



Bible Access List

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

Turkmenistan



Bible Restrictions Rank: **10**
EXTREME ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **60**
Bible needs estimate is less than ten thousand



An Overview of Bible access in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan, a nation of nearly 6.6 million people, has one of the smallest Christian populations in Central Asia—just below 3% or approximately 160,000 plus people. Already challenged by being a minority, believers face some of the harshest restrictions on religious freedom in the world. Making matters worse, it is estimated that no less than half of them have access to Scripture.

The situation in Turkmenistan is severe. All Christian materials, especially Bibles, must be approved by the State Commission on Religious Organizations and Expert Evaluation of Religious Information Resources. This council rarely, if ever, grants permission for Christian materials to enter the country. Bibles are frequently confiscated during police raids on homes and churches. Those caught storing, distributing, or importing unauthorized Scriptures face steep consequences, ranging from heavy fines to long-term prison sentences.

For non-Orthodox Christians, especially Muslim background believers (MBBs), owning a Bible is not only forbidden but dangerous. Many MBBs are forced into secrecy, hiding their faith even from close relatives. Being found with a Bible can lead to interrogation, harassment, physical beatings, and complete ostracization from family and community. Some women are subjected to forced marriage or house arrest to silence their faith. While expatriates are generally permitted to retain personal copies of their Bibles, locals face an entirely different reality.

Even digital access is a huge challenge. The Internet is only available to a little over a fifth of the population, and most Christian websites are blocked. The government maintains strict surveillance, tracking users who attempt to bypass censorship with VPNs. Those caught face significant penalties, including detention. Mobile devices are regularly searched, and any Christian content can serve as evidence against a person in court. In this environment, simply downloading or reading the Bible becomes an act of courage.

On paper, Turkmenistan appears to be upper-middle class, but there's a huge gap between the rich and poor. The country faces widespread poverty despite its natural gas wealth. Food shortages, inflation, and unemployment leave much of the population struggling with basic needs. For Christians already living under pressure, this economic strain makes it increasingly difficult to afford or access Bibles even through informal means.

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

How can I pray for Turkmenistan?

- **For Access to Bibles.** Pray for innovative and safe ways for Bibles to reach the small Christian community who are currently without access.
- **For Governmental Change.** Intercede for Turkmenistan's leaders, that their hearts may be moved to allow greater freedom for the distribution and possession of Bibles, enabling the church to grow and for the Gospel to spread.
- **For Strategic Partnerships.** Seek the Lord's provision in forming strong partnerships within the global Christian community, aimed at facilitating the flow of Bibles into Turkmenistan.

After praying for Turkmenistan, 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 population
- No distribution

Other Limiting Factors



Some Other Factors

- Very poor internet access
- Poor infrastructure

Bible Shortages Among Believers



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

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 6,598,000

Christian population:

- 164,000, 2.49% of total population

World Watch List: #29

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN TURKMENISTAN?

A Nation Under Fear and Control

In Turkmenistan, the government exerts one of the world's most intense systems of control over religion. While the constitution claims to guarantee religious freedom, the reality for Christians is vastly different. All religious activity outside of state-sanctioned structures is prohibited. Protestant Christians, especially those not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church, face constant surveillance, arbitrary raids, and legal penalties.

Any group must register with the government, a process that is deliberately complex and tightly monitored. Congregations that fail to register are deemed illegal and cannot legally gather, print, import, or distribute Christian materials. Attempting to do so invites fines, harassment, or imprisonment.

Surveillance and Seizures

The printing or importing of Bibles is extremely restricted. All religious materials must undergo strict government screening, and unauthorized literature is regularly confiscated and destroyed.

During raids, police often seize personal belongings (phones, computers, and tablets) to scan for Christian content. Even in registered churches, state agents attend services to monitor sermons and attendees.

Community Pressure and Secret Faith

MBBs face even harsher realities. Beyond state surveillance, they endure extreme social pressure from their families and communities. In rural areas, they are often beaten, placed under house arrest, or expelled from their communities.

Many are forced to live as secret believers to avoid further abuse. The discovery of a Bible or Christian media, whether digital or printed, can trigger violent retaliation from family members.

Digital Barriers

Digital access to the Bible is also severely restricted. Turkmenistan ranks among the lowest in the world for internet access, with only a little over 20% of the population connected.

Even for those who do have internet, foreign Christian websites are blocked, and internet usage is heavily monitored by the state. Slow connection speeds further prevent the downloading or streaming of Scripture-based content.

As one report puts it, Turkmenistan's internet speeds are slower than even many war-torn countries.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan	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 ↓	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	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 Turkmenistan, multiple forces of persecution operate simultaneously to restrict Bible access, including **dictatorial paranoia**, **Islamic oppression**, and **clan oppression**. These are fueled by government officials, Muslim religious leaders, local ethnic and clan authorities, and even extended family and everyday citizens.

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 Turkmenistan?

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.



Government Surveillance and Control

The Turkmen government maintains very strong authoritarian control over all religious expression, particularly targeting groups outside state-sanctioned religious structures. Unregistered churches, many of which are Protestant, are routinely raided, their Bibles confiscated, and members fined or detained.

In 2024, a church leader reported that police confiscated all digital devices during a raid and inspected them for Christian content. Any evidence of unauthorized Bible ownership is considered grounds for punishment. Another pastor was forced to leave the country after fabricated accusations were used to target him.

Even registered churches like the Russian Orthodox may be monitored during Sunday services. Meanwhile, Christian organizations are forbidden by law, and the importation or printing of religious materials, especially Bibles, is illegal without state approval. In most cases, Bibles are either denied entry or destroyed upon inspection.

Christian preaching, teaching, and materials are systematically censored, with the State Commission on Religious Organizations overseeing and restricting all religious literature. These tactics not only limit Bible access but create a culture of fear, leading many Christians to self-censor and practice their faith in secret.



Islamic Oppression Blended with Clan Oppression: Social Shaming and Family Reprisal

While the state is officially secular, societal and familial pressures, rooted in Islamic tradition and clan loyalty, exert intense persecution on MBBs. These forms of oppression are especially powerful in rural regions, where local imams, community leaders, and family members operate together to isolate or punish those who leave Islam.



MBBs frequently experience physical violence, house arrest, and forced expulsion from their homes. In 2024 alone, over 500 Christians were reported to have been physically or mentally abused, with the majority of cases occurring within the family. Beatings, threats, and forced isolation were common. One notable example: an MBB was forcibly detained and interrogated by their own relatives after religious literature was discovered in their home.

Community enforcement is deeply entrenched. Mahalla (local neighborhood) committees, backed by government authority, are empowered to restrict missionary activity, monitor Christian gatherings, and ban any Bible distribution viewed as proselytism. These local bodies often act in coordination with imams and family networks to report MBBs or confiscate materials.

Pressure also extends to the next generation. Children of MBBs are often harassed in schools, ridiculed, and forced to attend Islamic classes against their family's wishes. Weddings, baptisms, and Christian funerals are often blocked by the surrounding community or local authorities when the participants are known to be MBBs.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN TURKMENISTAN

Against the backdrop of systemic persecution, government censorship, and heavy restrictions on Christian literature, Bible access in Turkmenistan remains critically low. It is estimated that less than half of them have access to Scripture, meaning even fewer **than 10,000 Bibles** would significantly bridge the gap.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

Despite the pressure, the church in Turkmenistan is growing. Over the past five years, the Christian population has increased which is a remarkable trend in one of the world's most repressive nations.

As new believers turn to Christ, the demand for Bibles grows, yet the supply remains dangerously insufficient. Equipping these believers with Scripture is essential for discipleship, encouragement, and evangelism in an environment that punishes both faith and freedom.

Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

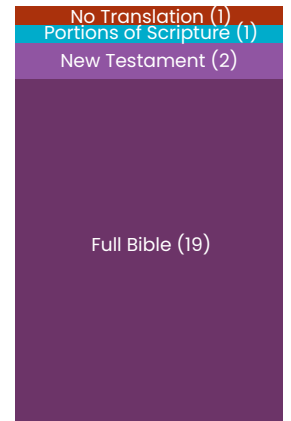
In a country where digital communication is heavily censored and monitored, **print Bibles are the top priority**. **Digital Bible resources accessed through the internet** have their place, especially in urban centers.

The Translation Gap

Language translation is another barrier that must be solved. Among the 23 languages spoken by Christians in Turkmenistan:

- **19** languages have the full Bible translation
- **2** have only the New Testament translated
- **1** has just portions of Scripture translated
- **1 more language still has no Scripture translation at all**

This linguistic gap further limits access for entire communities waiting for God’s Word in their heart language. Accelerating Bible translation projects is critical to ensure that every Christian can read, hear, and share the Gospel.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Turkmenistan

THE CLARION CALL

The need for Bibles in Turkmenistan is urgent, not just because of scarcity, but because of hunger. The church has more than doubled in the last 5 years in the midst of harsh restrictions. Every new believer, every underground church, every isolated MBB represents a flame of hope in a country shadowed by fear and control.

Providing Bibles in the languages people understand, and in the formats they can access, is not just a logistical issue, it is a mission for the international Body of Christ.

The global Church has a role to play: through prayer, advocacy, and radical generosity, we can equip the believers of Turkmenistan with the only weapon they need in a dark and difficult land—the Word of God.

Let us answer this call together. Now is the time.



7.9%
Annual Church Growth



Bibles needed for both
Believers & Seekers



<10k
Bible needs estimate



Printed Bible
Preferred Format



Internet Bible
Format 2nd Priority

The Bible Access List (BAL) and the Country Profile utilizes data from various primary and secondary sources. Key resources include the survey data, World Christian Database, Open Doors' World Watch List files, World Bank development indicators, and Bible translation data from multiple organizations. For a complete list of data sources and links, please refer to the BAL Methodology available at Bibleaccesslist.org.