



UK AND IRELAND

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PARTNERSHIP

Inspiring Christlikeness

transform

Autumn
2024

Langham Partnership News



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Hello!

If you would like multiple copies of this magazine for friends, church members, etc., please contact the address below.

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Have you considered including Langham Partnership in your will?

Like many mission organisations we can benefit greatly when friends make a final gift that continues to bless the ministries they have generously supported in life. Once you have made proper and primary provision for family and friends this can be a very effective way to go on making a difference to the church on earth when you have joined the church in glory! If you would like to consider this option in your will please let us know and we will send you a helpful legacy leaflet. Contact Simon Foulds: simon.foulds@langham.org

Letter from the Editor

It's great to be back and it's such a privilege to return to compiling Autumn's edition of Transform. You may notice this time we're having a break from the usual 'Word from the World' feature, because I didn't want you to miss hearing about three current Scholars from South Asia who are studying at UK institutions. Kiran and Karuna Sharma are conducting cutting-edge research for Nepal (**page 4**), and Francis Mathew is hoping to impact pastoral care of abuse victims in India (**page 9**). I hope you're inspired by Shadrach's story (**page 5**) of training rural pastors and benefiting from Langham's Library Grants scheme.

If you have any feedback about Transform (good or bad!) please email transform@langham.org

In Christ,



Victoria Marsay
 Media Producer for LPUKI



Find out how Langham Preaching began...

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Langham Partnership's Vision and Mission

Langham Partnership's Vision is to see churches equipped for mission and growing to maturity in Christ through the ministry of pastors and leaders who believe, teach and live by the Word of God.

Our mission is to strengthen the ministry of the Word of God through:

- nurturing national movements for biblical preaching (**Langham Preaching**);
- fostering the creation and distribution of evangelical literature (**Langham Literature**);
- and enhancing evangelical theological education (**Langham Scholars**), especially in countries where churches are under resourced.

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Scholars

Equipping theological educators to train future pastors and leaders.

Preaching

Training local pastors to faithfully preach God's word.

Literature

Developing biblical resources to equip pastors and leaders.

Greetings from the National Director:



Streaming to the Lord's Mountain

Dear Friends,

Considering the inspiration and imagery of the Prophets, what might a 'top down' view of 'all nations streaming to the Lord's mountain in the last days' look like? Imagine, believers from Gaza, Russia, Israel, Ukraine, UK, USA, China... indeed every nation, all in national dress and indigenous colours heading to the same place?

The Langham family tries to play a part in sharing and indeed, participating in that vision and you will find many of the 'all nations' in this Transform! We also glimpse an equivalent image during fellowship at Langham events and meetings, with friends, colleagues and supporters from around the world. Surely, we want to be together and travel together, all to the same place, and we want more to join us?



Credit: BBC News website

Runners celebrating the life of champion fell-runner Joss Naylor, prompting John Libby to consider 'all nations streaming to the Lord's mountain in the last days'

As we recognise our common goal and appreciate our different countries and contexts, perhaps we can recommit our prayers and support?

But we don't often focus on this vision and the privilege of having such joint purpose and hope.

Recently, my thoughts were triggered by an article about Joss Naylor (a sheep-farmer and champion fell-runner in the Lake District, who died in June). He wanted his funeral "to celebrate his life". And so, "runners came from every quarter, cresting the

various passes into Wasdale to escort him into the tiny church of St Olaf beneath Scafell Pike. From a helicopter or a drone you could see them, crowds of little figures in their club colours streaming down the slopes of the fells that were his joy".*

As we recognise our common goal and appreciate our different countries and contexts, perhaps we can recommit

our prayers and support?

May we too participate with crowds streaming to the Lord!

With thanks for your support and Christian greetings, as ever,

Rev Canon John Libby
National Director, Langham
Partnership UK and Ireland

*Obituary in *The Economist*, Aug 17th 2024

Celebration Leaflet

■ Inside this copy of Transform you'll find our brand new 'Celebration' leaflet giving a snapshot of Langham from the last financial year.

If you'd like copies to give to friends, please email: uk@langham.org

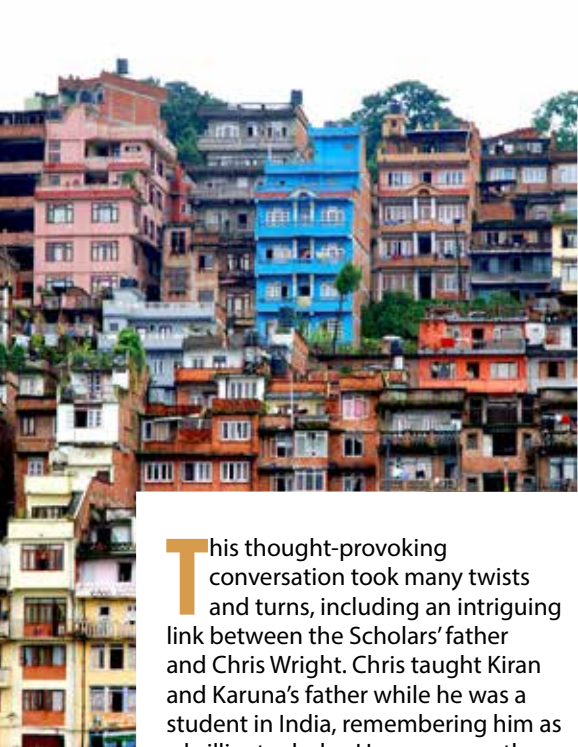


Praying with Langham

You will have noticed the six-month prayer guide isn't inserted into this edition. Langham certainly needs your prayers, actually we would like our prayer requests to you to be more timely and relevant – so we now have a monthly email prayer guide with more in-depth and timely requests, please do subscribe to that or download it. We also have our monthly Langham Live prayer call on Zoom, which you are welcome to attend. For more information, visit: uk.langham.org/langhamlive

Subscribe to our monthly prayer guide





Cutting-Edge Research in the Nepali Christian Context

This thought-provoking conversation took many twists and turns, including an intriguing link between the Scholars' father and Chris Wright. Chris taught Kiran and Karuna's father while he was a student in India, remembering him as a brilliant scholar. He even gave them a copy of his 'marks record.' The siblings then recounted their father's inspiring journey to Christianity.

Despite being raised in a Hindu household, their father had an early desire to become a Christian. After an arranged Hindu wedding, he revealed his Christian beliefs to his new bride. To their father's relief, she understood and supported his decision to adopt Christianity. **At the time there were only about 500 Christians in the country.**

Their father became an evangelist, traveling extensively to spread the Gospel throughout Nepal. This foundation of faith and dedication has clearly influenced Kiran and Karuna's own academic pursuits and Christian lives.

Addressing crucial issues in Nepal

Kiran and Karuna are conducting research through the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS), addressing crucial issues in the Nepali Christian context.

Kiran's research focuses on "Contextually and biblically appropriate financial stewardship in Nepal: socio-cultural analysis and theological reflection." As the current Principal of Ebenezer Theological Seminary, Kiran's work is particularly relevant given the rapid growth of churches in Nepal since the restoration of democracy in 1990.

Kiran's research aims to develop theologically sound financial practices that resonate with the Nepali cultural context.

Karuna is investigating "Inter-Caste marriages among Nepali Christians." As a faculty member at Nepal Theological College in Kathmandu and a teacher, Karuna is deeply aware of the societal constraints still faced by women,

Siblings and Scholars Kiran and Karuna Sharma took part in a fascinating event at the Oxford Town Hall back in July, when Rev Dr Chris Wright interviewed them about their cutting-edge research and remarkable family history.



Langham's Global Ambassador Rev Dr Chris Wright (left) taught Kiran and Karuna's father when he was a student at Union Biblical Seminary in India where Chris was teaching in the 1980s.

particularly in terms of marriage choices. Her research promises to shed light on how Christian communities in Nepal are navigating the complex intersections of faith and caste.

The Nepali context: Christianity in a changing landscape

The Sharma siblings' work is set against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving religious landscape in Nepal. The country has seen a significant rise in Christianity, especially since the 1990s when it transitioned from a monarchy to a secular state. This growth has created a pressing need for theologically trained leaders and institutions to equip the burgeoning Christian community.

Langham Partnership: nurturing global Christian leadership

The event highlighted Langham's crucial role in equipping scholars from the Majority World.

In a poignant moment, Chris Wright asked the Sharma siblings for prayer requests. Both emphasised the need for continued freedom of worship in Nepal and an end to persecution.

Karuna added a heartfelt plea for prayers for Nepali women, hoping for improved life chances and opportunities.

The event served as a powerful reminder of the importance of contextual theological education. The Sharma siblings' research not only contributes to academic discourse but also has the potential to effect real change in their communities.

Historical connection with OCMS

The event was well-attended, bringing together a diverse audience including Langham supporters and OCMS students and staff. The historical connection between Langham Partnership and OCMS is deeply rooted in their founders.

Langham's founder Rev John Stott played a crucial advisory role when Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden were establishing OCMS. This early guidance from Stott underscores the long-standing collaboration between the two organisations in nurturing global Christian scholarship.

Article from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies website, used with permission.

‘Most of the pastors have no access to a library’

The library at Shadrach's Bible Institute consists of a few shelves in a shipping container – but is a vital resource for many pastors.



Shadrach Lukwago is a remarkable man, whom God has used in amazing ways in Uganda.

During a recent Langham Live Zoom call, LPUKI Development Manager Simon Foulds interviewed Shadrach about his life, his faith, and his thankfulness for Langham's Library Grants scheme.

Treating the ill, preaching the Gospel

Shadrach grew up in a Christian home. His father, a pastor, was arrested for his faith during the Bush War in the 1980s. Shadrach came to faith as a teenager, through the Scripture Union, and trained to be a nurse at a Christian hospital where mission was central.

He said he “started preaching the Gospel at the same time as treating people of their illnesses”. Every weekend whenever he was not working, he would go out in the villages to work with local churches. Shadrach realised that the churches had a “gap in discipleship” and untrained leaders.

Consequently, Shadrach attended Kampala Evangelical School of Theology to be trained himself. He felt the pastors in the villages were missing such training, so started the Kiwoko Bible Institute in order to help leaders who could not afford to attend theological college.

48 children living in their house

In 2005, Shadrach and his wife Norah adopted a boy who had been treated in hospital and couldn't be returned



Shadrach Lukwago runs a Bible Institute during school holidays for pastors in rural villages in Uganda.

to his family. A few months later, they had 48 children living in their house and decided to set up Goshen Primary School, Luweero. Now there is a secondary school and a vocational school, with 300 children attending in total.

The Bible Institute is now held at the school during the holidays. Pastors come for two weeks of intensive study then return to their churches to put into practice what they have learnt. Shadrach visits the pastors in their church contexts for encouragement. Over 500 leaders have gone through the programme since it was started.

Link with Langham

Simon was keen for Shadrach to share with supporters about his link with Langham, which actually dates back to 2007, when he attended preaching training in Uganda.

But he says his connection with Langham has become “so much alive” through Mark Armstrong (LPUKI Supporter Development Officer in Ireland), who pointed him in the direction of Langham Literature's Library Grants Scheme.

Through the scheme, Bible Colleges around the world can choose contextually relevant, Biblical books - from a catalogue - for free or at highly reduced prices.

Shadrach said the books are of “great, great help, because most of the pastors, if not all of them that train, do not have such literature in their homes and in their churches.

“When they come to Goshen [Bible Institute], that's when they can at least open some books and others even travel and come back for reference to at least read.”

Books for Bible Colleges campaign

Over 700 Bible Colleges received books as part of the scheme free of charge during the last financial year.

Through our current Books for Bible Colleges campaign, individuals and churches in the UK and Ireland are being encouraged to donate £22 per month (plus Gift Aid) to cover the cost of a grant to a Bible College like Shadrach's.

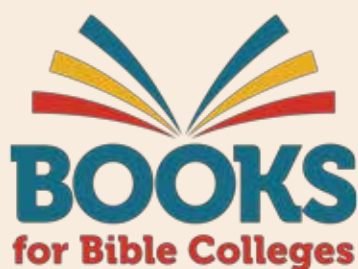
Shadrach's hope and prayer is for the students who go through the training at Goshen to “continue to handle the Word of God faithfully” for the rest of their lives, because pastors are easily taken off course. The so-called prosperity Gospel is prevalent, but also many pastors “just wake up, open a verse and then preach a sermon from a verse out of context”, Shadrach shared.

Providing high quality, Biblical resources for institutes such as Goshen has a real and lasting impact on the ministry of hundreds of pastors for years to come.

Support the Books for Bible Colleges Campaign: booksforbiblecolleges.org

SEE MORE

Watch Shadrach share more about his extraordinary work in Uganda in a Langham Live recording.





Credit: Eduardo Sánchez / Unsplash

An origins story: from building bridges in Argentina to training thousands worldwide

When Rev John Stott was invited to Argentina to lead preaching seminars back in 2001, he could not have imagined that this would be the birth of the global Langham Preaching programme, through which thousands of preachers are trained each year.



Chris Wright (centre) with René Padilla (left) and John Stott (right) during the first Langham Preaching seminar in Argentina, 2001

Church leaders in Latin America had shared with Stott that pastors across the region lacked training, leading to confusion and manipulation from the pulpit.

Wilfredo Weigandt, now the Southern Cone Coordinator for Langham Preaching Latin America, was among that first group of pastors to attend the training.

After a few sessions, Wilfredo started to discover “new truth” for himself.

Building bridges between the Bible and culture

“I saw that there was room to speak to people in a way that was close to the people. In other words, I want to build bridges between the Bible and culture,

between my people, my Argentine people, and what the word of God has to say to my people”.

So Wilfredo began to work as a team with John Stott and Rev Dr Chris Wright to create practical preaching workshops.

Later, he gave up his successful career as an architect to work for Langham Preaching. He said: “I thought to myself, ‘Well, I could build more buildings, or I could dedicate my life to training preachers. So I sold my company and started to train pastors.”

And what began in Argentina quickly spread through Latin America and around the world. Within several years, Langham was invited to launch its new preaching seminars in countries across five continents.

Huge positive impact

Now, 23 years later, there are Langham Preaching movements in 100 countries, with training last year led by over 700 local facilitators.

Back in Argentina, the training is still having a huge positive impact.

For example, at Iglesia Villacentenario, Cordoba, Pastor Marcelo Lopez says that if Langham wasn’t part of his training, “we’d be repeating the same approach to the Bible that I received when I was young”.

Church member Andrea Chialva appreciates the difference that Pastor Marcelo’s training has made. She said his sermons were difficult to understand, and that he would “go off on tangents”.



“The manipulative preaching [in Argentina] is a nationwide problem. There are many people who like it because it’s a light preaching. A preaching that makes you feel good but doesn’t generate any commitment.”

Nelly Perez, Langham Preaching Coordinator for Argentina.



Wilfredo Weigandt, was among that first group of pastors to attend Langham training in 2001

"Now he preaches in such a way to make you think. He provides context for the scripture so we can take what we are learning and apply it."

Helpful for growth

Andrea has also benefited from the training herself, helping her to prepare youth Bible studies. "It has helped me grow a lot. **It really has helped to change our church**", she explained.

Eduardo Robanya, a lay leader at Evangelical Christian Church General Paz, said that as a result of the training across three years, he feels confident about what he is teaching.

"It's like I'm a bridge between the text and the real life of people. So I feel secure now that I have the tools to interpret correctly."

As Langham walks with local churches and training spreads globally, communities and societies are changing.

Equipping pastors to be the 'voice of God'

Wilfredo has a deep concern that through Biblical preaching, God can speak into the lives of Argentinians.

"It's preaching that touches the lives

of those who are there, it speaks to the issues of Argentinians, of the economy, of the great political instability, of machismo, of all the drugs traffic problems we have in Argentina, of poverty of the vulnerability of so many people.

"I dream that there will be preachers who may be the voice of God for Argentina. That they can tell our people, 'Here is a way out... let us follow Jesus'. That every Sunday in every church there be a pastor who can, with clarity, explain a biblical text and call our Argentine society, our entire Latin society, to turn to God."

Thanks to your support, Langham Preaching is equipping pastors to faithfully preach God's Word around the world.

SEE MORE

Watch a video about Wilfredo Weigandt's journey and the birth of Langham Preaching.



Critical resource 'Tackling Trauma' serves Ukrainian Church

At the time of going to print, nearly 2,000 copies of the Ukrainian translation of Langham book 'Tackling Trauma' had been distributed across Ukraine. It was published last year in cooperation with the Eastern



Tackling Trauma was originally published by Langham in 2019, as a collection of essays by experienced and informed Christian professionals.

European Institute of Theology, responding to the Church's need to support victims of war and violence. Several pastors and theologians have shared with Langham their experience of using the book within their ministry. For example, an Assistant Academic Dean at a theological college in Ukraine said: "The Tackling Trauma book has been a tremendous resource. There are virtually no resources available in my local language, and I couldn't think of a more relevant resource right now that has an immediate need, and immediate impact than books dealing with trauma and counselling people that have gone through trauma."

Please remember our Langham family in Ukraine in your prayers at this time. Please also pray for Langham Scholars, volunteers and staff in at least 9 other sensitive countries at war as they carry on Langham's mission to equip church leaders.

Supporter's Page

Introducing Jo Phillips

Let's meet Jo Phillips, who has been the Executive Officer to LPUKI for just over a year.



Q: Who's in your family and where do you live?

I'm married to Ben, and we have three fairly grown-up children, 21, 19 and 16. We live near the Langham Service Centre in Carlisle.

I love that investment in leadership development in places where it's hard to equip and fund, has resulted in resources that are much-needed by the Western Church.

Q: What is your role within LPUKI?

As Executive Officer, I help support the Senior Leadership Team with whatever is needed. That might be arranging events; contributing to the upkeep of our supporter database; thanking our lovely donors and much more. A recent focus has been looking at our applications to trusts and grant-giving foundations who may be interested in contributing to Langham's global ministries.

Q: What have you enjoyed about working for Langham?

Over a decade ago - when returning to work after the season of small children at home - I prayed that the Lord would allow me to work for things that were dearest to His heart. He has heard my prayers. I feel it's a great privilege to play my small part in supporting God's global family that is the Church. We really need each other in so many ways. I think what Langham does around the world is quietly marvellous!

I love that investment in leadership development in places where it's hard to equip and fund, has resulted in resources that are much-needed by the Western Church.

Q: What are you looking forward to in the coming months?

Developing new ways of getting the message out about Langham to folk in the UK. There's a supporter event at the end of November [see back page ad], when we'll be bringing folk up to Carlisle by train, celebrating what God is doing in a service of thanksgiving and hearing about projects and studies. It's so encouraging to see what God is doing as we equip leaders around the world - I want to help share that.



What can I do?

We are building up a team of volunteers across the UK and Ireland, and we would love to benefit from your gifts and any time you may have available. For example:

- Leading a local prayer group
- Sharing Langham stories in newsletters
- Organising a coffee morning
- Speaking on behalf of Langham
- Administration
- Event management
- Manning an event stand

The list of possible roles is as long as the list of gifts God has given us. In return, we will provide you with the resources you need, there will be annual events for us to gather and celebrate Langham's ministry, and of course a huge thank you from us at every opportunity we get!

If you would like to chat about what you could offer, please contact LPUKI Development Manager Simon Foulds on 07941 955985 or email simon.foulds@langham.org

A Sizzling Summer

This year Langham had a stand at four conferences in the UK and Ireland: Keswick Portstewart (NI), Keswick (Cumbria), Kinfire (ROI) and Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention (NI). Attending these events has created two opportunities:

Firstly, it is always great to meet ongoing supporters and have the opportunity to thank them. It is humbling to listen to some personal stories of how a meeting with our founder John Stott has motivated a prolonged period of supporting Langham, as well as hearing how Langham has supported global ministries.

Secondly, it is great to introduce Langham to new friends and explain its impact on the Global Church.



Later this year, we will be at the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) conference at Blackpool, 4 - 6 November 2024. If you are there please come and say hello!

Scholar **hopes** PhD will inform Church's **care of abuse victims**

In June, supporters gathered in Bristol to hear from Indian Langham Scholar Francis Mathew, who is pursuing a PhD on the 'Silence of God' in Old Testament passages depicting violence against women.

Simon Foulds began the interview by asking about his background. Francis grew up in a Pentecostal Christian home, but had a 'light bulb moment' during a Bible study on sin, salvation and the centrality of the cross.

He studied engineering, but strongly sensed the call of God over his life, which he admits he initially tried to run away from. Francis briefly worked for his church, then joined 'Youth With a Mission' for a six-month placement. That short-term mission turned into nine years, during which time he met his wife Medonuo Zhotso [they now have a two-year-old son, Asher Lev].

The 'Silence of God'

They went to a seminary in India, where Francis was mentored by Dr Havilah Dharamraj, a Langham



Graduate and professor in Old Testament studies. He completed a Masters, and while writing his thesis, was inspired to further explore the 'Silence of God' in three rape narratives (Genesis 34, Judges 19, 2 Samuel 13).

"There is a significant gap in biblical scholarship when it comes to understanding the 'Silence of God' in these stories", Francis explained.

"There is a nature and character of God that's more consistent with who he is in these stories that I'm hoping to bring out through my research."

He shared that in India, sometimes people unfairly judge the victims of sexual abuse, while conversely, others feel that God "doesn't really care".

Pastoral care offered to victims

Francis hopes and prays that his research will have a practical impact: "I hope my findings will come alongside the pastoral care that's offered to victims or survivors of rape and sexual abuse and their families in India."

"I have friends who've been abused both in the church and outside as well. Hearing from them, I know how tough and painful it can be when you go through such a crisis in life and go through trauma - it sort of distorts



your understanding of not just reality but, added to that, how the Church offers little care to people and their families, you sometimes are at the far end of even losing your faith in God."

He is currently in the final year of his PhD programme, which is offered through the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence (part of Bristol Baptist College, with degrees validated by the University of Aberdeen). It is a distance-based PhD, so Francis travels to the UK for conferences and extra study once a year.

Grateful for the investment

The Langham Scholars programme and Scholar Leaders (a similar organisation supporting Majority

World leaders in pursuit of PhDs) jointly sponsor Francis' studies. He said that without this support: "There's no way in the world I would have had the resources to do a PhD in a world-class Institute like this. I'm really grateful for this investment."

He's also grateful for the pastoral care given by Langham, as all Langham Scholars are assigned a Scholar Care Coordinator. For Francis, this is Dr Rico Villanueva, who is based in the Philippines. Rico sends him encouraging messages and has regular Zoom calls to check how he and his family are doing.

"Langham is not just interested in me getting a PhD but is really concerned about my life and my heart", Francis said.

Future plans

When Simon asked what his plans were after his PhD, Francis explained that he would like to be a fully-fledged faculty member at the seminary where he is currently a member of staff within the Old Testament department. He would also love to write, not just for the Academy, but also for the Church.

There are over 50 Indian Langham Scholars who have gained their PhDs and returned home to be salt and light. Francis said: "We've got some very prominent thinkers and practitioners in India who are doing this work, but the population in India is fairly large and there is much more that needs to be done in our nation."

"I would say I stand on the shoulders of so many giants who've gone ahead of me."

Thanks to your support, Majority World nations are being impacted by the multiplying effect of Langham Graduates like Dr Havilah, and soon-to-be graduate Francis.

SEE MORE

Watch the entire interview with Francis, where he expands on the reasons for his studies and the impact his PhD has had on his family.



Word on the World

Chris Wright

Baruch and the pain of frustrated ambition (Jeremiah 45)

It is impossible to think about our world today without grief and pain. The mountain of human agony in so many places grows daily. And with that pain goes the feeling of impotence in the face of it all. What can any of us do when such evil is unleashed? Or some of us may face the frustration of having once had great ambitions of how we would “change the world”, but then life intervened and... what happened to those ambitions?

My favourite of the many lesser-known characters in the Bible is Baruch, Jeremiah’s “secretary.” We meet him just four times in Jer. 36, 45, 32 and 43. Baruch was actually a person of high social standing. He was “the son of Neriah”, who seems to have been head of a family close to the royal court. So Baruch would have been a trained candidate for remunerative government service. And yet, at some point Baruch had chosen to attach himself as a scribe to the troublesome and unpopular prophet Jeremiah. He chose to serve a prophet instead of the king!

Now if Baruch spent so much time in Jeremiah’s company, he would have heard Jeremiah pouring out his heart to God in the lonely suffering, disillusionment, bitterness and self-pity that Baruch himself recorded (e.g. Jer. 12:1-4; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 20:7-18). And so, in chapter 45, Baruch records his own personal lament and receives two words from God through Jeremiah. Please read the story of the scroll in ch. 36 and then little ch. 45. What Jeremiah and God were asking Baruch to do would be dangerous and potentially fatal. It would certainly spell the end of any hope that he might return to government service in the future.

Baruch has two strong emotional reactions. One is expressed in verse 3: “Woe to me! The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.” The other is hidden in his heart but exposed by Jeremiah in verse 5: “Should you then



seek great things for yourself?” - or in other words, “What’s left now for any ambitions and hopes I might have?” Bluntly, Baruch is in deep pain (who wouldn’t be, after writing down all we read in Jer. 1-25?). And he feels profound frustration that he would never achieve any of what he once dreamed of. Pain and frustration.

How does God respond, through the brief word that Jeremiah gives him? In two ways.

God sets Baruch’s pain in the light of God’s own pain (v. 4).

“This is what the LORD says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the earth.”

God reminds Baruch of *God’s own* grief (so clear in the words of Jeremiah) in having to destroy what God himself had built, to uproot what he himself had planted. The link between verses 3 and 4 seems to be this: “If that’s how you feel about these coming events, Baruch (v. 3), how do you think I feel, since I am the one who has to do them (v. 4)?”

What God had built and planted was his own people. He had called Israel into existence, led them out of slavery, through the wilderness and planted them in his land. There he had provided and cared for them, bearing with them in infinite patience through centuries of repeated cycles of unfaithfulness, judgment, and restoration. But now judgment must fall, for their rebellions were endemic and incorrigible. He must tear down the building and uproot the vines.

But the agony of it—*for God himself!* To have to destroy something precious that you yourself have created with loving devotion must be a most intense and angry grief. And that is exactly what God feels as he contemplates the horrors that will happen in 587 BC in Jerusalem. If God takes “no pleasure in the death of anyone” (Ezek. 18:23, 30-32; and 33:11), how much pain would

God experience in the appalling suffering of the siege of Jerusalem, the starvation and disease, the rape and slaughter, the razing and burning of buildings, including Solomon's beautiful temple, the humiliating captivity of the survivors? Lamentations tells it all. We should not imagine God just "watching" human suffering, unmoved and uncaring. The Israelites knew differently. When they were suffering in Egypt, God heard, and saw, and knew. Indeed, says Isaiah, "in all their affliction *he too* was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9 ESV).

"Baruch," says God, "whatever understandable grief and sorrow *you* feel needs to be embraced within the infinitely greater pain that is *mine*." And so it should be for us. Any anxiety, distress, grief, agony, that we do (and should) feel for our world, or for ourselves, simply cannot be compared with what is going on in God's own heart. If we can hardly bear to watch the televised suffering of some of the children today in Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza and elsewhere, how does God endure his infinite and intimate awareness of every broken little life on the planet in all history?

Ultimately the only true measure of the extent of the suffering that God has endured over the sins of humanity is the cross of Christ itself. For there, God the Judge chose to become God the judged, bearing upon himself the weight of our sin and God's own judgment in the person of his incarnate Son. Set your pain within *that* context.

But here's the thing: whatever pain we *do* feel should *motivate* us to share in the *mission* of God that flows from the pain-filled love of God for his world. God so loved the world that he gave—gave his Son to the agony of the cross. And God so loved Israel, even at that late hour of 605 BC, that he told Jeremiah to send Baruch to the temple to declare again God's coming judgment—in the hope of stirring repentance that could lead to forgiveness and reprieve (read Jer. 36:7). That is the missional hope of God behind the dangerous mission of Baruch—that people should come to repentance and salvation. That should still be the motivational force of our pain.

God puts Baruch's ambitions in the context of the coming judgment (v. 5)

"Should you then seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them."

Could it be that Baruch was having regrets about his decision to work for Jeremiah? At first, perhaps, unlike so many others, he had recognized Jeremiah as a true prophet, believed his message, and counted it a privilege to share his ministry. But now? Nothing but disillusionment after years of apparent failure. Perhaps he is imagining what life at court could have been like if he hadn't made that choice, but of course, any such ambitions were hopeless now. After all, if Jeremiah's predictions about the coming judgment were to come true, there would be nothing left of Baruch's life (or of his country for that matter). And even if they did not, Baruch's own career was in ruins anyway, having linked himself to a prophet branded a traitor by the government. All ambitions shattered.



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What is God's answer? Basically: "This is not the time for ambitions, Baruch, when you anticipate the coming disaster that lies ahead for everybody in this country. The most I'll grant you is that your own life will be spared" (v. 5b). Cold comfort, indeed! But how true. In the light of the obliterating catastrophe of 587 BC, any ambitions Baruch might entertain would be like hoping to be promoted to Chief Steward on board the Titanic. Rather meaningless, given what was about to happen.

As Christians living in this world now, in view of the certainty of God's ultimate judgment, some of our personal ambitions can seem very petty and small. Now, yes, it is good to have godly ambitions in life, to do the best we can with what God has entrusted to us, and to have strong goals and visions. But are they truly for God and God's kingdom, or for our own advancement or status in the eyes of others?

We sometimes cling on to our "great things" ambitions because they give us a sense of meaning and identity. And that can be true of so-called spiritual "ministry." "I long to be mightily used of the Lord!" (who is actually being used by whom?) "I want my preaching to be really effective!" (for whose praise and benefit?) "I want to be the best pastor this church has had!" (is it a competition?). And if we harbour such ambitions, even secretly perhaps like Baruch, then we can fall prey to deep frustration and the bleakness of unfulfilled aspirations when stuff happens and life gets in the way.

God doesn't give much comfort to that side of Baruch's sorrow or self-pity. He simply puts his ambitions into the context of "the wrath to come." And in the light of that, they begin to seem pretty small indeed. Perhaps we need to evaluate our ambitions by the thought of what they will look like when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, saved by grace and in his righteousness alone. "Great things?" Seek them not. And so, in this otherwise very minor word of God to not even a minor prophet, God says, "I share your pain, but I challenge your ambitions."

And yet... For all Baruch's grief (v. 3) and dashed hopes (v. 5), God still had a job for him. He was called to bear the pain and get on with the work—fulfil his mission; to pluck up his courage, and go and read out the Word of God in public to a people and a king who did not want to listen. Jeremiah needed Baruch. And God still needs Baruchs, who are content to be servants of the servants of God, persevering though pain and frustration. In my childhood we used to sing a song, "Dare to be a Daniel." Great! But the question is, **Can you bear to be a Baruch?**



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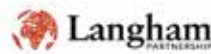
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