



# Yemen

Bible Restrictions Rank: **3**  
**EXTREME ACCESS RESTRICTIONS**

Bible Shortage Rank: **72**  
**Bible needs estimate is less than ten thousand**



## An Overview of Bible access in Yemen

Yemen is a nation of over 35 million people—but within this population, the Christian community is barely visible, estimated at just over 17,000 believers. That’s not even 0.1% of the population. Among these believers, Bible access is nearly impossible. Estimates show that less than one-third, and likely even fewer, have access to a Bible.

Under Yemen’s Sharia-based legal system, importing, printing, distributing, or publicly owning a Bible is strictly forbidden. Any perceived effort to share the Christian faith is considered blasphemy or apostasy, punishable by death. Even possessing Christian materials privately can lead to honor killings, particularly in the tribal regions where Islam is deeply embedded in ethnic and social identity. The discovery of a Bible, whether printed or digital, can result in execution, imprisonment, or forced expulsion from one’s home. The hostility towards Christianity is mainly enforced by this main entity, the Houthi—a radical Islamic group that gained control of the country.

While expatriates were previously allowed to worship in private, even this has largely ended since the onset of civil war in 2015. Christian migrants and refugees—primarily from Ethiopia and Eritrea—face heightened risks, including forced conversion, abuse, and arbitrary detention, especially in Houthi-controlled areas where being both African and Christian is viewed as a double offense.

Yemen’s broader context further deepens the crisis. The country remains locked in a prolonged civil war, with over 80% of the population now living under the Houthi regime, which tightly polices religious expression and represses dissent. In Houthi areas, informants spy on neighbors and turn in suspected MBBs to local authorities. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other Sunni extremists operate in the South, making no region truly safe for Christians.

Poverty and displacement add yet another layer. Yemen is enduring one of the worst humanitarian crises globally, with two-thirds of the population dependent on aid and over 4.5 million people displaced. Christians are frequently denied humanitarian aid unless they conform to Islamic expectations, leaving many physically and spiritually starving.

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

### How can I pray for Yemen?

- **Safety for Believers.** The ongoing civil war has escalated dangers for Christians, making even underground gatherings risky. Pray for their protection and divine safety as they navigate their faith in such perilous conditions.
- **Relief Efforts.** With over 4.5 million IDPs and two-thirds of the population relying on humanitarian aid, pray that relief efforts—especially those by Christian organizations—are effective and discreetly provide access to the Word of God.
- **End to Conflict.** Pray for peace in Yemen. Ask God to soften the hearts of leaders and factions and bring an end to the war. May this open doors for healing, restoration, and the spread of the Gospel.

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

### Bible Access Restrictions

#### Extreme Access Restrictions

- No Importing
- No Printing
- No Storage
- No Ownership
- No distribution

### Other Limiting Factors

#### Severe Other Factors

- Extremely poor
- Poor internet access
- Extremely poor infrastructure
- <50% literacy

### Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is low, **estimated** Bible need is <10 thousand
- Impacted by armed conflicts

**Main religion:** Islam

**Country population:** 35,220,000

**Christian population:**

17,200, 0.05% of total population

**World Watch List:** #3

# WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN YEMEN?

## Deadly Consequences for Conversion

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In Yemen, Bible access is blocked by a perfect storm of extreme religious persecution, legal restrictions, and civil war. Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy, punishable by death, and while judicial executions are rare, extra-judicial killings—especially by family members or terrorist groups—are not uncommon.

Muslim Background believers or MBBs, who make up nearly the entire indigenous church, must practice their faith in secret. Possession of Christian materials, especially Bibles, is extremely dangerous and can lead to imprisonment, physical abuse, or even execution.

## Surveillance, Spying, and Betrayal

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The discovery of Christian gatherings or materials can be met with harsh retaliation, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas, where internal security forces actively monitor for signs of conversion and dissent. These areas are tightly surveilled, and local citizens often report suspected Christians to authorities to maintain favor or simply survive in a resource-scarce environment.

Even in areas outside Houthi control, radical groups like al-Qaeda and IS wield considerable influence, creating danger zones where owning or sharing Scripture is a life-threatening risk.

## Poverty and Infrastructure Collapse

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Furthermore, systemic challenges such as widespread poverty and a collapsed infrastructure severely hinder Bible access. Many Christians are unemployed or have no regular income, making even a printed Bible unaffordable.

Digital access is not a viable solution either—barely a third of the population is connected to the internet, and surveillance is particularly strong in Houthi regions.

# Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Yemen

Yemen	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	Not at all	Not at all	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Strong	Medium	
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 Yemen, multiple forces of persecution operate simultaneously to restrict Bible access, including **Islamic oppression, clan oppression, dictatorial paranoia, and organized corruption and crime.** These are fueled by a range of actors including government officials, violent religious groups, tribal leaders, and even one's own family members.

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 Yemen?

## 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.



### Bibles Banned, MBBs Hunted

Islamic oppression is the primary force restricting Bible access in Yemen. The constitution declares Islam as the state religion and Sharia as the source of all legislation. Muslims are forbidden from converting to another religion, and proselytism by other faiths is banned. In such an environment, even owning a Bible, especially by a MBB, can be considered a capital offense.

Radical Islamic groups such as the Houthis, AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), and IS (Islamic State) routinely target Christians. These groups often operate with impunity, especially in areas where government oversight is weak or non-existent. In 2024, at least one Christian MBB was killed by family members because of his faith. Additionally, dozens of informal Christian fellowships were forced to stop meeting due to a deteriorating security situation, largely driven by the growing power of the Houthis.

Houthi forces have also been documented vilifying MBBs and actively stopping Christian activities. As a result, many believers were forced to flee Houthi-controlled areas. In some cases, Christian materials were confiscated and destroyed when discovered by authorities or neighbors.



### **Tribal Law Means Death for MBBs**

Tribal law in Yemen supersedes the national constitution in many regions, and Islam is deeply intertwined with tribal identity. MBBs from Islam are viewed as traitors to their tribe and faith. The consequences are often deadly.

In 2024, there were reports of Christian daughters being forced into marriages with Muslim men by their families, a form of coercion aimed at correcting their religious beliefs. Families who discover a MBB family member are known to retaliate violently, often with the intent to kill. Honor killings for conversion to Christianity are carried out with no legal repercussions, especially when conducted by tribal or family members.

One notable driver of this oppression is the caste-like discrimination against the Muhameshen (Akhdam), a marginalized group of African descent. If someone from this group is also a Christian, they are subjected to total exclusion from public services, including health care and education.



### **Houthi Surveillance and Arrests**

Yemen's fragmented governance creates pockets of authoritarian control, especially in Houthi-dominated territories. The Houthis view religious minorities, particularly MBBs, as threats to their ideological order.

After October 7, 2023, the influence of the Houthis surged, resulting in increased crackdowns on Christian fellowships, many of which were forced to cease entirely due to the threat of arrest and surveillance. In the same year up to 2024, several Christians were detained—some under fabricated charges—to avoid openly acknowledging their religious identity as the true cause of arrest.

In June 2024, the Houthis carried out a mass arrest of at least 35 UN and humanitarian organization workers, including women, in a broader crackdown on perceived foreign influence. Though not exclusively targeting Christians, such acts further demonstrate the climate of fear in which underground Christian communities must survive.



## Exploiting Christians for Profit

Lawlessness and corruption in Yemen leave Christians highly vulnerable to exploitation. In 2024, Christian detainees were held for extended periods by prison guards demanding bribes for their release.

There are also documented cases of abductions, where Christians were kidnapped by violent religious groups or revolutionary factions in exchange for ransom. The assumption that Christians, especially migrants or expatriates, have access to Western funding often makes them prime targets.

# THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN YEMEN

Against the backdrop of extreme persecution, war, and widespread poverty, Bible access in Yemen is nearly nonexistent. Without exaggeration, even less than **10,000 Bibles** would already make an impact to meet the spiritual need in the country.

## A Church Growing Slowly in Desperate Need of God's Word

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Despite unimaginable risks, the church in Yemen is slowly growing, a striking testament to the work of God amid crisis. But this growth intensifies the urgency: more believers mean a greater demand for God's Word.

Without access to Scripture, new believers cannot be discipled, and seekers have no way to explore the truth for themselves. In a country where MBBs are forced into secrecy and often disowned, the Bible becomes not just a guide but a lifeline.

## Bible Formats for Unique Needs

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When it comes to Bible formats, digital access through **Bible apps** is the top priority, given the need for discreet and mobile solutions. **Audio formats** follow closely, especially for those who are illiterate or in hiding. But these formats still face significant obstacles since just a third of the population has internet access, and digital surveillance by Houthi authorities adds additional danger.

# THE CLARION CALL

The need for Bibles in Yemen is not merely a question of logistics—it's a cry for survival. For persecuted believers who are risking everything to follow Jesus, access to Scripture means encouragement, strength, and truth. It is a shield against despair and a weapon of hope.

The global Church must respond with urgency, strategy, and compassion. This is a call to act: to accelerate translation efforts, to distribute Bibles in creative and secure ways, and to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Yemen.

We must see that every believer has access to the living Word of God.



Bibles needed for both  
**Believers  
& Seekers**



**<10k**  
Bible needs estimate



**Bible  
App**  
Preferred Format



**Audio  
Bible**  
Format 2nd Priority