

June 2017 Sicily, China

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include Revelation 10 and 11 and there is an MP3 file about this at <http://www.christadelphia.net/audio/rev1011.mp3>

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

Download the *NEV Bible* with commentary and *Bible Companion* bookmarks at <http://n-e-v.info/NEVBIBLE.pdf>

SICILY

There are believed to be up to 1 million migrants in **Libya** and **North Africa**, trying to reach the shores of **Italy** by boat. Many of these come to Sicily- up to 2000 / day. We have had contacts in Sicily since 2009, including some Africans who emigrated there legally in the past and have been many years in Italy. The situation in Sicily for all the new arrivals is utterly hopeless- there is no way Italy can cope with such huge numbers arriving each day. The most they can do is to try to ensure that minors and women are accommodated. But this leaves huge numbers of young men unable to get from Sicily to mainland Italy, and often without documents. Sicily is just full of them. It's a very hot, dry climate and water is at a premium, and relatively expensive. Public fountains and water sources have been turned off as there are just thousands of litres of water being taken from them each day; even those lucky enough to be in camps are only given one litre of water / day, despite the boiling temperatures. Public opinion in Sicily is running at high levels against the migrants. Racism is absolutely rampant. "*Leave Catania*" reads this graffiti painted in an area where many Africans sleep rough:



We noticed that some MoneyGram agencies effectively refuse to serve black people, or those thought to be associated with them. As a white guy, you get abuse and many hard looks walking down a street with black folks. And indeed, Sicily cannot cope. But the boats keep arriving. It's all very well to say "Well, they should've stayed in Africa". But even if that is thought to be legitimate, even if one digs a hole for oneself and falls into it, you're still in the hole and need help. It is basic humanity to assist, let alone the spirit of Christ. All these migrants had no idea that this was going to be the reality of life in fortress Europe. Sicily is in any case quite poor. There are tens of thousands of them just roaming the place, hungry and thirsty. Crime is their only recourse, as begging will not get any sympathy from the local Sicilians. With many thousands of desperately poor young men roaming around, the area has become a honeypot for all manner of homosexual abuse and sex tourism. It's a tragic situation.

And this is a forgotten or ignored crisis. The media are almost silent about it. And the tourists in their resorts and tourist beaches are totally ignorant of what is going on. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that it is no mere stereotype that much of Sicily, especially the interior of the island, is in the hands of the Mafia. They are exploiting the situation; sexual exploitation and slave labour in the fields and factories is rife, often forcing them to do dangerous work for a pittance.

Corruption is endemic in Sicily; many of the new camps have been built in the interior, right in the heart of Mafia controlled territory. And the residents are used by them. Many of the migrants were conservative young Africans who find themselves alone in a frightening and lonely

situation where immoral behaviour seems the only way to survive. It's all very well saying "Well go home then" but they typically have no documents and cannot be deported, because international law forbids sending people to any country if they have no documents. Many borrowed money to make the journey and some have genuine fears of the situations they fled from.

There are very few aid organizations operating in Sicily; that is not in the interests of the Mafia. And with each boatload of arrivals, the situation gets worse. Many arrive traumatized by the awful journey; we baptized one migrant, TONY, who got to Sicily and managed to get to mainland Italy. His story is terrifying and we will comment upon it more in next week's newsletter, Lord willing.

For now you can see his testimony at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YrcjAlvmxo>

The beaches of Sicily and Lampedusa have bodies washed up on them regularly; here are some stills from our video:



Probably 20% of those who attempt the journey don't make it.

We baptized a young man called JUSTICE on the beach in eastern Sicily, the video includes footage of dead bodies on the beach and it is

at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10iqTvfr9eo&t=92s>

if you'd prefer to just see the video of the baptism without the dead bodies, it's

at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dj5qCtm6HXE>

He was quite terrified of going back into the water, and you may be able to hear his terror in the recording. He's not a standard migrant, as he came to Sicily two years ago, although also by the sea route, as a minor. He was put in a young person's hostel and went to the local school. But as soon as he turned 18, Italy are free of their legal obligations to him. He was turned out of the hostel and school on his 18th birthday and had to live on the street. He took us to see the disused convent where he and many other Africans had slept on the stone floors. But he was different, although without parental influence and any sense of family, he earnestly wanted to serve God and go God's way. One evening on a borrowed computer he came across a video of a Carelinks conference in Croydon where we were packing up Bibles to mail out. He wondered if he could get one, and so began our contact. He has in turn distributed our *NEV Bibles* to other young Africans he knows. He laments that many have left their Christian faith in practice. We discussed the Biblical promises, that God will not let us be tested more than we're able to bear, but will make a way to escape; and that the Lord will not suffer the rod of the wicked to fall so heavily on the righteous that they are driven to sin. But in his situation, it takes some faith to believe this. His only real possession is an old cell phone, which he uses where there are free WIFI hotspots to read our material and watch our videos. He has the Bible on his phone. But nobody wants to mentor a young man like that, the Catholics are about the only church doing much for the migrants, and there are few Protestants in Sicily. He really feels he has found a family with us, although he is isolated. Please pray for him, that his faith will not fail, and the Biblical promises of preservation from sin come true for him. He has already interested other people, some of who we met, sleeping in the deserted convent.

Here's a photo of him having a cold drink after his baptism, with his phone which serves as his Bible and source of contact with us. He gets only clothing he finds or which some organizations offer. He has just a couple of T-shirts and one pair of trousers. It's tragic to see so many such young people going morally astray and being rudderless in the cruel world of migrant Sicily:



It's a common sight to see African migrants walking around with their packs of belongings, rather like our elderly brethren in Riga, Latvia; but Sicily is 40 degrees C in Summer, and some can only find Winter clothing, and they wear this even in the heat as it's all they can get:



It's inevitable that in such a situation, folks will be interested in the good news of the Kingdom. We did a very small amount of Facebook advertising in eastern Sicily and had nearly 3000 views and 200 expressions of further interest- from migrants originally from all over the world who are stuck there in Sicily.

Our remit is to preach the Gospel, but it's clear that we also have a duty to assist as we can. We obviously try to ensure that the welfare component doesn't distort the message of the Gospel in itself. But only God is the judge of human motivations, and such motivations do change over time.

With all these problems, we tried to do what we could. We contacted a long term contact, Godson, who got a copy of *Bible Basics* from us in 2009. We've remained in contact on and off. He shares our view on many things but hasn't seen the need for re-baptism. He is an African migrant from previous years with a stable job, from when Africans could immigrate legally to Sicily. He has a group of other Africans he tries to teach and pray and sing with. And he tries to help the newer migrants as best he can. We assisted him in renting a room which can be used as a base for them. It's a disused shop in a very run down area of **Syracuse**, the port once visited by Paul:



We provided lots of water, and rice and pasta. The original group he has built up are also settled migrants, but they are all working on minimum wage and limited as to how much they can assist the flood of new migrants. We felt they were very sincere and set them up to study *Bible Basics* as a group and to distribute the food and water provided. On the food and some of the bottles we placed our labels:



Here they are unloading some of the material into the disused shop:



Four of Godson's group came to help unload the food and water and they sung an impromptu song, "Thank You, Lord", African singing at its

best: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJGCaSmbMdg>

It's just scraping the surface of the need but it was the best we could do. We are considering a return visit to Sicily in late July God willing. The situation is unpredictable and fluid but there is much work to do. And all this work is expensive; do continue praying and donating if you can.

CHINA

Brother Donald continues following up contacts in China and reports another baptism:

I baptize bro Wen at private pool. Brother Wen used to believe in fortune telling, Divination is very popular in China nowadays, people prophet marriage, the location of a house or tomb, supposed to have an influence on the fortune of a family, etc

I began to go astray deeper and deeper. At that time, I believe furniture and furniture should be consistent to welcome festivity and don't let the evil spirits come in, so often there to move around. I have to move from one place to another, because the geomancy, thought moved house will make a fortune, my career will be promoted, moved there will be happy.

But this doesn't work at all, My career and fortune goes bad and I nearly go crazy for these stuff. One day I surf the internet and request Bible from QQ group advertisement. So I request one Chinese Bible and read for 2 weeks and request for baptism.

The Bible says, "as long as you believe in the heart and confess that God raised Jesus from the dead, he will be saved."

In our life There is pain, there is joy, God is disciplining. Now my heart are become more peaceful"



PRAYER POINTS

- For those recently baptized
- For the feeding scheme and shelter room we're supporting in Sicily
- For wisdom as to how to proceed with tackling the great spiritual and material needs of the migrants in Sicily
- For spiritual strength for brother Justice and others like him, that they will be empowered to overcome temptation and somehow be given a situation in life whereby they can serve God and not be overpowered by temptation

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks