

May 2014 Greece, Riga, Pastoral Program

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include Acts 25 and 26 and there is an MP3 about these chapters at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/acts2526.mp3> . You can see the archives of our MP3 files at <http://aletheiacollege.net/archives.html> ; Carelinks Bible Radio is at <http://r-b-c.org/listen.php>

GREECE

This week saw some intense activity in Greece. The Lord is very much at work there amongst the immigrant community in Athens and it is an honour to be co-workers with Him. Firstly we met and baptized two contacts, ASHKAN and MAHBOD; both have been granted asylum in Greece and thereby had the peace of mind to search for the real Christ. They explained in a very compelling way how many Moslems, especially from Iran, are deeply disillusioned with Islam and are looking for real answers to life's questions. But the Christian answers, as presented in standard Christianity, are hard for them to accept because they involve belief in a triune God and a Jesus who was God, with the obvious implication that Mary was the mother of God. It was our approach to these issues which attracted them to us. We made a movie of them talking about these issues, in English, at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZvn8AZjmTQ>



Our brethren are very keen to spread the knowledge of the real Christ to many others. We also met with brother Farshid and were happy to baptize AMIR, a very sincere man who had been well prepared for baptism by Farshid and use of *Bible Basics* in Farsi. Afterwards we broke bread together, and recorded the prayers for the bread and wine and the taking of the bread and wine, in English and Farsi. There are so many Iranian brethren in various parts of the world, breaking bread alone or in small groups, and it's hard to do so initially when one has never been part of an established local congregation. You likewise may find the brief movie helpful, it is at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gcycbdry2U>



We have mentioned earlier that brother Simon had been arrested for being in Greece without documents, and imprisoned in the notorious Elliniko prison. You only have to do a Google search to discover how awful this place is, and the very widespread human rights abuses against refugees being committed by the Greek Police. Greece is virtually bankrupt and yet due to their geographical position, they are flooded with refugees from the Middle East. There is huge anger against them by some elements of the Greek population, including the Police. Our Iranian brethren in Greece have suffered from this, but none perhaps as bad as Simon. It's hard to find Elliniko Prison- it has been removed from Google maps, and we only got access by paying a lawyer to accompany us there in order to visit Simon and conduct a legal appeal for his release; the first hearing will take place soon, so please do pray for that. Greece holds people without documents in these 'prisons' for up to 18 months without trial or doing anything positively about them. Conditions there are truly awful; even in our presence, a guard yelled at

Simon abusively. Here's just a few clips from what you can read about Elliniko and other such Greek detention centers for immigrants:

<http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2011/07/29/death-of-migrant-in-the-aliens-prison-elliniko-near-athens-gives-rise-to-protests-of-co-detainees/>

"a 27-year old immigrant ... was found dead in the new detention center of Elliniko (close to Athens). He had been asking for a doctor repeatedly, but the only thing the detention center authorities did was to notify an unskilled member of a NGO, who just subscribed some medicine. Hours after this so-called medical examination, Goulam Bamper Khan fainted. Other inmates asked for an ambulance, but this was considered "not necessary". Finally Goulam Bamper Khan died. Immediately riots broke up, as 98 inmates started shouting and pushing their cells' doors. Riot police entered the detention center, chose 8 immigrants and started beating them up "to give a lesson to the rest". "

<http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2013/07/23/migrants-tortured-with-electroshock-in-their-genitals-at-athens-airport/>

"Now they are detained in Elliniko. The three detainees reported that they had been beaten and electroshocked. One of them reportedly had been boxed in the face, nine times electroshocked and kicked in the stomach. Another detainee had bruises on his back and sholder. The third one reported that he had been hurt with the Teaser's electricity on his genital organs. He also showed injuries on his arm. Furthermore, they reportedly were insulted and sexually harassed by police officers who asked them for oral sex".

<http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2012/11/08/european-court-of-human-rights-rulings-against-greece-for-detention-conditions/>

"The Court decided that the detention conditions, after her arrest for irregular entry into the country... were inhumane due to the fact of over-crowding, lice infestation and poor quality drinking water".

There is a whole blog listing the regular inmate uprisings in these centers from sheer desperation at the awful situation- <http://clandestinenglish.wordpress.com/>

It is in Elliniko Prison that our brother is being kept, and we visited him there. It really is a bad situation.

It's clear that our brother has suffered a breakdown and possibly a slight stroke. He had involuntary arm and hand movements and one arm appeared limp. He really needs specialist attention but as you can see from the above reports, there is little sympathy for any needs of the inmates.

If they wish to have a lawyer, then they must pay for this at their own expense. It's not allowed to take photos within the prison, but we did snap this shot of 'General information' in the entrance lobby which makes this clear- it's pinned up in multiple languages, reminding prisoners that they are imprisoned in accordance with the laws of Greece, and reminding them that they can hire a lawyer "at your own expense". Bear in mind most people fleeing Iran, Syria and Afghanistan arrive in Greece with no money and no ongoing income. You can see the document in a rather blurred form at www.carelinks.net/images/refugeelawyer.jpg .



Here are all the notices for prisoners in the various languages:

Apart from Simon's issues, please pray for the general safety of our Iranian brethren, because they report continual racist attacks on darker skinned immigrants, and the media carries many such stories of murders and beatings by far-right groups [of which there are many in Greece], which the Greek Police appear to ignore. Here's some graffiti in Athens, reflecting the desperation of the immigrants:



PASTORAL PROGRAM

Our aim in all this work is to promote spiritual growth in all those baptized and help them on a path which leads to eternity in God's Kingdom at the Lord's return. This is our sole and genuine aim. So many have been baptized and are effectively isolated, but have access to email. We've therefore developed a program of weekly pastoral mailouts. There will be a mailing once / week, which will give a chapter or part of a chapter from the Gospel of Matthew, along with links to 1) A brief devotional commentary on the chapter or section 2) An extended devotional commentary on it, maybe useful for a breaking of bread service 3) An MP3 audio file explaining the section and 4) A link to a movie on the section. There are 52 parts to the program, taking us through the 28 chapters of Matthew's Gospel. All current recipients of Carelinks messages will receive these mailouts but you can opt out by sending us an email to info@carelinks.net . Please let us know any email addresses which could usefully be added to the list. You can view all the material at www.gospelstudies.net

RIGA

We are pleased to tell you that attendance at the *Riga Bible Center* reached a record high of over 150 at the May Day national holiday. We're pleased to report the baptisms of VIKTOR and YURI, the latter suffering from various cancerous growths and serious health issues. Sister Hazel from the Nantwich UK ecclesia kindly sent over a rather fine blue baptismal robe, and we were delighted to use it in baptizing both these new brothers:



With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks