

## February 2016 UK, Belgium, Greece

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include Mark 10 and there is an MP3 file about this chapter at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/mk10.mp3>

You can see the archives of our MP3 files at <http://aletheiacollege.net/archives.html> and on iTunes at <https://itunes.apple.com/ca/podcast/christadelphian-bible-talks/id987163468>

### BELGIUM

We have heard so much about Iranian, and Syrian and other refugees moving into Europe and finding the Truth there in asylum camps and refugee centres, so it was something of a surprise to hear from an Iranian brother living in Belgium that there some who had come to Europe specifically to be baptised before returning home. They were staying in a rather isolated holiday centre. They were in a chalet - the type of which you associate with family holidays in the height of summer, but it was fully booked in early February. There was an indoor swimming and sports area.

ARASH and MOHAMMAD have been learning about God and Jesus whilst in Iran, but keeping a very low profile because of the oppressive regime there. They both come from Moslem families so their identity is officially Moslem. It is not a question of choice - it is determined by birth. Actually 4 main religions are accepted in Iran, Moslem, Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrianism, and if you are born to one of these families, then you are accepted and there is no problem. Things become impossibly difficult if the religious authorities find you have chosen to forsake Islam for another faith - apostacy - and the Ayatollahs have high authority in government and law, meaning that a conversion from Moslem to Christian carries the potential death sentence. Our brother explained that arrest is always possible and pressure is brought to bear whilst in prison to renounce the conversion. To revert to Islam is seen as a success of the prison system. But at the end of a prison term, then execution is seen as the possible consequence. As a result there is a great shadow of fear hanging over anyone who chooses to be baptised into the saving name of Jesus. And quite apart from any legal consequence, there are likely to be repercussions from family and friends and in the workplace and universities.

So with such a great reason to ignore what Jesus represents, one could excuse people for not wanting to know. But as usual, when there is a prohibition about the truth of God and Jesus there is a huge appetite! Many of the people we have met, speak of seeing the film about Jesus, and for many of them this has been the first access to Bible truth. The film follows the life of Jesus from birth to resurrection and ascension.

So in discussion before baptism, most of the time was spent in checking that they had a firm grasp on the essential truths that we consider people need to know before committing themselves to the Lord. It was therefore very reassuring to see a well thumbed and marked copy of *Bible Basics* there in the room when I arrived and it was clear that there had been long and intense discussions. Obviously there is no problem about the Trinity because those with a Moslem background believe in the Unity of God anyway, and the concept of a triune god is alien to their thinking, as it is to ours.

The appearance of Jesus as a human being in this world, just like us, is very significant for them. Because he was made just as we are, then they understand that they can identify with Jesus - and he with us. As one of them said to me, the difference is that Jesus died but came to life again and he is alive now, unlike all the prophets and religious leaders. Jesus is alive and that

makes the fundamental difference. Also the concept that God is primarily a God of love is wonderfully attractive to them. They have a background of thinking that Allah is a god of punishment - one to be perpetually afraid of - so it is a wonderful experience for them to learn that they can pray openly to God as "Our Father in heaven," and that He is available to us because of what Jesus has done. The coming Kingdom of God on earth is immensely attractive because it is such stark contrast with the state of the world at present. A kingdom whose foundation is love, justice and peace is what they want. The day of judgement is not something about which to be in perpetual fear, but one to embrace as the time of God's justice and of justification of His followers. And so the conversation continued - with clear agreement with all our fundamental doctrines and priorities. Our Iranian brothers have been doing a good job to teach the truth and to ensure that those seeking baptism understand not only why they want to be baptised, but also what are the essential truths they need to accept.



They know that they have more detail to learn, as we all do, but they return to Iran, with their own copies of the Bible in Farsi and *Bible Basics* to guide their studies. And so they were baptised. Sadly the heater was not working properly and the water was cold, but Arash and Mohammad gave a good confession of their faith and committed themselves to their Heavenly Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. There was much happiness and joy in the prayers as we committed our brothers to the Lord, who alone is able to keep them strong in such a difficult country.

As usual, you come home feeling humbled to be in the presence of those who risk so much when they say, "Yes, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world."  
Steve.

## **GREECE**

There is an ecclesia of Iranians in Athens and it was a pleasure to visit them this week and see many holding on in the faith. Greece is bankrupt and yet has thousands of refugees arriving on their shores each day. Athens is full of such folks sleeping rough and in a very bad way. It's not a happy city once you get away from the usual tourist attractions.

We were pleased to baptize a lovely elderly man called SAEED who has attended our meetings previously. His wife divorced him in Iran when he became a Christian and thence he fled to Europe, he like many such folks lives a very austere life searching for petty cash jobs where he can. But his joy at now finally being baptized was just wonderful. He said that now nothing else is important for him, now he is with the Lord.

We try to support materially as best we can and would appreciate your continued donations so we can continue giving at least some temporary assistance to these dear folk. Here is this lovely brother being well and truly immersed in the bath tub:



Brother Farshid has been in Athens for years- the asylum seeking process takes a long time. We were really pleased to baptize his girlfriend KYRIAKI, a local Greek woman who has an impressive grasp of all our doctrines and who spoke eloquently and passionately of her exit

from the Greek Orthodox church because of her discovery that hell is not a place of fire, and the devil is not out there as a cosmic being. So here we are as a happy group after the baptisms:



## **LATVIA**

We've had brother Andy Taylor from Windermere ecclesia assisting Andy & Mel Downton in the kitchen, and he has now been replaced by April Neate from Forest Hill and Sarah Bird from Waterside, we really so appreciate all who donate and contribute to enabling the great work here to go on as we feed and teach many 5 days / 7

Here are the two Andys and brother Maxim serving up:



## **U.K.**

A reminder of our Bible packaging day and Carelinks UK Conference on Saturday February 27 God willing. The replies to our latest 'Free Bible' ad in the *Daily Mail* are flowing in and we will be packaging up the Bibles for these people. We are hoping to have several Iranian brethren attending from far away and would appreciate any offers to put them up for the night- if you are in the South East and able to help please let us know. More details of the event at <http://carelinks.net/doc/events>

## **PRAYER POINTS:**

- For those baptized this week
- For people to respond to our latest 'Free Bible' advert in the UK newspaper *The Daily Mail*- replies are flooding in already, please pray for them all to respond further
- For wisdom as to how to respond best to all the Iranians and other asylum seekers responding to the Gospel
- For those facing real persecution from Islam because of their faith in Christ

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