



Bible Access List

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

Syria

Bible Restrictions Rank: **35**
CONSIDERABLE ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **41**
Bible needs estimate between fifty and one hundred thousand



An Overview of Bible access in Syria

Syria is home to over 24 million people, with a Christian population comprising just over 3%, roughly 770,000 individuals. Of these believers, it is estimated that just over half of them have access to the Bible. Once a vibrant presence in the region’s religious and cultural landscape, Christians in Syria now face deeply rooted challenges in accessing the Scripture due to years of war, religious intolerance, displacement, and government control.

Bible access in Syria is marked by considerable restrictions, many of which have persisted across changing regimes. Under previous government rule, all Bible imports required special permits, especially Kurdish-language Bibles, which were explicitly prohibited. While the current regime’s position on Bible imports remains unclear, early indications suggest that the same limitations still apply, particularly in areas now governed by groups such as Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

Printing Bibles domestically also remains complex. It is technically possible through licensed printing houses, but the process is bureaucratically intensive and monitored. Although Bible ownership for traditional Christians within church contexts is largely tolerated, access for Muslim-background believers (MBBs) is virtually nonexistent. For MBBs and Muslims exploring the Christian faith, discovery can lead to violent repercussions from family or society.

Adding to the difficulty is Syria’s massive internal displacement crisis. Over 6.8 million people are internally displaced, and a total of 12 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes. For many of these IDPs who fled from regions once dominated by ISIS, HTS, or Turkish-backed militias, accessing a Bible becomes nearly impossible.

Meanwhile, economic hardship is at an all-time high. Around 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line, and for many Christian families, purchasing a Bible is not a priority. Even digital Bible formats face barriers, since less than 40% of the population is connected to the internet.

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

How can I pray for Syria?

- **Protection and Access Opportunities.** Pray for the safety of believers, especially those in HTS or Turkish-backed territories, and for new, safe ways to access Scripture without detection.
- **Courage and Provision for MBBs.** Ask God to strengthen Muslim-background believers, who face some of the most severe consequences if discovered with a Bible.
- **Breakthrough and Peace.** Pray that the new political dynamics would not harden restrictions further and that freedom of religious expression—including Bible access—would increase across all regions.

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

Bible Access Restrictions

Some Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions
- Print restrictions
- Storage restrictions
- Ownership restrictions
- Distribution restrictions

Other Limiting Factors

Considerable Other Factors

- Extremely Poor
- Poor internet access
- Extremely poor infrastructure

Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is over 50%, **estimated** Bible need is between 50 and 100 thousand
- Impacted by armed conflicts

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 24,348,000

Christian population:

770,000, 3.16% of total population

World Watch List: #18

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN SYRIA?

Access to Bibles in Syria is hindered by a web of structural, political, and societal barriers. These obstacles vary greatly depending on who controls the region and the type of Christian community present.

Permits and Bureaucracy

In government-controlled areas before the recent regime change, the import and printing of Bibles required government permits, particularly for non-Arabic translations like Kurdish. These permits were technically obtainable but difficult to secure, creating de facto restrictions for over 2 million Kurdish speakers.

Printing Bibles also requires licensed facilities, and while some underground printing did occur, it involved risk if discovered. It remains unclear how the new government under HTS control will handle these processes, leaving the future of Bible access uncertain.

Area-Based Restrictions and Conflict Zones

In territories controlled by radical Islamic groups such as HTS and Turkish-supported factions, Bible access is virtually nonexistent. In these areas, church buildings have been destroyed, repurposed, or closed. Christian gatherings are banned, and public expressions of faith, such as owning or distributing Bibles, are punishable and dangerous.

Christians remaining in these zones live in secrecy, and any efforts to distribute Scripture face severe risk. Even in areas where Christians have returned, such as parts of Idlib, restrictions on church bells and crosses persist, indicating only a limited tolerance at best.

Muslim Background Believers and Social Rejection

For Muslim Background believers or MBBs in Syria, the risk of possessing or sharing a Bible is extreme. MBBs face family rejection, societal ostracism, and threats of violence or death. In Sunni-majority or tribal regions, clan-based pressures often result in forced divorces, loss of custody, or complete disownment.

These dynamics create a chilling effect that prevents access and hinders the open use of Scripture.

Surveillance and Censorship

Throughout much of Syria, especially under previous Assad control, sermons and Christian publications were monitored. Government officials often visited churches to inspect activities, checking for political messaging or missionary efforts. This kind of surveillance discouraged the open use or distribution of Bibles. While some Christian materials were permitted within church grounds or bookshops, any broader dissemination was constrained by fear of violating vague laws about "public order".

Digital and Infrastructure Challenges

While mobile coverage exists in urban centers, internet penetration across Syria remains low (around 35%), and power outages are widespread—especially in rural or conflict-prone areas. This severely limits access to online or app-based Bibles. In areas under militant control, using Christian apps or websites could lead to accusations of evangelism or espionage, putting users at risk.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Syria

Syria	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 strong	Very weak	Very weak	Strong	Medium	Very weak	Not at all	Very strong	Strong	
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 Syria, a complex combination of persecution operates simultaneously to restrict Bible access, including **Islamic oppression**, **dictatorial paranoia**, **clan oppression**, **organized corruption and crime**, and **Christian denominational protectionism**. These are driven by violent religious groups, government officials, clan leaders, and even family members, each exerting distinct forms of pressure that obstruct Scripture access.

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 Syria?

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.



Banned Scripture and Life-Threatening Risks for MBBs

Islamic oppression is the most dominant force restricting Bible access in Syria. In areas controlled by groups such as Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham and Turkish-backed Islamist militias, churches have been closed, destroyed, or repurposed into Islamic centers. In Idlib province, where HTS governs, Christian clergy are forbidden from wearing clerical clothing publicly, and church bells and crosses have been banned.

Christians in these areas face systemic discrimination. In Sere Kaniye (Ras al-Ayn)—a once-thriving Christian city—nearly all Christian residents have been displaced since the Turkish invasion in 2019. Those who remain face harassment, property seizure, and arrests. In November 2023, two Christian men were detained for requesting the return of their seized properties.

MBBs across Syria are under constant threat, especially in Sunni-majority areas where conversion is viewed as treason. Public distribution of Bibles in these regions is not only impossible—it's dangerous. In Idlib, the few Christians who remain hide their faith, and evangelism is punishable by death.



Christianity Under Authoritarian Control

Before the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, the government maintained tight control over religious activities. Churches were routinely monitored by security officers who reviewed sermons for political content and questioned pastors about new attendees, especially if there was suspicion of evangelism or conversion efforts.

Distribution of Christian materials was subject to penal code enforcement. While not officially outlawed, public distribution of Bibles outside church walls was treated as a threat to public order. Bible work could only happen inside monasteries, bookstores, or licensed churches—limiting its reach, particularly for those outside Historical Christian communities.

This paranoia extended to Christian soldiers and civil servants. Some were reportedly assigned more dangerous duties or denied promotions. MBBs were closely watched by local officials and occasionally reported by their own families or church leaders. In some cases, government actors aligned with Orthodox clergy denied permission for Evangelical conferences or new church buildings.



Family and Tribal Honor Silence MBBs

In southern regions like Daraa and Suwayda, and in tribal areas of central and northeast Syria, family and clan systems exert strong pressure against any deviation from religious norms. MBBs are often disowned or worse. In many cases, religious and ethnic leaders sanction these responses, sometimes justifying the seizure of property or threats to the MBB's life.

Even in Kurdish areas that have historically been more tolerant, tribal dynamics and Islamic conservatism remain potent in rural and desert regions. The cultural shame associated with conversion often leads to covert faith and isolation from Christian communities, and access to Bibles becomes nearly impossible as a result.



: Looting, Kidnappings, and Bribes Block Access

In the chaos of war and lawlessness, Bible distribution is also thwarted by corruption and opportunistic crime. Christian families, especially in the Latakia region, which is seen as relatively stable, report kidnappings of young Christians, with suspicions that security forces may be complicit. These acts are often financially motivated, as Christians are viewed as both wealthy and politically weak.

In northern and northeastern Syria, radical Islamic groups and Turkish-backed militias have seized hundreds of Christian homes and businesses. Between October 2019 and January 2020, properties were looted or reassigned to Muslim families linked to armed groups. In these areas, there is virtually no access to Bibles or Christian spaces.

Bribery is routine. Christians attempting to cross military checkpoints or access health care are often required to pay under the table. This systemic favoritism for Muslims further isolates Christians economically and socially, reducing their ability to secure or share Christian literature.



Institutional Barriers Against Evangelicals and MBBs

Tensions between church groups have also restricted Bible access. Leaders from Historical Churches, particularly Greek Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox, have used their influence to block Evangelical outreach. In 2020, they successfully lobbied the government to ban all Evangelical activities outside church buildings, effectively cutting off broader distribution of Bibles.

In northeast Syria, Syriac Orthodox leaders reportedly tried to prevent the construction of an Evangelical church. MBBs and Evangelical believers are often denied legitimacy by Historical Church authorities, with some leaders even teaching their congregants that Evangelicals are heretics and that their churches are not real churches.

This intra-Christian hostility creates social stigma and restricts the safe circulation of Bibles among new believers, particularly those without ties to traditional denominations.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN SYRIA

Against the backdrop of persecution, poverty, and language diversity, Bible access in Syria remains alarmingly low. Despite the country's long Christian heritage and deep spiritual roots, a significant portion are left without the daily strengthening of God's Word. To meet this pressing need, it is estimated **that 50 to 100,000 Bibles** are required to bridge the gap. This will help supply the believers already present.

A Growing Church in a Fragile Nation

Remarkably, despite the war, displacement, and persecution, the Church in Syria has expanded during the last five years. This growth reflects not just numbers, but a spiritual hunger rising from the ashes of conflict. But growth without access to Scripture is like trying to plant a garden in a desert. Discipleship, evangelism, and the formation of resilient faith cannot flourish without Bibles, especially in regions where new believers are emerging amid trauma, poverty, and cultural pressure.

Bible Formats to Meet Diverse Needs

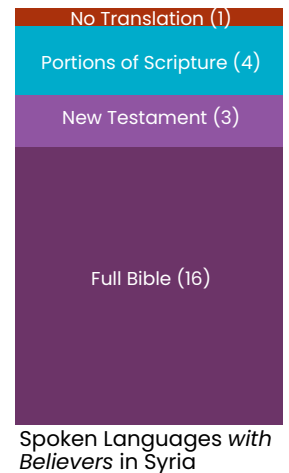
In Syria, the most urgent is the **printed format**, particularly in regions where electricity is unreliable and mobile access is low. Only around 35% of the population has internet access, and many rural areas still lack stable power. **Digital Bibles are also an effective format** in urban centers where there is internet connectivity.

The Translation Gap

Syria's linguistic diversity adds another layer of urgency. Christians across the country speak at least 24 different languages. Of these languages:

- Only **16** of these have a full Bible translation
- **3** languages only have the New Testament
- **4** have only Scripture portions translated
- **1 more language remains entirely without translation**

These gaps leave entire communities spiritually isolated, unable to engage with Scripture in their heart language. For new MBBs, especially among the Kurdish and Druze populations, this language gap severely hinders discipleship and outreach.



THE CLARION CALL

answer the cry of a church. These are believers who have lost homes, families, and communities, yet cling to Christ.

Now, they are crying out for the one thing that can sustain and grow their faith: access to God's Word. To meet this need, we must act with compassion and urgency.

This is a clarion call to the global Church—pastors, mission leaders, Bible agencies, and believers worldwide—to respond. Whether through translation work, covert distribution, or supporting local partners, the time to act is now. Every Bible placed in Syria is a light in the darkness, a seed of hope in a land that longs for healing.

Let us not delay. The Church in Syria is standing strong. But it cannot stand alone.

