

Adoniram Judson

Giants of the Missionary Trail

Adoniram Judson

1788 - 1850

Apostle of the Love of Christ in Burma

by Eugene Myers Harrison

THERE IT WAS -- the site of the historic Let-ma-yoon prison, famous for its heathen horrors and its Christian conquests. Soon after commencing my missionary service in Burma, I went to Mandalay, then through the dense jungle growth to the memorial slab marking the site where Adoniram and Ann Judson, America's first missionaries, endured such incredible sufferings as ambassadors of Christ.

As I stood there I recalled the confident prediction Judson made in 1816, in his first tract for the Burmese people: "About one hundred or at most two hundred years hence the religion of Buddha, of Brahma, of Mohammed and of Rome, with all other false religions, will disappear and the religion of Christ will pervade the whole world." Why is it, as we hasten toward the termination of the two hundred years of which Judson spoke, that the unsaved multitudes of earth are greater by at least one thousand million than they were when Judson made his prediction?

In a day when the cause of world evangelism is so sadly languishing, it will be a humbling and inspiring experience for the Christians of America to turn aside and expose their souls afresh to the story of one who was magnificently captivated by the love of Christ. The love of Christ was his hope, his incentive, and his consolation. The love of Christ sang and sobbed and shouted its way through all the changing scenes, manifold trials and monumental accomplishments of the five great epochs of his life.

I. The Love of Christ Cleansed His Polluted Heart

In the Baptist meeting house in Malden, Massachusetts, the traveler will find a marble tablet bearing the following inscription:

IN MEMORIAM

REV. ADONIRAM JUDSON

BORN AUG. 9, 1788

DIED APRIL 12, 1850

MALDEN, HIS BIRTHPLACE

THE OCEAN, HIS SEPULCHRE

CONVERTED BURMANS AND

THE BURMAN BIBLE

HIS MONUMENT.

HIS RECORD IS ON HIGH.

Judson was a very precocious boy. When only three years of age he learned to read under the tutelage of his mother while his father was absent on a journey. How great was the father's astonishment and delight upon his return, to hear his young son read to him a chapter from the Bible.

He grew up in a devout Christian home. His father, a Congregational minister, cherished the fond hope that his son would follow in his footsteps. But Adoniram was enamored of his brilliance and could not think of wasting his superb talents in so dull a calling as the ministry. Having vanquished all rivals in intellectual contests, he graduated at nineteen from Providence College (now Brown University) as valedictorian. He entertained the most extravagant ambitions and his imagination ran wild as he contemplated his future

eminence. He pictured himself as an orator, greater than Demosthenes, swaying the multitudes with his eloquence; as a second Homer, writing immortal poems; as a second Alexander the Great, weeping because there were no more worlds to conquer.

Judson was not only inordinately ambitious; he was also openly atheistic. It was during the early years of the nineteenth century, while Judson was in college, that French infidelity swept over the country. With only three or four exceptions, all the students of Yale were avowed infidels and preferred to call each other by the names of leading infidels such as Tom Paine or Voltaire, instead of their own names.

Providence College did not escape the contaminations of this vile flood of skepticism. In the class just above that of Judson was a young man by the name of Ernest [other sources identify this individual as "E___" and "Jacob Eames"], who was exceptionally gifted, witty and clever, and an outspoken atheist. An intimate friendship developed between these two brilliant young men, with the result that Judson also became a bold exponent of infidelity, to the extreme mortification of his father and mother. When his father sought to argue with him, he quickly demonstrated his intellectual superiority, but he had no answer to his mother's tears and solemn warnings.

One day he set out on horseback on a tour of adventure through several states. He joined a band of strolling players and lived, as he himself related later, "a wild, reckless life." Leaving the troupe after a few weeks, he continued his trip on horseback, stopping on a certain historic night at a country inn. Apologetically, the landlord explained that, only one room being vacant, he would be obliged to put him next door to a young man who was extremely ill; in fact, probably dying.

"I'll take the room," said Judson. "Death has no terrors for me. You see, I'm an atheist."

Judson retired but sleep eluded him. The partition was very thin and for long hours he listened to the groans of the dying man -- groans of agony and groans of despair. "The poor fellow is evidently dying in terror. I suppose I should go to his assistance, but what could I say that would help him?" thought Judson to himself; and he shivered at the very

thought of going into the presence of the dying man. He felt a blush of shame steal over him. What would his late unbelieving companions think if they knew of his weakness? Above all, what would witty, brilliant Ernest say, if he knew? As he tried to compose himself, the dreadful cries from the next room continued. He pulled the blankets over his head but still he heard the awful sounds and shuddered! Finally, all became quiet in the next room. At dawn, having had no sleep, he rose and inquired of the innkeeper concerning his fellow lodger.

"He is dead." "Dead!" replied Judson. "And do you know who he was?"

"Yes," the innkeeper answered, "he was a graduate of Providence College, a young fellow named Ernest."

Judson was overwhelmed by the news that the young man who died the previous night in the adjoining room in evident terror of death was his college friend Ernest, who had led him into infidelity. For many hours the words "Dead! Lost! Lost!" kept ringing in his ears. There was now just one place that beckoned him. Turning his horse's direction, he went home and begged his father and mother to help him find a faith that would stand the test of life and of death, of time and eternity.

The brilliant young skeptic realized at last that he needed:

A faith for the testing of life!

A faith for the exigencies of death!

A faith for time and eternity!

At this time of acute spiritual struggle, when his mind was filled with the dark clouds of infidelity and his soul enveloped with the black darkness of sin; he turned to the Word of God. Before long his heart was cleansed, his mind illumined and his soul enraptured by the incoming tide of the love of Christ. Henceforth Ephesians 3:17-19 was his great text and the love of Christ was his theme. Henceforth he was magnificently captivated by the

love of Christ as he explored the mystic meaning and the abounding fullness of its fourfold dimension -- its breath and length, its depth and height.

II. The Love of Christ Sanctified His Ambitions

As a student at Andover Seminary, Judson heard and read of the work that William Carey and his associates were opening up in India. This influenced him to give serious consideration to the question of foreign missions. His first conclusion was that surely the love of Christ, which had so marvelously banished the darkness from his own soul, was meant for all mankind. By day he was haunted by the vision of vast nations bound and dying in the darksome prison house of sin. By night he spent long, sleepless hours contemplating the hapless condition of teeming multitudes beyond the sea sinking into Christless graves. But it was not easy to find and accept his place in the divine program. There was a terrific struggle in his soul between his worldly ambitions and the claims of the love of Christ. Then one epochal day he went out into the woods and fell down, praying: "More than all else, I long to please Thee, my Lord. What wilt Thou have me to do?" As he prayed, he felt the presence of Jesus close beside him and heard His voice saying, "Go to the uttermost parts and preach the gospel of My love. I send you forth, like Paul, as a witness to distant nations." And; also like Paul, he rose up determined not to be disobedient to his Lord's commission.

He soon gathered around him a group of kindred spirits. Among these were four young men who had come to Andover from William's College: Samuel J. Mills, Jr., James Richards, Luther Rice and Gordon Hall. Already, while in college, these young men had taken refuge from a storm under a haystack and had solemnly dedicated their lives to take the gospel to the "far away places." But there was no missionary society to send them forth. The question which now burdened Judson and his associates was that which Paul raised, "How shall we preach unless we be sent?" In response to the challenge of these consecrated young lives, a missionary society was formed, consecrated money poured in, the necessary equipment was provided and the missionaries arranged to depart. On the 5th day of February, 1812, Judson was married to Ann Hasseltine, who was destined to become the heroic "Ann of Ava." The next day

he and his fellow appointees received solemn ordination at Salem, and on the 19th the Judsons embarked on the sail ship *Caravan*, bound for Calcutta.

During the long voyage the Judsons changed not only their physical, but also their denominational, latitude and longitude. As the result of a protracted study of the New Testament in the original Greek, they decided to become Baptists. Upon reaching Calcutta they had blessed fellowship with the English Baptist missionaries, Carey, Marshman and Ward, and formally aligned themselves with the Baptists.

This was a serious decision. They could no longer expect support from the churches that sent them out. Would the Baptists of the United States, at that time a very feeble people, rise up to their support? Just at this critical juncture another difficulty arose. They were peremptorily ordered out of India by the East India Company, on the expectation that the missionaries would interfere with its nefarious trading practices. After a long journey to the Isle of France, they returned to India and landed at Madras. Again the East India Company ordered them to leave the country immediately, else they would be deported back to England and America. Accordingly, they embarked on the *Georgianna*, which Judson described as a "crazy old vessel." For three weeks they were tossed about by a fierce monsoon in the Bay of Bengal. Ann became desperately ill, and Judson expected her death momentarily. Attended only by her husband, Ann gave birth to her first baby, which soon died and was buried at sea. As they sailed into the harbor of Rangoon, Ann finally rallied. Before them lay a squalid, unspeakably filthy village, whose uncivilized life had been utterly untouched and unsoftened by western influence. The night was made terrible by the cries of the dogs and pigs fighting for the garbage littered throughout the village. That night, said Judson in a letter written soon thereafter, "we have marked as the most gloomy and distressing we have ever passed." Instead of rejoicing that at last they had reached a heathen land where they might stay and proclaim the gospel, they found consolation, he writes, "only in looking beyond our pilgrimage, which we hoped would be short, to that peaceful region where the weary are at rest." Speedy death, either from disease or at the hands of Burma's notoriously cruel officials, seemed to stare them in the face and they were sorely tempted to return to

America, concluding that God had shut the door in their face. But as they prayed through the long vigils of the night, the voice of the Lord comforted them, saying, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." Assured that their blessed Lord was with them and that their commission was still binding, they determined to go forward, whatever the cost, soothed and sustained by the constraints of divine love. They were:

Assured of their Lord's presence!

Comforted by His promise!

Made strong in His love!

The next morning, July 13, 1813, they disembarked. Look ye mortals! Look ye angels! Look ye ages to come! Behold the scene as these two intrepid souls leave the vessel, thereby committing themselves irrevocably to the dark uncertainties of the future, although Mrs. Judson was still so ill she had to be carried in a stretcher! Behold and weep as they go forth together into the chamber of horrors and the vale of bitter tears!

Then began the third great epoch in Judson's memorable pilgrimage.

III. The Love of Christ Glorified His Tribulations

Following the missionaries in their holy adventure, we behold scenes too horrible for words. On one occasion Judson, pitifully weak and emaciated, was driven in chains across the burning tropical sands, until, his back lacerated beneath the lash and his feet covered with blisters, he fell to the ground and prayed that the mercy of God might grant him a speedy death. For almost two years he was incarcerated in a prison too vile to house animals. He was bound with three pairs of chains and his feet were fastened in stocks which at times were elevated, so that only his shoulders touched the ground. The room into which he and many other prisoners were crowded, was without a window and felt like a fiery furnace under the merciless glare of the tropical sun. The stench of the place was terrible, vermin crawled everywhere and the jailer, Mr. Spotted Face, was a

brute in human form. And, as Judson saw other prisoners dragged out to execution, he lived in terrifying suspense and was able to say with Paul, "I die daily."

Surely he would have fallen and perished under the weight of his cross, except for the tender, persistent, beautiful ministrations of Ann. As often as possible she bribed the jailer and then, under cover of darkness, crept to the door of Judson's den, bringing food and whispering words of hope and consolation. Finally for three long weeks she did not appear; but, upon her return, she bore in her arms a newborn baby to explain her absence. An epidemic of smallpox was raging unchecked through the city and little Maria was smitten with the dread disease. Due to the double strain of concern for her imprisoned husband and the suffering baby, Ann found herself unable to nurse the little one. Tormented by its pitiful cries, Ann took her baby up and down the streets of the city, pleading for mercy and for milk: "You women who have babies, have mercy on my baby and nurse her!"

Near the prison gate was a caged lion, whose fearful bellows had told all that he was being starved against the day when he would be turned loose upon some of the prisoners. But the lion died of hunger before the plan was executed. Thereupon, plucky Mrs. Judson cleaned out the cage and secured permission for her husband to stay there for a few weeks, since he was critically ill with a fever.

One of the most pathetic pages in the history of Christian missions is that which describes the scene when Judson was finally released and returned to the mission house seeking Ann, who again had failed to visit him for some weeks. As he ambled down the street as fast as his maimed ankles would permit, the tormenting question kept repeating itself, "Is Ann still alive?" Upon reaching the house, the first object to attract his attention was a fat, half-naked Burman woman squatting in the ashes beside a pan of coals and holding on her knees an emaciated baby, so begrimed with dirt that it did not occur to him that it could be his own. Across the foot of the bed, as though she had fallen there, lay a human object that, at the first glance, was no more recognizable than his child. The face was of a ghastly paleness and the body shrunken to the last

degree of emaciation. The glossy black curls had all been shorn from the finely-shaped head. There lay the faithful and devoted wife who had followed him so unwearily from prison to prison, ever alleviating his distresses and consoling him in his trials. Presently Ann felt warm tears falling upon her face and, rousing from her stupor, saw Judson by her side.

And there were other sorrows. Before he had been in Burma fourteen years he buried Ann and all of his children. But "the love that never fails" sustained him. "If I had not felt certain," he says, "that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings." Judson joined with Paul in declaring: "The love of Christ constraineth me ... Therefore I will glory in reproaches, in persecution and in distresses for Christ's sake."

Thus began the fourth epoch in the life of this amazing man, this apostle of the love of Christ in Burma.

IV. The Love of Christ Animated All His Undertakings

Judson had two master passions. One was to translate the Bible into the Burmese language so that multitudes whom he would never see could read it and hear God's voice speaking directly to their own hearts. Having mastered the intricacies of this very difficult tongue, he spent long days, weary months and exhausting years in translation. It was while engaged in this pursuit that he was dragged away to languish in prison at Ava and Oung-Pen-La. Ruffians were plundering every white man's house. What was to be done to preserve the precious manuscripts? What seemed to be a clever plan occurred to Ann: She would hide the manuscripts in a pillow! Having done this, she brought the pillow to the prison and no one dreamed that the white man's head rested at night on the most precious of treasures -- the Word of God.

Then came a crushing misfortune. Taking a fancy to the pillow, the jailer grabbed it and kept it as his own. Judson's spirit groaned within him. What an irreparable loss! But Ann's ingenuity was not yet exhausted. Having made a prettier, nicer pillow, she brought

it to the prison and Judson said to the jailer, "How would you like to exchange the old, soiled pillow for this bright new one?" Mr. Spotted Face readily agreed, wondering at the odd taste of the white man. Thus the precious manuscripts were recovered. Many times, smitten down with disease and at death's door, he breathed out the prayer, "Lord, let me finish my work. Spare me long enough to put Thy saving Word into the hands of a perishing people." What a day of rejoicing it was when the Word of God came off the press with its stupendous invitation, "Whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely."

Judson's concern to get the gospel into the language of other tribes and nations was shared by his wife. Ann was the first missionary to learn Siamese and to translate a portion of Scripture, the Gospel of Matthew, into that tongue.

Judson had a second passion and prayer, namely, to lead individuals to know Christ in His transforming power and to live to see one hundred converts. With great tact and consuming zeal, he preached by the road side and dealt with inquirers. Years went by without a single convert, but he refused to be discouraged. When a member of the Mission Board in America wrote, deploring the lack of results, and inquired concerning the prospects, this intrepid ambassador of Christ replied, "The prospects are as bright as the promise of God." There were many disappointments, but six years of unwearied effort and fervent supplication were finally rewarded. His Journal, of June 27, 1819, gives the thrilling record. "We proceeded," he says, "to a large pond, the bank of which is graced with an enormous image of Buddha, and there administered baptism to Maung Nau, the first Burman convert. Oh, may it prove the beginning of a series of baptisms in the Burman empire, which shall continue in uninterrupted succession to the end of time!"

With a judicious admixture of gentle entreaty and stern warning, he sought one day to point out to a native woman the momentous alternatives that lay before her. Making two divergent marks on the ground, he said, "This leads to eternal life, while this leads to

eternal destruction. Will you leave this straight and narrow path drawn by the Saviour's finger for that which leads to everlasting despair? Will you? Will you?"

Many years later this woman, now an earnest and active Christian, said, "Even now I can hear that terribly earnest 'Will you?' coming from the teacher's lips as though it was the voice of God." Yes, the voice of God! Many listened wistfully to the foreigner's preaching, for even their depraved hearts discerned in his message the tender and imperious accents of the voice of God.

The voice of God!

Its tenderness!

Its imperiousness!

Will you heed the tender and imperious accents of the Voice of God?

Judson frequently went on extended preaching trips to villages scattered through the jungles. As Lower Burma is a delta region with innumerable streams, he usually traveled by boat. While living at Amherst, he became exceedingly burdened for the salvation of his boatman.

He frequently went to the man's house to converse with him on his favorite theme, the love of Christ, but as soon as Judson left, the man and his wife would scrub the bamboo house to remove the contaminations caused by contact with the foreigner. As they traveled by boat from village to village, Judson had many hours in which to enlighten his unwilling auditor concerning his soul's need and to tell him of the Redeemer's love. When a trip was completed and the man asked for his wages, Judson would say, "Come to the service Sunday morning and I will pay you." Greatly impressed by the missionary's life and passionate concern on his behalf, the man eventually came to appreciate and to appropriate "the riches of love in Christ Jesus." And so it was that the erstwhile depraved and stony-hearted boatman became not only a Christian, but also a very zealous evangelist among his own people.

The desperate need of a perishing people was matched by the love of Christ blazing in the soul of Adoniram Judson. In a letter pleading for missionary reinforcements, he speaks of "the sin of turning a deaf ear to the plaintive cry of millions of immortal beings, who, by their darkness and misery, cry, day and night, 'Come to our rescue, ye bright sons and daughters of America. Come and save us, for we are sinking into hell!'"

In the year 1828 an event of vast significance took place. Having come in contact with the Karens, a race of wild people living in remote and almost inaccessible jungles, Judson longed for the opportunity of winning a Karen for Christ and thus reaching his race. This opportunity came to him through Ko Tha Byu, a Karen slave who was sold one day in the bazaar in Moulmein and bought by a native Christian, who forthwith brought him to Judson to be taught and, if possible, evangelized. Ko Tha Byu was a desperate robber bandit. He had taken part in approximately thirty murders and was a hardened criminal with a vicious nature and an ungovernable temper. Patiently, prayerfully, and lovingly, Judson instructed the wretched, depraved creature, who eventually not only yielded to the transforming power of Christ but went through the jungles as a flaming evangelist among his people. The hearts of the Karens were remarkably and providentially prepared for the reception of the gospel message by a tradition prevalent among them to this effect:

Long, long ago the Karen elder brother and his young white brother lived close together. God gave each of them a Book of Gold containing all they needed for their salvation, success and happiness. The Karen brother neglected and lost his Book of Gold and so he fell into a wretched type of existence, ignorant and cruelly oppressed by the Burmese. The white brother, however, prized his Golden Book, or Book of God, and so, when he sailed away across the oceans, God greatly blessed him. Some day the white brother will return, bringing with him God's Book, which, if the Karen people will receive and obey, will bring to them salvation and untold blessings.

Accordingly, as Ko Tha Byu went on his unwearying preaching tours through the jungles, declaring that the long-looked-for white brother had returned with God's Book, hundreds received the message with gladness.

When a depraved slave, a bandit and murderer, was brought to Judson in 1828, who would have imagined that, a century later, the Christian Karens alone would have many splendid high schools, hundreds of village schools, some 800 self-supporting churches and a Christian constituency of more than 150,000?

Being a missionary meant, to Judson, just one thing: to join with Christ in a supreme endeavor "to seek and to save the lost." He was a tireless seeker of souls and the theme of his message never varied. The following entry from his diary is typical:

March 11, Lord's day. Again took the main river. Soon came upon a boat full of men. Their chief, an elderly man, stated that he had already heard much of the gospel ... We went to the shore and spent several hours very delightfully, under the shade of the overhanging trees and the banner of the love of Jesus ... The old man went on his way, rejoicing aloud and declaring his resolution to make known the eternal God and the dying love of Jesus, all along the banks of the Yoon-za-len, his native stream.

In these deserts let me labor,
On these mountains let me tell
How He died -- The blessed Savior,
To redeem a world from hell.

The banner of the love of Jesus

The dying love of Jesus!

The redeeming love of the blessed Saviour!

Answering a communication from a group of missionary candidates in Hamilton, New York, Judson warned of the danger of growing weary in preaching the gospel and of substituting other activities for the business of winning lost souls. He says:

Satan will sympathize with you in the matter and he will present some chapel of ease in which to officiate in your native tongue, some government situation, some professorship or editorship, some literary or scientific pursuit, some

supernumerary translation, or, at least, some system of schools; anything, in a word, that will help you without much surrender of character, to slip out of real missionary work.

If all missionaries in all lands had shared Judson's passion for souls, his vision of missionary conquest would not now be so far short of realization. In his first tract for the Burmese people, written in 1816, he included this sanguine prediction:

About one or at most two hundred years hence the religion of Buddha, of Brahma, of Muhammad and of Rome, together with all other false religions, will disappear and the religion of Christ will pervade the whole world; all quarrels and wars will cease and all the tribes of men will be like a band of mutually loving brothers.

More than a century and a quarter have passed since that prediction was made. We are hastening toward the termination of the two hundred years of which he spoke and, due to the tremendous increase in population, there are more -- vastly more -- unreached and unsaved people in heathen lands today than there were when Carey inaugurated the modern missionary movement. Adoniram Judson is still the voice of God, calling us to pray, witness and sacrifice.

By the mercy of God, Judson lived not only to translate the entire Bible into the Burmese tongue, but also to see thousands pass from darkness and death to light and immortality. At the time of his death there were sixty-three churches and seven thousand converts. "In achieving these triumphs," writes Dr. Boreham, "Judson constantly adhered to his favorite theme -- the love of Christ." He seemed convinced, as Dr. Wayland intimates, that the whole world could be converted if only each individual could be persuaded that there was a place for him in the divine love.

After eight years of loneliness following the death of Ann, Judson had married Sarah Boardman and, during their eleven years of married life, eight children were born to them, three of whom died at an early age. Upon Sarah's death, Judson returned to his homeland after thirty-three years absence for his only furlough. While at home he married Emily Chubbuck, who returned with him to Burma to share the fervent labors of his closing years.

The year 1850 ushered in the final epoch in the life of this hero of the Cross.

V. The Love of Christ Ushered Him into the Fathers House

Judson became critically ill in the spring of 1850 and it was believed that his only hope of recovery lay in taking a long sea voyage. A French barque, the *Aristide Marie*, was scheduled to sail from Moulmein on the 3rd of April. The stricken missionary was carried on board by his weeping converts. When the ship, after certain delays, sailed several days later, he was accompanied only by Mr. Thomas Ranney, a fellow missionary. On April 12, 1850, Adoniram Judson breathed his last and on the same day his body was buried at sea. Meanwhile, Mrs. Judson waited in agonized suspense for four months before learning of her husband's death.

During the last days and weeks of his earthly life, he frequently referred to "the love of Christ" -- his favorite theme, and chief inspiration. As his eyes kindled and the tears chased each other down his cheeks, he would smilingly exclaim, "Oh, the love of Christ! The wondrous love of Christ! The blessed efficacy of the love of Christ!" One day he said,

I have had such views of the loving condescension of Christ and the glories of Heaven, as I believe are seldom granted to mortal men. Oh, the love of Christ! It is the secret of life's inspiration and the source of Heaven's bliss. Oh, the love of Jesus! We cannot understand it now, but what a beautiful study for eternity!

The love of Christ! The efficacy of the love of Christ! The secret of life's inspiration! The source of Heaven 's bliss! A study for eternity! Oh, the wondrous love of Christ!

Shortly before his departure to receive "a victor's crown," he expressed pleasure at the prospect of being buried at sea. It afforded, he said, a sense of freedom and expansion, in agreeable contrast with the dark and narrow confines of the grave, to which he had committed the forms of so many whom he had loved. The vast blue ocean, to which his body was committed a few days later, seemed to Adoniram Judson a beautiful symbol of the love of Christ--

*Boundless in its breadth,
Infinite in its length,*

*Unfathomable in its depth,
And measureless in its height.*

In the exigencies of death, as in the ordeals of life, Ephesians 3: 17-19 was uppermost in Judson's mind. The love of Christ cleansed his polluted heart, sanctified his ambitions, glorified his tribulations, animated all his undertakings and transformed the Valley of Shadows into the bursting dawn of eternal day.

More Information on [Adoniram Judson](#)
