth, primarily fueled by underground fellowships, private Bible study groups, and online engagement with Christian content, reveals a silent revival. The need for Bibles is compounding. As more hearts turn toward Christ, the demand for Scripture is growing faster than access can provide.

Bible Formats for Unique Needs

Printed Bibles are the most urgently needed format, especially for expatriate workers and new believers who cannot easily access digital resources due to surveillance. **Audio formats** are also proving valuable, making access more discreet and manageable in the midst of pressure and persecution.

THE CLARION CALL

This is an urgent call to the global church. Saudi Arabia is not unreachable. God is already moving. But the gap between spiritual hunger and Scripture access must be closed. This moment demands boldness, innovation, and sacrificial partnership.

Whether through print Bibles, discreet digital access, or translated audio and video Scripture, we must rise to meet this call.

Every believer in Saudi Arabia, seen or unseen, deserves the life-transforming truth of God's Word in a format and language they can understand. Let us not delay. The time to act is now.

