

## December 2011 Mali

This Sunday's *Bible Companion* readings include 1 John 5 and there's an MP3 about this chapter at <http://aletheiacollege.net/audio/1jn5.mp3>

We'd like to remind you that CDs of the *NEV New Testament* being dramatically read by bro Steve Gretton are available from us free of charge. Please let us know how many you'd like at [info@carelinks.net](mailto:info@carelinks.net).

You've probably heard of **Timbuktu**, the proverbial town in the middle of nowhere in the Sahara desert of **Mali**. What's amazing is that the true Gospel has spread even to Mali. **Mali** and **Burkina** are on many indicators the poorest countries on earth, comprised largely of the Sahara desert. You're never going to get too wealthy in the world when your main export is groundnuts, most of your country is desert and your population largely illiterate and sick. We appealed a while ago for French speakers to come forward and assist on a visit to contacts in Mali and Burkina Fasso, and we were delighted in the response of sister Astrid Holt, who brings with her a wealth of practical charitable experience as well as a firm knowledge of French.

For a long time now we've been in contact with Gerald, a young man from Burkina who works in Bamako, Mali as a teacher at a small primary school. He's worked through *Bible Basics* and has it and our other publications in French ever on his desk at the small "office" at the school, where he lives and sleeps on a mat the floor after school:



Gerald has a true heart for people as well as for Christ. The "School" is just three classrooms, and was founded by a Frenchman named Damien. Damien has a most unusual story. An electrician from near Nantes in France, he was a rally driver in the various treks across the Sahara from Spain to the ports of West Africa which are widely popular amongst adventurous young people in France and Spain. He took a liking to Mali, sold his car after one trip and remained in Mali. Here he married a Malian woman called Fatah:



He came to believe in Christ in Mali- which is amazing, seeing it's 99% Moslem and only 1% Christian. He decided to give his life to practical service to others, in the spirit of Christ. He obtained the use of three rooms, owned by a French woman in Paris, rent free. He transformed these into a simple school. His aim is to offer free primary education to poor children. All schooling has to be paid for, and many children grow up unable to read or write. So he aims to provide basic literacy and maths for free. No food is provided, the children live locally with their parents, and they have 87 children enrolled. He has two other teachers, one of whom is Gerald:



As Gerald began to learn the true Gospel through *Bible Basics*, he shared his findings with

Damien. Their studies enabled them to put meaning into the words "I am now a Christian... I have come to Christ". They spread the knowledge of the true Gospel to others in their neighbourhood. After an exchange of around 100 letters, it was clear that this group really understood the Gospel and were ready for baptism, hence our visit. It's amazing that an electrician from Nantes, France should find the Gospel in the Sahara desert of highly Moslem [99%] Mali. But this is the way providence works. It's for sure the first time we've baptized a trans-Sahara rally driver.

After extensive discussions it was a pleasure to take GERALD, DAMIEN & FATAH and another 10 people [brothers MATTHIEU, SAMUEL, SANIBE and LUC and sisters MARIANNE, SEWA, RUKI, MARIE, MIRIAME and JUA] down to the Niger River and baptize them into the real Christ. Duncan baptized Gerald first and then together they baptized Damien, and then the others:



So an ecclesia was born, with very great joy- we feel this is one of the most beautiful photos we've ever shared on a *Carelink* message, may they all hold the confidence and rejoicing of the hope [which they so clearly have] firm unto the end:



In a situation where total poverty, malnutrition, lack of education and basic hunger is everywhere apparent, it's so hard to know how to appropriately assist. We agree with Damien that providing basic education is about the best way to go forward given our limited resources. But it's also important to give people at least something which they can do and achieve, even if they make no real money from it.

Astrid came into her own here with a project involving recycling plastic bags. With no garbage collection, Mali like much of poorer Africa is drowning under discarded plastic bags, with much of the urban open space looking like a garbage tip:



Astrid got the kids to join her in collecting bags, and then taught the new brothers and sisters and the older kids how to twine them together and weave them into furniture upholstery- you can see the younger kids eagerly waiting at the door of the "office" of the school to pass their collected bags to Astrid and her eager team of newly trained helpers:





The final joy was that at least a few mothers had somewhere more comfortable to sit with their children:



Astrid and Damian have subsequently taken the idea forward, constructing a loom with wood, nails, a hammer and string, upon which the plastic bags can be woven into yarn, and are teaching some amazed local people just what's possible:



Exactly how far and in what direction this initiative can be taken further is unclear and anyone with any knowledge about plastic bag recycling is welcome to contact us. Whilst it costs almost nothing, it's very labour intensive and the products can be used but not so easily sold in the poverty stricken Malian environment.

Please pray for this new ecclesia in their poverty, and especially for Astrid, Damien and Gerald as they continue the work here and now head overland into Burkina Fasso hopefully for more baptisms. There are serious travel warnings everywhere due to the prevalence of kidnapping by various extremist Moslem groups, especially is it dangerous for Christian missionaries.

The hotels in Bamako wouldn't let us use their pools for baptisms, hence our trip to the very polluted and disease ridden Niger River. One good thing is that through this new ecclesia, the Gospel is spreading yet further to the ends of the earth- "and then shall the end come". We conducted our meetings in French and the local language, Bambara, and made MP3 recordings of them. There is very little Christian literature of any description in Bambara. At the baptism service, we recorded Damien reading Romans 6 verse by verse in French, and Gerald translating it verse by verse into Bambara. We will in due course put the MP3 on the carelinks.net website. This is really taking the Gospel to "the regions beyond", to those in the Sahara who have never had the Gospel in their language. Here's the recording being made:



Apart from donations, you can assist by deep prayer for this group and also anyone with access to primary school material in French could usefully post it out to the school. And of course if you know French and can travel, well, you could be very, very useful to this new ecclesia.

**With love and joy from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks**