



United Bible  
Societies



Global Scripture Distribution Report  
2017





A Rwandan teenager with his phone. In 2017, the number of mobile phone users across the world surpassed 4.7 billion. More and more Bible Societies are making Scriptures available online as they work towards their common mission of making the Bible available to everyone. (Photo: Becky Silva, American Bible Society).

## One in five Bibles distributed online

More than 20% of all Bibles distributed by the United Bible Societies (UBS) fellowship in 2017 were downloaded from the internet. It's the first time Scripture downloads have been recorded separately by Bible Societies – and it shows that online distribution is increasingly significant.

While overall Scripture distribution fell by 12% globally, the number of full Bibles made available around the world topped 34 million for the third year running. Of these, more than 7.9 million Bibles were downloaded, primarily on apps such as YouVersion. In total, more than 107 million full Bibles have been distributed by the UBS fellowship since 2015.

Nearly 355 million Scripture items, including Bibles, Testaments, Gospels and smaller Scripture items like booklets for people learning to read, were distributed (or downloaded) in 2017. UBS continues to be largest translator and distributor of Scripture on the planet; around 70% of the world's full Bible translations have been provided by Bible Societies.

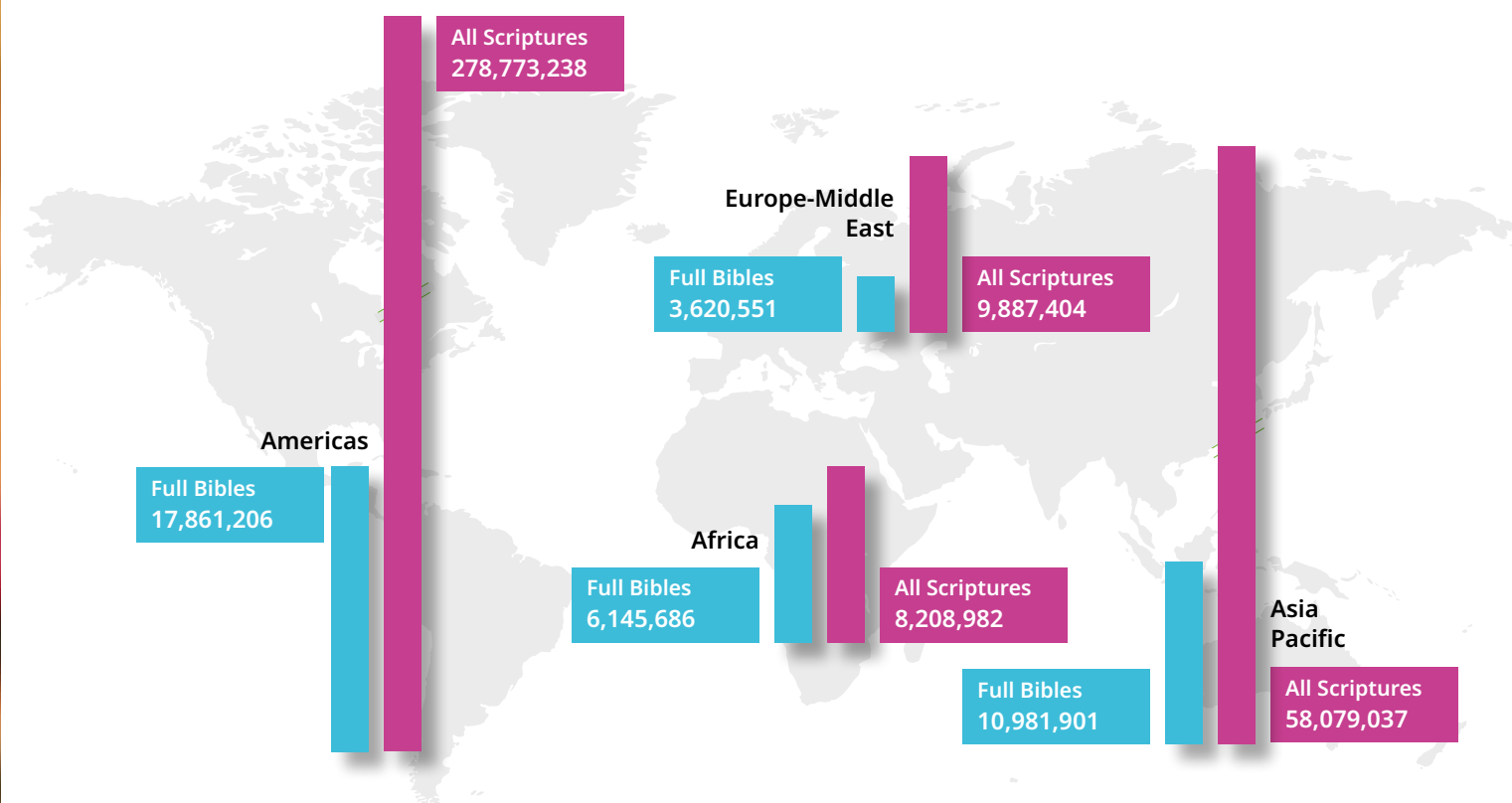
The figures are compiled from annual Scripture distribution numbers reported by Bible Societies around the world, and include local sales and exports of Scripture material and unique internet downloads<sup>1</sup>.

### Global Scripture distribution in 2017

**All Scriptures: 354,948,660**

**Full Bibles: 38,609,344** (including 7.9 million downloads)

**Testaments: 11,595,614**



*Distribution figures for the Americas include three major languages – Spanish, English and Portuguese.*

<sup>1</sup>Data was collected up to the end of March 2018. 80% of Bible Societies responded. In the case of non-respondents, the previous two years' average data was given as their 2017 distribution data.

Cover photo: A delighted Cuban woman who received a Bible through the Million Bible Mission, which has provided one million Bibles for Cuban Christians over the past five years. (Photo: Hans Sagrusten, Norwegian Bible Society).



## God's Word at our fingertips

The full Bible was downloaded more than 7.9 million times in 2017 as unique downloads – but this is a conservative figure and it's likely the real number of downloads was much higher.

Around 90 Bible Societies are now making their Scripture translations available online, using hundreds of different websites, such as bibles.org, and apps such as YouVersion. In addition, more than three-quarters of Bible Societies have received training in how to make the Bible available digitally.

The Europe-Middle East region had the highest proportion of Bible downloads; 44% of all Bibles distributed there were provided online. But the Americas saw the biggest number of Bible downloads – some 5.4 million.

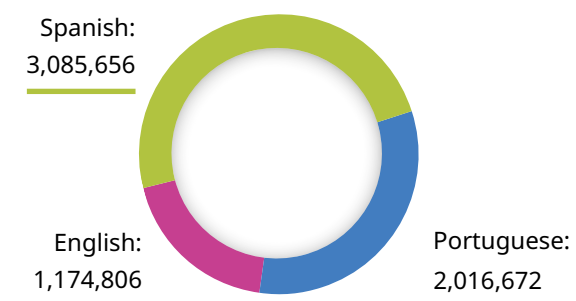
The download data for 2017 has been collated from YouVersion and tracking within individual Bible Societies. It errs on the conservative side, with downloads under-counted, but the data collection is a step forward from last year – and will become increasingly accurate in the coming years.

Most Bible Societies now store their texts in the Digital Bible Library® (DBL), which is developed and maintained by UBS in partnership with other Bible agencies. It was launched in 2011 and has grown rapidly since then, making the Bible more accessible than ever before. By the end of 2017, the DBL contained 1,735 Scripture texts in 1,269 languages, spoken by 5.6 billion people.

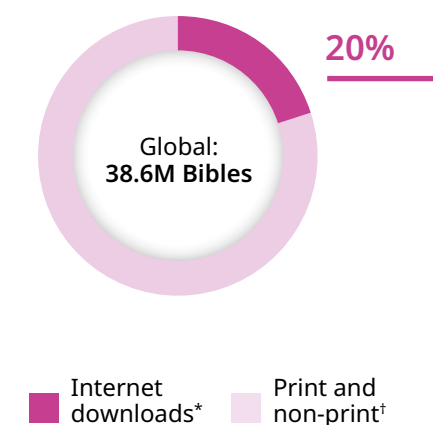


A young man looking at his phone outside Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (Photo: Doug Nottage, American Bible Society).

### Languages with more than a million Scripture downloads\*



### Full Bible distribution – % which were internet downloads



\* Unique downloads of Bible Society-owned texts.

† Non-print Scriptures include physical products containing digital Scriptures, such as CDs, DVDs and audio players.

More than 780,000 non-print Scriptures were distributed by Bible Societies in 2017. These include audio Scriptures, such as this Proclaimer device, held by Ealed Admas, founder of the Deborah Project – a home for disadvantaged girls in Ethiopia. The girls listen to audio Scriptures as they go about their daily activities. (Photo: Doug Nottage, American Bible Society).





## Scriptures for conflict zones



An army chaplain in Ukraine with the special edition of the New Testament for soldiers.



Young children in Damascus, Syria, with Scripture booklets they received from the Bible Society. (Photo: Dag Smemo/ Norwegian Bible Society).

**More people are displaced today than ever before; an unprecedented 65.6 million people have been forced from their homes around the world<sup>2</sup>. It's a humanitarian crisis that has touched almost every region of the world. And it's led to a huge demand for Scripture among people who long for God's comfort, hope and healing.**

In South Sudan, where four million people have been driven from their homes, Scripture distribution has increased dramatically. The Bible Society there has distributed more than 250,000 Bibles since the conflict began in December 2013, compared with an average of around 6,000 Bibles a year before the war started.

*"Amid tension, people are looking for the comfort and stability that is found in the Word of God."*

Rev Oleksandr Babiychuk, Ukrainian Bible Society

After four years of conflict in eastern Ukraine, 4.4 million people are in a 'dire humanitarian situation', according to the United Nations. Last year, the Ukrainian Bible Society distributed more than 190,000 Scriptures, many of them to people affected by the fighting, including refugees, soldiers and hospital patients. Half of those distributed were special editions of the New Testament, including a waterproof one for the military and another that highlights verses about hope.

"Amid tension, people are looking for the comfort and stability that is found in the Word of God," said Bible Society General Secretary Rev Oleksandr Babiychuk.

Meanwhile, two million Scripture items, including more than 350,000 full Bibles, have been distributed in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq since conflict hit the region in 2011. A record number of Scripture portions – 200,281 – were distributed in Syria in 2017. George Andrea, who leads the team of four Bible Society staff in Syria, said the Aleppo bookshop has remained open almost every day throughout seven years of war.

"During Christmas we organised our greatest distribution ever," said George. "You should see the children when they receive these gifts. They feel the Bible is a gift from God, special for them. In this way, we give children hope that God will help them pass through this bad time."



(Above) Together with the rest of their family, Marina and her baby son, Matvii, fled the fighting near their home in eastern Ukraine, leaving nearly all their possessions behind. They received a New Testament and Children's Bible from the Bible Society, which is working with churches to put Scriptures into food packages (top right) for people who have been displaced by the conflict.



A woman in Jordan reads an Arabic Bible that she received through a Bible Society project offering practical and spiritual support to refugees. (Photo: Ian Oakley, British and Foreign Bible Society).

<sup>2</sup>UNHCR Global Trends report, June 2017.





Pastor Zhang Wen Fu, 76, with a copy of the very first Bible in his language, Black Yi, published in 2016. Nearly 4 million Bibles were distributed in China in 2017, the second highest number in the world after Brazil. (Photo: Clare Kendall, British and Foreign Bible Society).

# 15 million print Bibles in five nations

Five countries accounted for more than 40% of the global distribution of full printed Bibles by Bible Societies.

## 2017's top five countries for print Bible distribution

- 1 Brazil - 5,279,423
- 2 China - 3,937,476
- 3 USA - 2,415,709
- 4 India - 2,050,535
- 5 Philippines - 1,372,684



Instilling a love for the Bible among the next generation in India. (Photo: Joyce van de Veen, Netherlands Bible Society).



Sharing the Bible in the USA. (Photo: Doug Nottage, American Bible Society).



A young woman in Brazil reading Scripture. (Photo: Drew Hood, American Bible Society).



## 'God's work more alive now than ever'

In the year that Robert Mugabe's reign as president finally ended, Scripture distribution increased significantly in Zimbabwe.

Bible distribution went up more than 70%, and almost 29,000 people received God's word in 2017. Overall Scripture distribution almost doubled, with the biggest increase in the provision of new reader Bible booklets. Bible Society of Zimbabwe General Secretary Chipu Maringe says that this is largely down to efforts to re-engage with Churches throughout the country.

"Churches are our major strategic partners but over the years, in light of the economic meltdown here, their participation in our work had slowed down," she explains. "In 2017 we launched a church outreach program, which increased our visibility and opened up new opportunities to work together to take the Gospel to more people."

She has great hope that Scripture distribution will continue to grow. "God's work in Zimbabwe is more alive now than ever, because the new government is pressing on churches to play a pivotal role in the reconstruction of the country through preaching peace," she noted.



People at a church conference in Zimbabwe browse through the Bibles on display at the Bible Society stand.

*"So also will be the word that I speak - it will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send it to do."*

Isaiah 55:11 (GNT)



Maryam, 12, with one of the new reader Scripture booklets she received through post-literacy classes she attended at her church in Giza, Cairo. "My reading before was wrong. I've really improved and have learnt how to apply the Bible to my life," she said.

### Literacy driving Scripture distribution

A record 1.3 million Bible booklets and leaflets for new readers were distributed last year in Egypt, where two out of five people are functionally illiterate.

The Bible Society of Egypt made these available through a wide variety of projects for different audiences across the country. The post-literacy program is one them, and each year helps thousands of adults and children with very basic literacy skills to become confident readers and writers through engaging with Scripture.

Bible Societies are running nearly 30 active literacy programmes in more than 50 languages across the globe, empowering well over 100,000 people each year to learn to read. More than 4.6 million new reader portions were distributed in 57 nations.



Mary (far right) reading in the post-literacy class she attends at her church in Cairo each week.

As a child, Mary dropped out of school because her parents couldn't afford the fees. All her life, she felt frustrated and upset that she had only very basic literacy skills. Now aged 57, thanks to the Bible Society of Egypt's post-literacy classes, she can read and write well, and has her own Scripture booklets and Bible. "It adds joy to my life!" she said. "I was like a blind person but now I can see."



The Reformation booklet produced by the Bible Society of South Africa.



### Marking the Reformation

A number of Bible Societies marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with a variety of activities and publications.

Beginning in Germany in 1517, the Reformation led to the birth of Protestantism and triggered the translation of Scripture into many more languages.

Among numerous initiatives, the German Bible Society published a new edition of the Luther Bible and made it available through an app.

The Bible Society of Brazil distributed more than 175,000 special Bible editions, while the Bible Society of South Africa gave out 150,000 free Reformation booklets in English and Afrikaans.

Other Bible Society activities across the world included a commemorative Reformation postage stamp in Portugal, the first ever International Congress of the Bible in Argentina and a special co-edition of the Luther Study Bible in Turkey.





*Rwandan children with a Bible given to them as part of the End-to-End program, which provides Bibles to people who have taken part in Scripture listening groups. (Photo: Doug Nottage, American Bible Society).*



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## ***The Bible for everyone***

The Fellowship is incorporated as United Bible Societies, a corporation registered in the state of Delaware, USA, in 1946. The affairs of the Fellowship are administered on its behalf by the United Bible Societies Association (UBSA) from its registered office at UBS UK Hub, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon SN5 7PJ, England. UBSA is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales no. 2264875. Registered charity no. 800058.