



DESTINATION MONGOLIA

By Rob

I met Adam about a year and a half ago at a conference in Missouri. A music missionary serving with a church plant in western Mongolia, he gave a presentation on his work in supporting church musician development, which included teaching piano and guitar. He had also compiled a songbook with every Kazakh and Mongolian language song he could find. In the presentation, he expressed a desire to see new songs composed to serve the church in the region. Right after the presentation, I promised him that if he brought me to Mongolia, I would turn his students into songwriters.

Adam talked to the pastor of the church where he worked, Dave Baker, who in turn spoke with Rev. Puje, a denominational leader. The word came back that they did not want me working merely with a small church plant on the western side of the country. Rather, this was something to benefit the whole church. Puje noted that the church had been creating their own songs up until ten or fifteen years ago and then it stopped suddenly. They needed someone to come and catalyze the work anew.

For weeks, I went back and forth between being unbearably excited about having the privilege of being in the room when new Mongolian Scripture songs were created and being unbearably apprehensive that I had promised more than I could deliver. I'd told Adam I could get his guitar

students writing songs. Now, I was expected to reawaken a dormant gifting of the Holy Spirit throughout a whole group of believers across an entire country.

On the good days, I recognized that this was God's work, not mine. I just got to be there when it happened. On the bad days, I thought that if something powerful didn't happen, I would be blamed for the failure of these song writing seminars.

If you were among those praying regularly for the work in Mongolia, you probably heard that I was sick. It is technically true that I was sick. I had a fever one day and a bit of nausea. I had diarrhea for two weeks. When I got an appointment to see a physician, the main thing the doctor noticed was that I had high blood pressure. They spent more energy treating high blood pressure than intestinal issues. And yet, I never *felt* as ill I as apparently was. I don't know if I've ever felt so strongly that I was running on Holy Spirit power, fueled by prayer, than I did on this trip.

I led two 3-day seminars, one in the capital of Ulaanbaator and



Top: Rob teaching in Ulaanbaator, with Pastor Puje translating. Puje did a lot of the organizational work for the Ulaanbaator seminar and wants to do a much larger event like this next year.

Bottom: A new poem about baptism is being set to music on the dombro, a traditional Asian instrument favored by the Kazahks.

Photos by Colter Knippa.

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a second on the western side of the country in the small city of Khovd. I taught the musical side, while Rev. Baker handled the Biblical exegesis side. Baker could teach fluently in Kazakh, but had a translator for Mongolian. The group in the capital was primarily Mongolian-speaking, while the latter group was a mix of Mongolian and Kazakh speakers. We had about 20 people in the capital, mostly professional or semi-professional musicians and church music leaders. We had a day of teaching and creating, a day of creative contemplation, and an optional third day to record. Anyone who wanted to document their creations to share with the greater church was invited to record on the third day. We recorded six songs.

Then we made the 20-hour drive across the Gobi Desert to Khovd. When we arrived there, we learned that an announcement given to local churches may have been mistranslated. Our Monday event was scheduled for noon to five PM, though “noon” was not a familiar term. The night before the event, Adam told me that the only people he was sure would be attending were four of his guitar students, since they had arrived from out of town. When no one at all showed up for the noon start period, we pivoted to a 5:00 start. This turned out to be the right choice; we had close to 40 people at 5:00. None of them had ever composed a song before, though one lady said she tried to write a song once many years ago, but never finished it. We encouraged the participants to break into groups and create a refrain from a Psalm, then come

back in twenty minutes and share what they’d come up with. At the end of the exercise, no one wanted to share a song. The groups said they didn’t have a lot and struggled with the exercise. Then the youngest girl in the room—one of Adam’s guitar students—stood and shared her refrain. She said she is just learning to play guitar and didn’t know anything about making songs, but as she was reading the Psalm, this idea came to her. Then the oldest woman in the room stood up and sang her Psalm, powerfully singing in a traditional Mongol style. After that, a dozen or so people shared songs and poems in various stages of completion. Baker observed, “For a group that ‘doesn’t have a lot,’ they had quite a bit.” On the final day, we recorded six new songs, including the song started many years ago, finally finished.

Puje wants to go bigger next year. Some participants could not get away from jobs and families to stay the whole time. Next year, he wants to reserve a retreat center where the participants could be together without outside distractions. On my side, I’m hoping to put together a team who can lead, so it isn’t me all the time.

My year slows down after this, but 2025 looks to be full of many ministry opportunities. Please join me in thanking the Lord for the opportunities I’ve had in 2024 to participate in what He’s doing and please pray for the right things to come together in 2025.

Top: Many years ago, she started a song to help children remember the titles of all of the books of the Bible. She finished it at the seminar and recorded the song whilst playing this traditional zither.

Middle: Two of Adam’s guitar students share their first song.

Bottom: Rob prays for the songwriters in Khovd.

Photos by Adam Fosse

ABOUT US

Rob serves as LBT’s Scripture Engagement Coordinator and a specialist in Ethnodoxology.

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