

God's Word, Every Nation, Every Language

ACCESS

DIGITAL BIBLE SOCIETY

Winter 2026



**Introducing the
Bible Access List**

Page 3

LETTER FROM KEN BITGOOD

CEO, Ken Bitgood



Dear friends,

I am often deeply moved as I meditate on what God's Word says about itself:

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (John 14:23-24)

and again...

Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32 NASB)

The promises surrounding life in God's Word, living in it, continuing in it, and abiding in it, are extraordinary and precious. God's Word has profoundly shaped my own life, and I believe that if you are reading this, it has likely shaped yours as well. Yet, millions worldwide can only dream of obtaining a Bible in a format or language they can understand.

My prayer is that as you read through this publication, your heart will be touched for the tens of millions of believers around the world who, for a wide variety of reasons, do not yet enjoy the daily benefit of living in God's Word. May this issue serve as our call to action, stirring us to invest our prayers, energy, and resources, so that God's Word may spread and be multiplied until every person, in every nation, has access to it. Thank you for joining us in the cause.

Ken Bitgood
CEO at Digital Bible Society

CONTENTS

- 3** INTRODUCING THE BIBLE ACCESS LIST
- 4** BIBLE RESTRICTIONS MAP
- 6** TOP BIBLE RESTRICTIONS COUNTRIES
- 8** BIBLE SHORTAGE MAP
- 10** TOP BIBLE SHORTAGE COUNTRIES
- 12** PARTNER SPOTLIGHTS
- 14** BIBLE ACCESS INITIATIVE
- 15** JOIN OUR MISSION

About the Cover

The Ethiopian man on our cover represents one of the nation's 77 million Christians. Amid widespread poverty and ongoing internal conflicts, only one in three believers have access to Scripture.

Many face insurgent groups and terrorist threats without the hope and comfort of God's Word. As one of the world's poorest countries, Ethiopia struggles with low internet penetration, limited electricity, and literacy rates hovering around 50%, making it extremely difficult for families to own or even access a Bible.

Countless Christians have also lost all their possessions, including their Bibles, while fleeing violence, and churches in several regions have been burned or attacked, further restricting Scripture access.

To honor our friends and partners in persecuted regions of the world, identifying details throughout this publication may have been subject to change for their protection. We appreciate your collaboration as we work to ensure the safety and protection of our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Introducing The



BIBLE ACCESS LIST

DBS believes everyone should have access to the Bible in their heart language. Co-founded by Ken Bitgood, CEO of DBS, and Wybo Nicolai, the founder of the World Watch List, the Bible Access Initiative utilizes collaborative research to supply trustworthy data that guides those working to bring God's Word to people who lack it most.

The Bible Access Initiative is a comprehensive framework designed to evaluate global Bible access and identify areas of shortage. Its mission is to present a research-based global view of Bible availability and Scripture need, enabling the Church to respond with wisdom, urgency, and meaningful impact.

Through extensive research, the Initiative pinpoints and ranks countries according to the level of Bible access limitations and shortage severity. This data-driven methodology equips partners to see where needs are greatest and how to direct resources effectively and unites Bible societies, mission agencies, and funding partners to align efforts, pool resources, and achieve greater impact through coordinated action rather than isolated projects.

Millions around the world still struggle to obtain God's Word because of legal restrictions, persecution, infrastructure challenges, economic barriers, and language gaps.

1

Restrictions Ranking

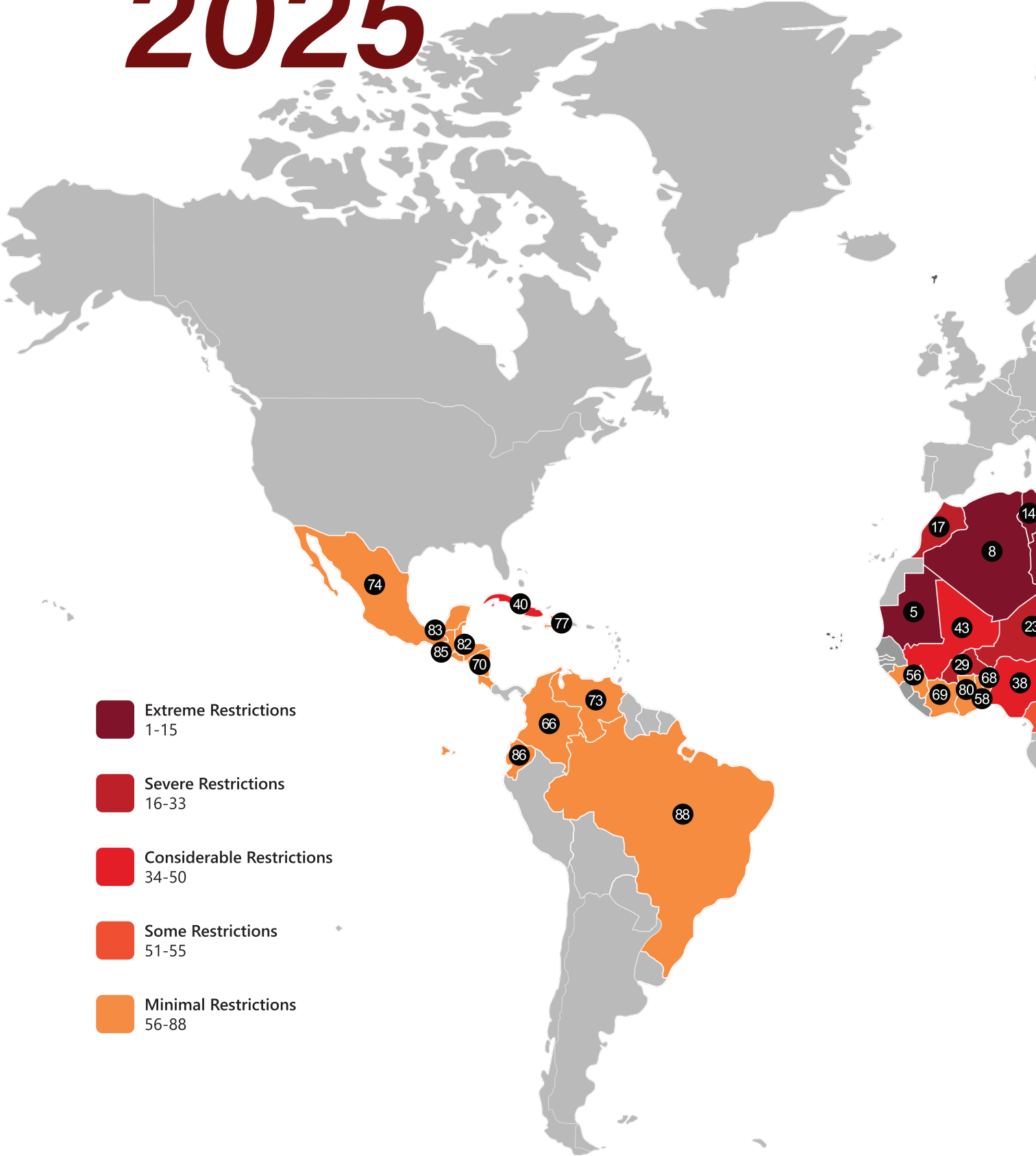
The Bible Access Initiative assesses and ranks countries by the intensity of Bible access limitations, looking at factors such as legal obstacles and societal hostility toward Christianity.

2

Shortage Ranking

The Bible Access Initiative measures Bible shortage levels by combining expressed desire for Scripture, people who want a Bible but do not have one, with ownership statistics, translation status, distribution capacity, and economic accessibility across various regions.

BIBLE RESTRICTIONS RANKING 2025



BIBLE RESTRICTIONS



Somalia

Since 1993, Somalia has been one of the most difficult places in the world to live as a Christian. In 2025, it ranked first on the Bible Restrictions List and second on the World Watch List. The country is plagued by terrorist attacks from Al-Shabaab, an al-Qa'ida affiliate that functions as an opposing government to the federal authorities and seeks to impose Sharia law and eradicate Christianity from the nation, actively seeking out and executing believers.

Beyond militant threats, Christians face rejection and danger from their families and communities, where leaving Islam is seen as rejecting Somali identity. Muslim-background believers are viewed as traitors to their families, clans, and communities, who often serve as the first line of persecution, monitoring suspected Christians and reporting them to authorities or militants. Surveillance is pervasive, including phone calls, emails, and even daily behaviors.

Christians in Somalia live under constant oppression and fear, concealing their faith to avoid harassment, threats, and attacks. Even minor deviations, like a change in dress or beard style, can draw suspicion and lead to interrogation or violence. Al-Shabaab routinely kidnaps Christians to enforce religious conformity and suppress Christianity, and victims are often forced into conversion or marriage. Anyone suspected of leaving Islam remains vulnerable to such extreme measures. The pressure to conform creates an atmosphere of fear and isolation that pervades daily existence.

There are no officially recognized churches in Somalia. Christians are forced to gather secretly in homes for worship, but even these house churches face constant surveillance and threats from both authorities and extremists. The mere suspicion of a house church can trigger raids, harassment, or violence. Despite these harsh conditions, the underground church in Somalia is slowly growing and in need of Bibles. Few Somali children attend school, and more than half of adults are illiterate, a reflection of decades of conflict, drought, and famine. Audio and video Bibles are key resources needed to minister to the hearts of believers.

In Somalia, only a few thousand Bibles could meet the needs of the underground church, providing hope and comfort in the midst of great persecution.

Bible access in Somalia is virtually impossible. Under a strict interpretation of Sharia law, it is illegal to print, import, store, or distribute Bibles. Even the rumor of owning Christian materials can result in execution. Somalia ranks 180 out of 180 on Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index, scoring just 11 out of 100, evidence of deep systemic lawlessness.

Organized crime and jihadist networks such as Al-Shabaab collect illegal taxes and control trade routes, using profits to fund militant operations that target Christians. These networks infiltrate local and national authorities, ensuring that any attempt to smuggle or import Bibles is intercepted or extorted, making Bible access structurally impossible across most of the country.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, believers exist in secrecy and under immense legal and communal pressure. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 tightened restrictions, enforcing harsh interpretations of Sharia law that outlaw Bible ownership, printing, storing, or distributing. Exposure as a Muslim-background believer often leads to forced marriage, imprisonment, or execution.

Under strict Sharia enforcement, conversion is considered apostasy punishable by death, and family or tribal betrayal is common. The Taliban conducts home raids and phone checks, and any sign of Christian belief, such as missing mosque attendance, can bring interrogation or death. Converts lose access to healthcare and community resources, baptisms are secret, and Christian parents often hide their faith from their children. In this climate of surveillance and repression, even a rumor of Bible possession can end a life.

Over half the population lives in poverty, literacy hovers around 40%, and only 18% have internet access, rendering digital Bibles unreliable. Even when available, digital access is dangerous, as the Taliban monitors phones and online activity, making reading Scripture on a mobile device unsafe. Women face additional barriers; banned from secondary school and most work, they are isolated from both education and faith resources. As the violence and tensions increase, millions are displaced, and refugee communities remain cut off from support networks or faith resources.



Yemen

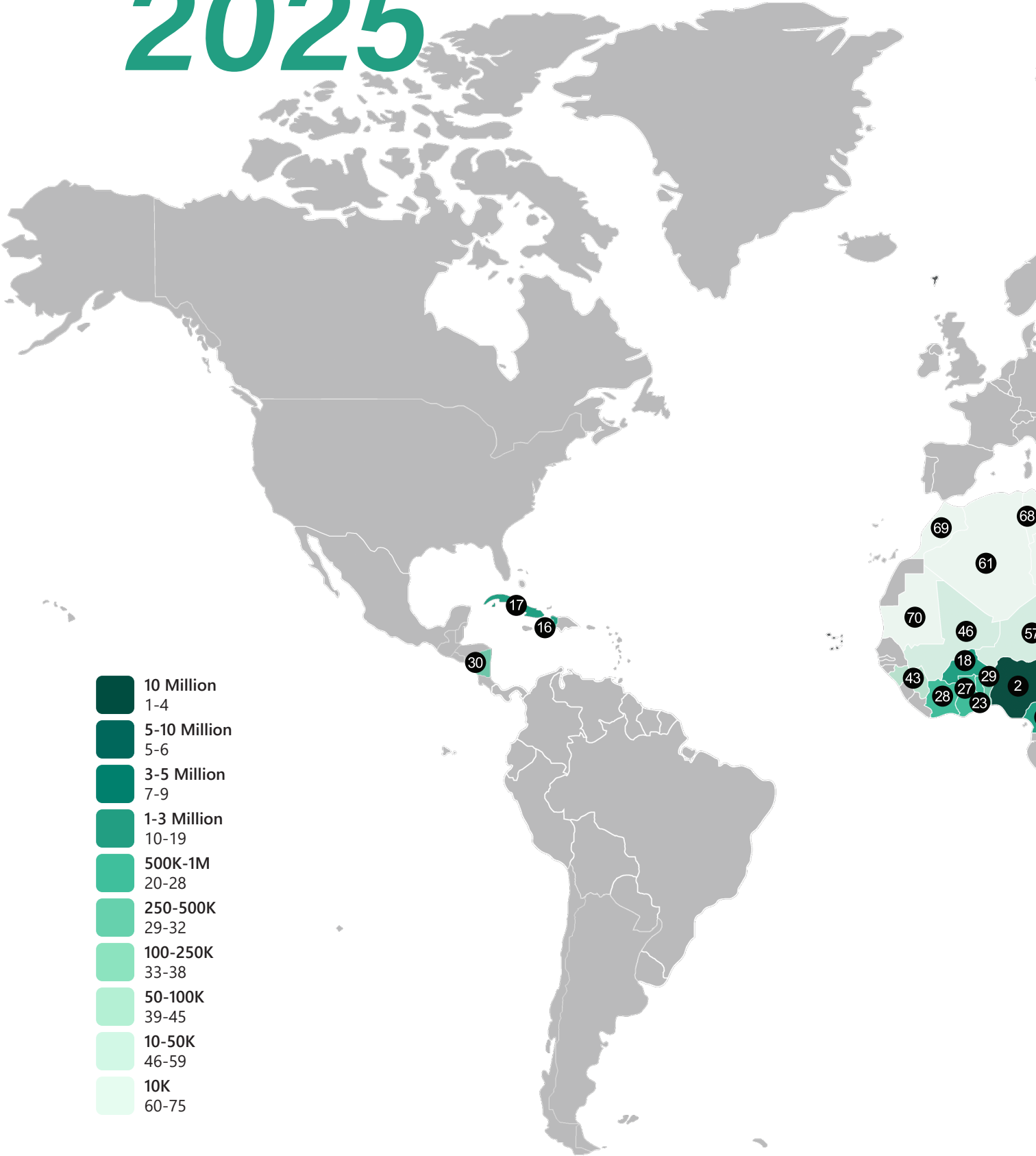
In Yemen, where fewer than one-third of believers worldwide have access to a Bible, Christians live under constant threat in a nation torn by war and extremism. The country remains engulfed in a prolonged civil conflict, with more than 80% of the population under Houthi control, a regime that enforces Sharia law, bans all Bible importation, printing, or distribution, and punishes conversion from Islam with death. Even private possession of Christian materials can lead to imprisonment, execution, or honor killing, especially in tribal regions where Islam is inseparable from social identity.

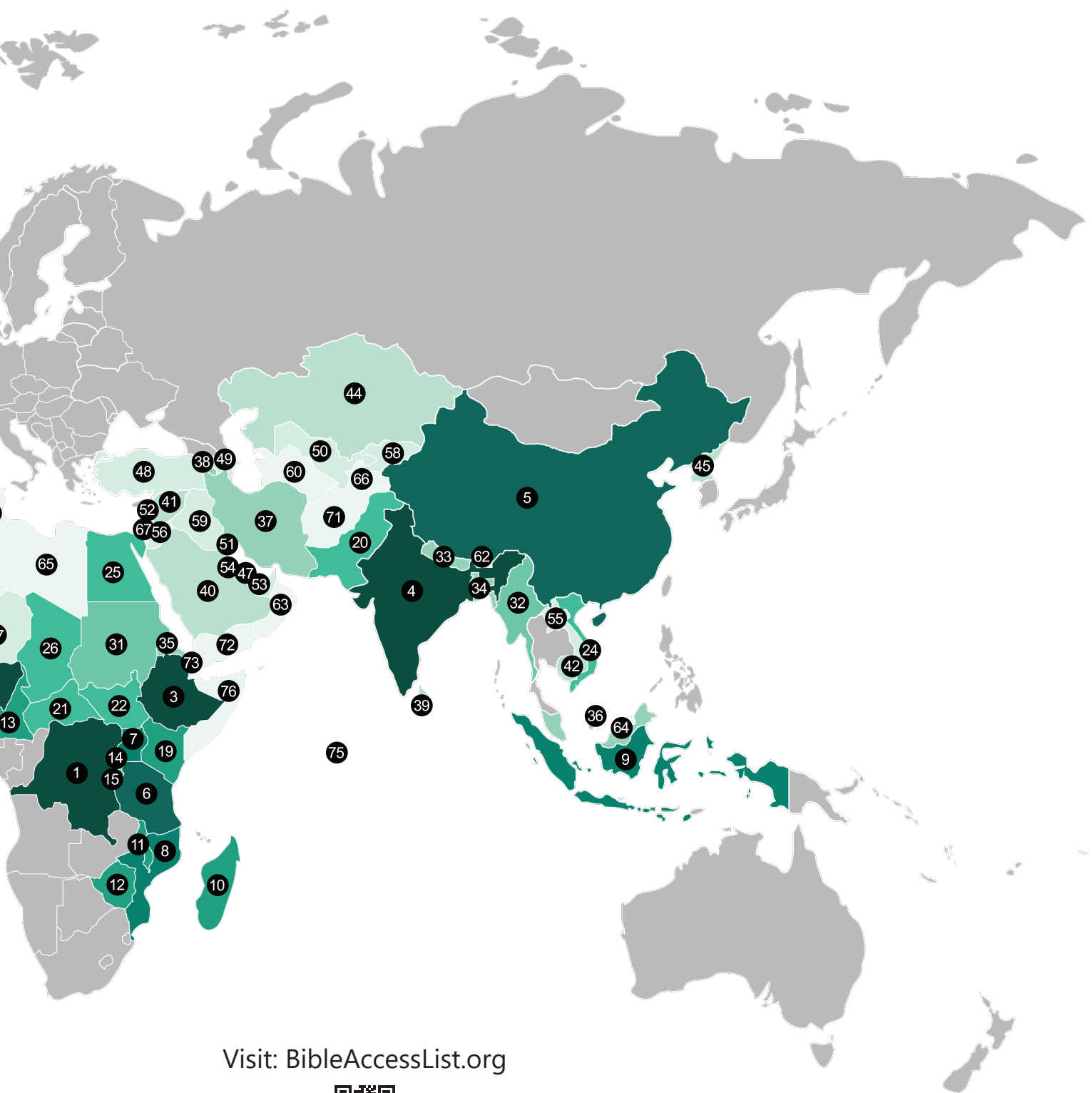
Since seizing power, the Houthis have tightened surveillance, using informants, raids, and arrests to suppress dissent and religious diversity while perpetrating violence, child recruitment, sexual abuse, and attacks on civilians and infrastructure. In Houthi-controlled areas, neighbors are pressured to report suspected Muslim-background believers, while extremist groups like al-Qaeda in the south leave no refuge for Christians. Radical factions routinely target believers, and in 2024, several were detained, killed by relatives, or forced to flee as fellowships disbanded under mounting repression.

Yemen's humanitarian catastrophe, where two-thirds depend on aid and 4.5 million are displaced, further compounds the suffering; Christians are often denied relief unless they conform to Islamic expectations. Tribal law overrides national protections, and conversion is viewed as betrayal of family and faith, frequently resulting in forced marriages or killings, particularly of women. Marginalized groups such as the Muhameshen face even greater exclusion if they convert. In this fractured, lawless environment of corruption and impunity, Christians are vulnerable to extortion, arbitrary detention, and abduction for ransom.



BIBLE SHORTAGE RANKING 2025





Visit: BibleAccessList.org



BIBLE SHORTAGE



Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), access to the Bible remains perilously limited, with only about one-third of believers owning a copy. In the east, armed Islamist groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and rebels like M23 have made Bible possession a life-threatening act.

Christians face targeted attacks: churches burned, homes destroyed, believers abducted or killed, and Scripture eradicated. Pastors are singled out for persecution, churches are forced to close, and believers often worship in secret, hiding their Bibles to avoid fatal punishments. Widespread displacement, over 7 million people internally displaced as of 2024, has deepened this crisis, cutting off entire communities from access to Scripture.

Beyond violence, systemic corruption and poverty make Bible distribution nearly impossible. The DRC ranks among the world's most corrupt nations, scoring only 20/100 on the Corruption Perception Index. Officials and armed groups routinely exploit control of trade and territory to block or extort Christian activity. Bribery and bureaucratic delays hinder Bible shipments, while rebel factions, including ADF, M23, Mai-Mai, and CODECO, seize or destroy Bibles.

Additionally, the Ministry of Justice has not issued final registration permits for religious organizations since 2014, leaving many churches legally unrecognized and

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 10 million Bibles are needed.

- Yet, only 52 languages have a full Bible translation.
- 37 languages have only the New Testament translated.
- 47 have partial Scripture portions translated.
- 99 languages still have no translation at all.

vulnerable to harassment. Over 100 churches and Christian facilities were attacked in the past year, their leaders silenced or punished for speaking out against injustice.

Extreme poverty further compounds these barriers. With more than half the population living below the poverty line and inflation nearing 20%, most Congolese Christians cannot afford a Bible even when available, as they must prioritize food over Scripture. Limited infrastructure worsens access, only about one-fifth of the population has electricity, and internet access remains below 30%. While mobile phone use is increasing, digital Bibles are inaccessible or unsafe in conflict areas where power outages and surveillance are common.

Nigeria

Nigeria, home to Africa's largest Christian population, about 106 million believers, remains one of the most difficult places in the world to have a Bible. Since the 19th-century Sokoto Caliphate, Fulani-led Islamic expansion has shaped religious conflict that persists today. Boko Haram and ISWAP seek to establish an Islamic state through mass killings, bombings, and kidnappings, while Fulani militias push southward, occupying Christian-majority villages and erasing entire communities. Churches are destroyed, pastors targeted, and believers forced to flee, convert, or die. They burn churches, massacre believers, and destroy Christian materials, making Scripture almost impossible to obtain. Simply possessing a Bible can be deadly; in territories controlled by Boko Haram or ISWAP, believers caught with Scripture are executed. The ongoing violence has displaced over 3.3 million people, many living in IDP camps with no access to printed or digital Bibles.

Systemic poverty and underdevelopment compound these challenges. More than 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, leaving most unable to afford a Bible when survival needs take priority. Infrastructure issues, such as low electricity coverage and limited internet access, further restrict access to digital or audio Scripture. In rural regions, power outages and poor connectivity render online Bibles useless, trapping millions in spiritual isolation.



Ethiopia

Ethiopia has about 77 million Christians, roughly 60% of its population, yet only one in three owns or can access a Bible. As one of the world's poorest nations, most families cannot afford basic necessities, making Bible ownership a luxury. Low literacy, just over half of adults can read, reduces the usefulness of printed Bibles, while low internet access, limited electricity, and government censorship hinder digital or audio formats.

Conflicts in Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray have displaced about 4.5 million people, many Christians who fled with nothing. Churches have been burned, looted, or destroyed; pastors kidnapped or killed. In Oromia, ransoms rise when victims are church leaders. Entire communities are cut off from Scripture and worship. Al-Shabaab's rise in Afar, Somali, and Dire Dawa increases danger as Christians are targeted and Bible distribution is restricted. Smuggling Bibles is risky, and local believers often risk their lives to share the Gospel.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), while historically central to Ethiopian Christianity, also contributes to Bible access challenges. Many EOC leaders view Protestant and Evangelical movements as threats to national heritage, leading to resistance against non-Orthodox Bible distribution. EOC-affiliated groups have blocked church construction, opposed Bible translation into local languages, and even confiscated Bibles from non-Orthodox believers. As a result, many Protestants must hide their faith and Scripture materials to avoid retaliation. Government discrimination, censorship, and bureaucracy further restrict Bible imports, Christian materials, and gatherings, leaving many without safe access to God's Word.



Frontlines International

Wybo Nicolai grew up during the communist era, shaped by his parents' wartime experiences and his father's dramatic conversion after finding a discarded Bible, which impressed on the family the value of Scripture.

As he grew older, Wybo prayed for imprisoned believers and sent postcards, igniting a lifelong passion for the persecuted Church. His studies in modern history, focused on socialist and Islamic nations, prepared him for his calling to serve with Open Doors International for over 35 years, beginning in 1985.

During the time of the Iron Curtain, Wybo undertook a delivery of 3,000 Bibles to Bukaresti, Armenia, where owning Scripture could lead to imprisonment. With no reliable roadmaps, Wybo and his partner were told to memorize their route, burn all written instructions, and enter the city after dark to avoid being followed.

Navigating unfamiliar streets without signs or streetlights and their car dangerously full of Bibles, they soon realized they were lost. However, within minutes, Wybo discovered they were only two blocks from their destination, a local pastor's home.

After being led safely back out of the city, he realized God had miraculously directed them. That night became a lifelong reminder to depend wholly on God's guidance. "The Lord is there, He cares about His Word, and He does more than we can imagine," Wybo reflects.

In 1990, as the Iron Curtain crumbled and liberties spread across Europe, Bible smuggling teams were no longer needed in that region. Johan Companjen, the CEO of Open Doors International at the time, invited Wybo to start a new department, Global Research, to identify where the ministry should expand their work.

As he pioneered this new effort, Wybo wondered, "What if we could measure Christian persecution objectively and scientifically?" That question led to his development of the World Watch List, which was launched in January 1994.

This global research project would become one of the world's most trusted tools to identify persecution of Christians among the nations.

Wybo's decades of ministry are filled with stories that reveal the Bible's immense worth in a Christian's life. One moment captured this truth vividly: after he carried 1,200 pocket Bibles into a closed nation in the Middle East, a local pastor picked one up and said with deep emotion, "This has more value to me than gold, pure gold."

In 2020, at the onset of the COVID pandemic, Wybo boarded one of the last flights to the United States before global travel came to a halt. During a visit to DBS, Ken Bitgood pulled him aside and asked, "Brother Wybo, I know that you created the World Watch List decades ago, but wouldn't it be wonderful if something similar could be created with a focus on Bible access and Bible need around the world?"

The question sparked a new vision, and the Digital Bible Society and Open Doors began exploring this new initiative. The months that followed saw the beginning of what would become the Bible Access List. A pilot study was launched in 2022, and over the next three years, as partners joined and research expanded, the project was officially launched in October of 2025.

Drawing from his many years serving the global persecuted Church, Wybo now works with Frontlines International, an organization that provides Scripture, training, and practical support to persecuted believers and churches.

frontlinesinternational.org

His life mission continues: to support the persecuted Church and to help ensure that God's Word reaches those who desperately need it.

More about the World Watch List



worldwatchlist.org

Bible League International



"Hey, I have a guy working for me, and he wants to work with you..."

With that simple statement, a journey that would shape the next two decades of Jos Snoep's life began. Jos had grown up in the church and, while never walking far from his faith, it wasn't until his university years, studying international business and management, that his relationship with Christ developed. He began to ask deep questions about how he could dedicate his life to serving the Lord, and while he knew his calling would be tied to the gospel and to the Bible, the details were still unclear.

After graduation, Jos started his career working alongside a Christian business leader who became a guiding mentor. Though Jos still knew nothing about Bible League International, his employer was a committed donor. One day, during a phone call with a BLI representative, Jos's mentor made an unexpected offer: "I have a guy working for me, and he wants to work with you." Within a month, Jos had joined Bible League International.

Over the next two decades, Jos served faithfully. He began with BLI Netherlands, then joined international mission teams serving across the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa. After a decade with BLI, he and his wife moved with their four children to the United States, where he now serves as President and CEO. Now, looking back, he sees God's sovereign plan, answering the questions Jos had been asking: how to honor and serve the Lord through gospel work and the distribution of Bibles.

Jos shared a story that still deeply impacts him. He was leading a discipleship training event in the Caribbean, or-

ganized to equip 50 lay leaders. An elderly woman quietly attended, listening intently throughout the sessions. At the close of the event, she stood up with tears streaming down her face. "I have been a Christian since 2001," she said. "But today, for the first time in 22 years, I finally have a Bible of my own. I'm going back to my house, and I will thank the Lord for this day."

Stories like this fuel Jos's passion and underscore BLI's passionate commitment to equip the under-resourced Church with Bibles and discipleship training with the hope that eventually, no believer will ever have to wait decades to hold God's Word in their hands. As Jos puts it, "We want to be where the Bible is not yet there."

As BLI moves closer to that goal, Jos shared that the newly launched Bible Access List will guide their mission by answering two vital questions: Where do we go? and How do we grow? Under Jos's leadership, Bible League International is cultivating an Acts 8 model of discipleship that will echo across the globe, ensuring that the transformative power of Scripture reaches every believer, everywhere.

Bible League International (BLI) is dedicated to equipping the under-resourced Church for disciple-making and fostering deeper engagement with God's Word around the world. At the heart of BLI's work is Project Philip, a Bible study program rooted in Acts 8 that connects trained leaders with those seeking the hope of the Gospel. BLI's easy-to-read Bible translations, written in everyday language, are designed to be both faithful to the original text and understandable even to those with limited education. Recognizing that many people across the world are denied education, BLI also runs Bible-based literacy programs in six languages, teaching basic reading and writing skills.



Partners of BIBLE ACCESS INITIATIVE

Open Doors International

Founded in 1955 by Brother Andrew, Open Doors International is committed to strengthening and equipping Christians around the world who endure persecution by providing Bibles, Christian media, and practical support.



Digital Bible Society

Leveraging emerging technologies, the Digital Bible Society gathers, prepares, and distributes Biblical resources in the languages of the world to create cost effective solutions to Bible access, connecting missionaries with donors and supplying Christian workers with relevant content, information, and tools.



Frontlines International

Frontlines International provides Scripture, training, and practical support to persecuted believers and churches, bringing hope and light in the midst of their trials and equipping them to remain strong in their faith and ministry.



Bible League International

Bible League International is dedicated to equipping the under-resourced Church for disciple-making and fostering deeper engagement with God's Word around the world, offering accessible Bible translations, literacy programs, and discipleship.



The Voice of the Martyrs

The Voice of the Martyrs focuses on ministering to Christians suffering for their faith and inspiring believers through the stories of those who have been martyred or face persecution, working in over 70 nations.



Bible League Canada

Bible League Canada focuses on mentoring local believers, providing Bibles and Biblical training to reach communities and transform lives across nearly 50 countries through four branches: Starting New Churches Ministry, Children's Ministry, Adult Bible-based Ministry, and Persecuted Church Ministry.



Biblica

Founded in 1809, Biblica is dedicated to ending Gospel poverty by providing contemporary, accessible Bible translations and Scripture resources that empower global mission organizations so millions worldwide can experience transformation through Scripture.



OneHope

Since 1987, OneHope has been devoted to ensuring that every child and youth has access to God's Word in a form they can understand, reaching over two billion young people worldwide through innovative, culturally relevant Scripture engagement programs.



Join us in

Our Mission

3 Ways you can get involved:

Pray because God is the Lord of the harvest. The Bible Access List country profiles, found in PDFs on the bibleaccesslist.org site, each contain a list of prayer requests for every nation. Please join us in praying for the needs of God's people across the globe.

Give to our partners listed on page 14, supporting them as they do vital work for the kingdom of God. Or, become a regular supporter of DBS as we continue in our mission of making God's Word accessible to those around the world who need it most.

Go, but don't go empty-handed. Take digital Bible resources with you wherever God leads you in your outreach: to the unreached people in your community, or around the world – perhaps one of the countries listed on the Bible Access List.



Together, we can empower God's people to share God's Word everywhere!

Your partnership and generosity enables DBS's mission to make Scripture accessible to all peoples. Scan the QR code provided to access all of the DBS resources available on our webpage.





It is estimated that close to 50 million Ethiopian believers are still waiting for their own copy of the scriptures.

Donate at: www.DBS.org | (936) 494-4442



FORUM OF BIBLE
AGENCIES
INTERNATIONAL



CHARITY
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As a registered non-profit 501(c)3 ministry, Digital Bible Society is dedicated to Making Scripture Accessible to all. By fostering collaboration among Bible publishers, translators, content creators, donors, and Christian workers globally, we ensure that God's Word is easily accessible to those who need it most. Harnessing the power of the digital revolution, we believe God is equipping the Body of Christ with unprecedented resources for advancing discipleship, evangelism, and church planting. Join us on this exciting journey of making Scripture accessible to everyone.