

A trip to Marsabit

In this brief report of our visit to the people of Rendile in the Northeastern Province of Kenya between Friday 18th to Tuesday 22nd May 2018, I highlight what God is doing among them and the greatest needs they have. Among those who were in the trip include Pastor Murungi (Nairobi TBC), Pastor Mucheru (Miathene TBC), Diba (a member of TBC Nairobi and a native of Rendile who was helpful in translation), and the three of us who are TPC students and interns (Kahure, Teka and I).

1. What God is doing among the People of Rendile

God has caused a hunger and thirst for His word among the members of this community and this was manifest in a number of ways. One, the church there was very receptive and I thank the Lord that it is doing spiritually well, by His grace. Their services are closely modelled to take the pattern of what we have in TBC Nairobi. They have a Bible study in the morning for all ages that comes shortly after the impressive session of Scripture memorization. In addition, they have a session for public reading of Scripture and corporate prayer shortly before the morning service preaching. Pastor Joseph Mucheru of Miathene TBC took the adult Sunday school as Teka took the children's class. Pastor Murungi preached in the morning service from Heb. 1:1-4 as I took the evening service from John 3:16. Our ministry was well received and we pray that the Lord may watch over His word for the encouragement, consolation, and upbuilding of His people, to the praise of His glory.

Two, there is great hope for the continuity of Korr church going by the number of young people among them. I was particularly encouraged by the number of children who attend Korr TBC. Let us pray that the Lord will save them and use them for the future ministry among the members of their community since many of them go to school and can speak both Swahili and English.



Figure 1 I spent some time with the Korr TBC children

Three, the villages also gladly received our message wherever we went and we can therefore, only pray that the Lord may save them and bring them to the kingdom of His Son endowed with marvelous light and eternal life. In one of the villages called *Uruween*, the older men engaged us in a healthy Q/A that lasted for about an hour. It is highly likely that the Lord is working in the heart of most of them. The discussion was about their traditional practice of *Sorio* and its place in the worship of *Wakh*, their god. I believe the Lord is opening up this community to be reached out with the gospel. Other villages that we visited and were similarly welcomed include Tubcha, Dubsahai dofo, Farakoren, Ong'eli, Nahgan, and California.

2. Great Needs of the People of Rendile

- i. There's need for more labourers in the area, especially those that can communicate to the people of Rendile and Samburu in their local dialect.

This is necessitated by at least three factors. Firstly, the majority of the members of the Rendile community can neither communicate in English or Swahili. This means that if a foreigner is to speak with them, he must use a translator. The challenge of translation is however, that you can't be sure that the information is accurately relayed to your audience. For example, generally speaking, there is difficulty in translating illustrations from Swahili or English to another language. This however, would not be the case if a member of their community speaks with them. Besides, it would be much easier for a local labour to use relevant illustrations and examples that would turn out to be very effective. I emphasize illustrations and examples because the majority of the members of this community are illiterate, not to mention the fact that they don't have a Bible translation in their own language. Therefore, preaching in such a case is only effective if accompanied by a lot of illustrations. Other than accuracy of translation, there is also the challenge of getting a reliable translator due to high levels of illiteracy and fewer number of Christians in the community. Of the three men in Korr church where we were hosted, only Ogom can translate, perhaps most comfortably from Swahili to Rendile. Secondly, for the sake of effectiveness and ease of assessment of progress, it would be much better and wiser to labor among these people on a long-term basis as opposed to occasional visits. The latter would only be helpful as a means of follow-up. As I observed, some of the villages we visited were asking us establish local churches for them where they can be taught the word of God regularly, especially in *Ong'eli and Uruween*¹. Their initial reception of the gospel in encouraging—both men and women. However, lack of constantly bringing the gospel to them would potentially

¹ These villages are several kilometers from Korr where we have a church plant. Even with his motorbike, Ogom cannot reach them due to lack of roads and long such distances.

lead to syncretism. In other words, they would accept [gladly, as I observed] the message of the gospel while at the same time still hold on to their traditional religion. It is not easy for such people to totally discard the practices they are used to if there's no alternative they are being pointed towards. Biblically speaking, I think Paul's model of discipleship is worth emulating at this point. He would spend some time with the people to whom he ministered to make sure they are grounded in the truths that he sought to bring to them before he moved to the next destination. Thirdly, the laborer working among them must be very familiar with their religious systems for the sake of effectively reaching them with the gospel. Generally speaking, the people of Rendile are very religious and one has to be thoroughly cognizant with their religious practices in order to utilize them, not only as points of entry during preaching but also to know how to invalidate them as impotent for salvation. For example, among other things that they tightly cling upon, they have a traditional animal sacrificial system called *Sorio*² and another one called *Haay*³. They also have a place of traditional prayer called *Nahapo*⁴. Such a person would also be properly acquainted with their rites of passage such as *Khaandi*⁵ in order to integrate with them and utilize such gatherings as opportunities for the gospel. In addition, a locally stationed laborer would be at a position to minister to the *Morans*⁶ in the evenings since it is not easy to find them at home during the day.

² A traditional practice that is similar to the Jewish Passover in which the firstborn son of each family slaughters a sheep and smears its blood on the doorposts, back of camels and other animals, on men's chest and forehead, and on women's ear and cheek. The meat is shared among the members of the family and with other families who did not slaughter anything.

³ A traditional religious practice among the Rendiles in which on the night of the new moon, the first-born son of each family blows a horn with an accompanying prayer ritual.

⁴ A place for watching and prayer with a fire that never goes out. Every evening at 8 p.m. all the men (only married ones) of the village assemble there for a ritualistic prayer, led by one of them, a member of the Saale sub-clan. This sub-clan is known to be prayerful.

⁵ The traditional circumcision among the Rendiles conducted periodically as a rite of passage. It attracts a large number of boys in their teens.

⁶ Young men who have undergone the traditional rites of passage (like circumcision) and are tasked with the responsibility of taking care of the animals, especially where long-distant grazing is required. They leave in the morning with the animals and only come back to the villages in the evening. Some of them also provide security for the animals due to high prevalence of cattle rustling and banditry.



Figure 2 Nadesol speaking with his kinsmen. He is the only man among the three men laboring in Korr church who can speak both Rendile and Samburu languages. The two others include Ogom and Godana.

- ii. There is need to translate most of the good [doctrinal] literature content that we have in TBC Nairobi office to Swahili for the benefit of the TBC church in Korr.

Since Ogom can speak Swahili, he would be able translate such content to the members of his church in his own dialect. During his last visit to Nairobi, he asked for my notes on Psalms that I used in the adult Sunday school. It's quite interesting that they have been using the same notes for their adult Sunday school for the past Sundays and were even asking for more. Ogom and Maqaa divided the content among themselves and undertook to teach it through. I therefore, think it is possible to utilize Ogom, Maqaa and Diba to translate some of these materials to Rendile if they pool together. I'm appealing for them to work as a team for the sake of achieving some degree of accuracy. During my preaching among the Rendiles, Diba did translate for me quite well and I think his ability in this area can be harnessed. Maqaa was also handy during the Sunday service

public Scripture reading. It's quite encouraging that he was able to read a whole chapter from the Swahili Bible and translate to Rendile quite well. They should not only be encouraged to take such initiatives but also be used in such tasks as translation. Other than making sure that these good literature materials are available in Swahili or Rendile language, I was informed by the brethren in Korr that they will soon have the New Testament available to them by the Bible Society of Kenya in their local dialect, something for which we need to thank God.

iii. There is need to pray for the fruit of the gospel among the people of Rendile.

In light of the above 2 needs, the church ought to pray that God would raise men from among the people of Rendile who would be willing to preach to them the gospel for their salvation. We have young people like Diba and Maqaa who are greatly advantaged to benefit their community with the good news because they have been educated and would therefore, not only help their local church, Korr, in future but also evangelize the villages around them. These men could be encouraged to consider ministry—in case the Lord is calling them. The church also needs to pray that God's word that has been repeatedly planted among these villages over the years may bear fruit.

3. The challenges faced during the trip

There were majorly four challenges we encountered: -

- i. **Difficulty of reaching out to the Morans.*** The Morans travel long distances as they take the animals with them for grazing. This makes it difficult to reach out to them with the gospel except late in the evening when they come back. You can read my recommendations under the needs of the people of Rendile above.
- ii. **Language barrier.*** Most of the members of the community can only speak Rendile or Samburu (the Arielle Rendiles). It means that unless someone translates or speaks their language,

communicating becomes difficult. You can read my recommendations under the needs of the people of Rendile above.

iii. Geographical challenges. The torrential rains [although quite intermittent and unpredictable] deposit large volumes of *laga*⁷ which makes it difficult for vehicles and motorbikes to move around. The surface runoff from the Samburu hills also form seasonal rivers that are too flooded to cross. For example, on both ways, we had to cross Margi seasonal river at the time when its waters were undulating. Most motorists were either camping on one end waiting for the waters to subside or turning back. We thank the Lord for the car we had that could maneuver such challenging terrains.

iv. Cultural challenges. In all the villages we visited, men and women do not sit together and this means that they have to be reached out with the gospel separately. I believe such challenges can only be overcome when the gospel penetrates the hearts of these people.



Figure 3 The waters of Margi seasonal river overflowing and making it difficult for motorists to cross.

⁷ Large volumes of desert sand deposited by heavy rains

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