



Adoniram Judson 1788-1850: The Word of God to Burma

'...Break Down Your Pride, and Yield to the Word of God.'

From Malden, Massachusetts, to Myanmar

Adoniram Judson, 1788-1850, was the son of a Congregational pastor in Massachusetts, also called Adoniram. Adoniram senior had studied with Joseph Bellamy, himself a student of Jonathan Edwards.¹ With this background it should not surprise us that our Adoniram Judson had an all-pervading sense of the Sovereignty of God — he was to say of the trials of his life in Burma,² *'If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings'*. This quotation alone should also reassure us that Judson was not content to rest upon his father's faith, but came to his own remarkable salvation, confidence in the goodness of God, and utter acceptance of the authority of the Bible. Later, when a Buddhist teacher would not believe that Christ had suffered the death of the cross, because *'no king would allow his son such indignity'*, Judson was to reply, *'Therefore you are not a disciple of Christ. A true disciple inquires not whether a fact is agreeable to his own reason, but whether it is in the book; his pride has yielded to the divine testimony. Teacher, your pride is still unbroken. Break down your pride, and yield to the word of God.'*

Judson was to have an impact upon the missionary outlook of America similar to that of William Carey on Britain a generation earlier. There was indeed the Massachusetts Missionary Society, begun in 1799, but it did not look beyond the newly: Independent America as a field of labour. The activities of Judson and his colleagues led to the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an organisation rooted in the Congregational Churches of the day, but also the 'mother' of American mission organisations. Judson's early and comprehensive change of mind on the matter of baptism meant that he also was the catalyst in the formation of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, in 1814.

When considering the sufferings entailed in Adoniram's obedience to the heavenly vision, one other great name comes to mind — Henry Martyn. It is truly astounding that in the dawning years of the 19th century these three men, Carey Martyn and Judson, were all in and around Calcutta! Martyn and Carey met; Carey and Judson met; Martyn and Judson missed one another by a handful of years.³ Not only entering the Kingdom but also gladly serving the Kingdom through much tribulation marked all three men. An uncompromising and uncomplicated satisfaction and delight in the Sovereignty of God joined with a robust preaching and proclaiming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ adorned the testimony of all three. The urgent necessity of providing the enduring record, rule and reference of the Bible, in the languages of their hearers and converts, was the dominant task laid on all three.

Adoniram Judson-Beginnings and Conversion

Adoniram Judson was born into the heady beginnings of the United States of America in August 1788, just nine months before George Washington, reluctant but triumphant general of the Continental Army, was unanimously elected first President, April 30th 1789. Judson's father, Adoniram senior, was a congregational Minister in Malden, Massachusetts, later in Wenham, then Braintree, and then Plymouth. Young Adoniram was notably serious, eager and intelligent, entering Rhode Island College at an early age and achieving academic distinction. As with many a

preacher's son, he had once delighted in gathering his young friends and 'preaching' to them. Now, to his family's distress his reliance on the power of reasoning, together with the strong influence of a fellow student, Jacob Eames, led to his being enamoured of deist, free thinking views of the Living God and religion. He declared his unbelief to his father and left home to begin a tour of the Northern States,⁴ followed by the tearful prayers of his mother and sister.

One night at an inn was passed in acute discomfort because of inescapable evidence of someone gravely ill in an adjoining room. He made inquiry next morning and learned that a young man had indeed died during the night, a young man by the name of Jacob Eames, his deist mentor! By this most startling providence Judson's fig-leaf rationalism was ripped from him, and he was spiritually naked and ashamed before his father's God, the God of the Bible. All that had been presented to him, from a child, as Truth, now crashed in upon him as true indeed. He returned to Plymouth, September 1808, in great distress of mind and spirit. By the 2nd December he had solemnly committed himself to God and to the ministry of the Gospel, and in May 1809 became a member of Third Congregational Church in Plymouth.

Adoniram Judson-Mission and Marriage

Judson was saved, grounded in the truth, a lover of the Bible, and well taught to consider the details of the workings of Providence. These characteristics marked the rest of his life. In the Andover Seminary he was one of a small group passionately concerned about Mission,⁵ and several things inclined his thoughts to Burma. Putting aside the probability of academic preferment, and declining a near certain appointment to a prestigious church ministry, Judson, together with his like-minded colleagues, made the burden for mission known to the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts.

The next year, 1811, the newly formed Foreign Missions Board sent Judson to England to confer with the London Missionary Society. Any joint venture seemed to be impracticable, and so he returned to Plymouth. There he was appointed a Missionary to Asia, to be located in Burma 'or elsewhere as ... Providence shall open the most favourable door'.⁶ Before his eventful trip (he was captured by French privateers!) to England, Adoniram had lost his heart to Ann Hasseltine, and after his return they were married at Bradford on February 5th 1812.⁷ Twelve days later they embarked at Salem on the brig Caravan bound for Calcutta. Ann had confided in a letter to a friend that she was '*...willing, and expect, if nothing in Providence prevents, to spend my days in this world in heathen lands ... (determined) to give up all my comforts and enjoyments here, sacrifice my affection to relatives and friends, and go where God in his Providence, shall see fit to place me*'. Ten years later she made a trip home to the US, for health's sake, returned to Burma in 1823 and died there in 1826. Adoniram never saw his parents again, returning very briefly to the US in 1845, thirty-three years after his departure.

Adoniram and Ann Judson in India

The Judson's were four months voyaging around the Cape of Good Hope, and arrived in Calcutta in June. Parallel with that voyage another inward one had taken place. In full expectation of making converts in Burma, Adoniram gave himself anew to the question of baptism. Earnest discussions with his bride, reading and re-reading his Greek Testament, resulted in the pair arriving in India persuaded of a Baptist view of that ordinance. This I record in no spirit of argument, but as a profoundly serious matter of fact for the missionaries and their companions. They made the same journey that Henry Martyn had made, to Serampore, to enjoy fellowship and hospitality with William Carey and the company there. Judson records in his diary: '*September 1st, announced to the Secretary of the A.B.C.F.M. my change of sentiment on the subject of Baptism. September 6th was baptized in Calcutta, with Mrs. Judson, by the Rev. Mr. Ward.*' All connection with his sending churches and their support had been cut; there was no Baptist Mission involvement in the States. 'By faith' and 'courage of conviction' took on new depths of meaning!

Being now Baptists was only the beginning of their troubles. Under the scant umbrella of the East India Company, India was under British dominion, and in 1812 Britain and America were at war

again.⁸ *‘These Judsons then; one can hear the Establishment in their dubs, ‘American Missionaries? American spies more like! And anyway we don’t like missionaries of the Serampore kind, they encourage the natives and insult the gentry.’*

The whole American party was summarily ordered to return to America and their plea to re-settle elsewhere in India was refused, and they were then ordered to sail to England. A request that they be allowed to go to Mauritius (Isle de France) was granted, but only two could travel on the ship available. Mr. and Mrs. Newell went, and the Judsons remained in Calcutta. After events which read like a schoolboys’ adventure story they at last came to Mauritius in January 1813. There they learned that Mrs. Newell had died.⁹ Mr. Newell left for Ceylon, and the other member of the company, Mr. Rice, embarked for America to seek the support of Baptist Churches there.

The Judson’s were alone, outside of Burma, having no ministry, and no apparent support. Perhaps they thought on Joseph in prison, and Psalm 105:19 *‘Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him’*. After a temporary stay on Prince of Wales Island in the Strait of Malacca, and a journey which severely tried Ann’s health, they at last came to Rangoon, Burma, on July 13th 1813, almost eighteen months after leaving America. In Rangoon Adoniram and Ann took up residence in the English Baptist mission house, where Felix Carey, eldest of William’s three sons, had begun a Gospel work. To his father’s great disappointment, Felix had not persevered in this labour, and indeed was absent when the Judson’s arrived. Soon afterwards Felix entered government service, leaving the Americans in possession of the Mission assets. *‘Felix is shrivelled from a missionary into an ambassador’*, lamented his father.

Adoniram and Ann Judson in Burma-Rangoon

The current Empire in Burma had been precariously and despotically ruling since 1755. British authorities in India maintained a wrangling relationship with the Burmese, whilst the French authorities favoured the rebel forces in the north and eastern regions. Endless border strife between (British) Bengal and (Burmese) Arakan brought about the breaking of diplomatic connections between Britain and Burma in 1811. If the Judsons were not welcome in India as being American, they were even less welcome in Burma as being ‘English’! By 1824 the Judson’s were to be caught in the midst of open war between Burma and British India, and all the underlying xenophobia became sharpened towards these white English-speakers. This is the incessant context of so much that was achieved under the grace of God by these truly committed disciples. The protective protocols of the ‘Golden Throne’ made access to the ‘Golden Ear’ almost impossible. But with God all things are possible to him that believeth, and, before the end, Judson did secure an interview with the Emperor of Burma — ‘The Golden Kingdom’.

A further part of the context is this: the religion prevailing around them was Buddhism. A system of utter atheism and universal negation; no matter, no body, no soul, no God, no sin, no sacrifice, no heaven, no hell, no holy writings, only a fourfold rule and an eightfold path, only the final negation (to cease to exist) as only a dim hope through aeons of soul migration up and down the shadow bondage of existence, from insect to Imperial Prince and round again. And again. And again. Many trials and dangers were in the way for Adoniram and Ann Judson, but the joy of holding forth the Light of the World in that darkness — which was foolishly styled by some the Light of Asia¹⁰ — sustained them.

The first ten years of their labours from 1813 were largely given to learning the Burmese language. There was no published grammar or dictionary, not even an English-speaking teacher: just the need and the call. In a day when seminaries are discontinuing the study even of New Testament Greek, the laborious acquisition by the Bible men like Tyndale, Carey, Martyn, and here Judson, of the language skills needed for the fulfilment of their task is a standing challenge.¹¹ It is an intriguing fact that Ann Judson, in assuming the whole domestic management of their affairs in order to give her husband time to pursue his language work, became at the start a more fluent and idiomatic speaker of Burmese! Necessarily so — she was dealing with the neighbours for everyday things in this new language.

T I M E L I N E

1755–1865	Burmese Konbaung Dynasty, Rangoon its capital.	1804	British and Foreign Bible Society founded
1769	Dr. Benjamin Blayney's edition of the Authorised Version.	1805	Battle of Trafalgar
1776	AMERICA DECLARES INDEPENDENCE	1806	Henry Martyn in India
1781	Henry Martyn born	1807	John Newton died
1783	William Carey baptised	1808	Judson dedicated himself to the Gospel of God
1785	Andrew Fuller's <i>Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation</i>	1809–17	James Madison, U.S. President
1786	The cotton plant introduced in Georgia	1810	American Missionary Society
1788	Adoniram Judson born, Malden, Mass. The Philadelphia Quakers free their slaves	1811	Judson visited the London Missionary Society in England
1789–97	George Washington, U.S. President	1812	Judson married Ann Hasseltine in Bradford, Mass., and embarked for Calcutta Napoleon begins retreat from Moscow.
1789	FRENCH REVOLUTION begun. Ann Hasseltine born	1812–14	USA and Britain at war
1790	Benjamin Franklin died	1813	The Judsons arrived in Rangoon, in connection with Felix Carey. Henry Martyn died.
1791	John Wesley died	1814	American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions established
1793	Carey in India	1815	Judson's son (Roger Williams Judson) born
1794	Paley's <i>Evidences</i>	1816	Roger Williams Judson died.
1795	London Missionary Society founded	1817–25	James Monroe, U.S. President
1797–1801	John Adams, U.S. President	1817	Judson Gospel of Matthew in Burmese
1799	Religious Tract Society founded	1819	Judson began public ministry in Burmese language. First Burmese convert.
1799	Church Missionary Society founded		
1800	First Greek NT printed in America: Mill's, ed. Caleb Alexander		
1801–09	Thomas Jefferson, U.S. President		

Mandalay

Adoniram, though, realised that if a Bible and Christian literature were to be produced in the new language, it would have to be grammatically and stylistically correct to endure the challenging scrutiny of the Court and Religious experts of that time and place. Only then would others receive them. No wonder that he should say 'A young missionary, who expects to pick up the language in a year or two will probably find that he had not counted the cost'. His own resolution was steadfast and dear, 'Notwithstanding my great incompetency, I am beginning to translate the New Testament, being extremely anxious to get some parts of Scriptures, at least, into an intelligible shape, if for no other purpose than to read, as occasion offers, to the Burmans with whom I meet.'

Meanwhile Mr. Rice's 'deputation work' in the States had been well heard, and in his diary for 1815 Judson noted, '*September 5, received information of the establishment of the American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions ... and their appointment of me their missionary*'. For September 11th the diary note was '*Roger Williams Judson was born in Rangoon*'. He might have added that the pregnancy had severely weakened Ann's health. Their firstborn son was to survive a scarce nine months, to May 1816, a pattern of joy and sadness, receiving and losing that continued throughout Judson's life. Despite this Adoniram completed a grammar for the Burmese language in three years, and in May 1817 finished the translation of Matthew's Gospel. He also began to write tracts, and synopses and outlines of Biblical truth in Burmese which he distributed thoughtfully and prayerfully.

Baiting his line in this judicious way he made connection with his first serious inquirer. His sharp and logical mind, and winsome Christian spirit, cheerfully engaging the shrewdness of the first few listeners, even brought applause from them at times. Within six years, in April 1819, Judson took the plunge and ventured to preach in public, in Burmese, and in June he baptised MOUNG HAU, the first Burman convert. Several who had become attached to his informal early ministry followed, and so the mission became a happy body of believers.

'...We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience'.¹²

Crises and Courage

We left Judson translating the New Testament, preaching, at last, in Burmese, and seeing Burman's returning to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. Perhaps because of this he was so harassed by the authorities as to appeal to the Emperor at Ava, but ineffectually. Greatly discouraged, he planned to move the mission to Chittagong, under protection of the British flag. Gathering converts and inquirers together, warning them of the sufferings to which they would be exposed, he declared his intent to leave the country. His converts stood firm, willing to suffer persecution, even death, rather than renounce Christ. They begged him not to leave. '*Stay,*' they said, '*at least until a little church of ten is collected, and a native teacher is set over it, and then, if you must go, we will not say nay ... This religion will spread of itself. The emperor cannot stop it*'. Faced with such heroic discipleship Adoniram and Ann remained in Rangoon.

In this demanding hour God worked mightily, their weakness the occasion of His strength.¹³ Within five months seven Burmese were converted, including the hitherto sceptical MOUNG SHWA-GNONG, and the first woman, MAH-MEN-LA. The church grew, but Ann's state of health caused fear for her life. Judson took her to Calcutta, arriving on the 18th of August, 1820. They spent three months at Serampore with the English Baptists, with marked improvement in Ann's health. Adoniram was anxious about '*those few sheep that I have left in the Burman wilderness ... Oh, may the great Shepherd feed the little flock, and gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom*'.

Returning to their labours in Rangoon early in 1821, concern over Ann's health was renewed, and Adoniram determined that she should return to the U.S. This she did, via Bengal and England, arriving in America in September 1822. Her nine-months stay¹⁴ in the country stirred great interest, especially through the book *An account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire*. This was written and published there in the States, and made immediate impact. From this providence, bringing Ann to America, alone and in ill health, there followed a renewal of prayerful interest, of financial support, and some new recruits to the work.

*'Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound.'*¹⁵

In 1822 the Burman Emperor became aware of the medical skills of Jonathan Price, a fellow labourer with Judson, and summoned him to the court. Adoniram determined to accompany him. He asked leave to work in the city (a church in the heart of the empire would be good!), and this time was received favourably. Before settling in Ava he must await Ann's return, at Rangoon. During this wait he completed translation of the New Testament into Burmese, and prepared a synopsis of the Old Testament as an introduction to the study of the New. Ann returned December

5th, 1823. Rangoon had eighteen converts, a chapel, printing press and schools, with two missionary couples from America to take care of the work. Eight days after Ann's arrival they set out for Ava, where they arrived January 23rd, 1824. By June, Judson was in prison.

The Emperor had given Judson a plot of ground, with assurance of royal protection. Then war broke out between Burma and British-India; the Judson's were once more regarded as '*enemy aliens*'.¹⁶

Adoniram was imprisoned in Oung-penla: forty by thirty by five feet high; no ventilation; one hundred persons of both sexes and all nationalities, nearly all naked, and half famished. He lay with fetters on legs and ankles weighing about fourteen pounds, the marks of which he carried to his death. At night a bamboo pole was placed between the legs and lifted so that the shoulders were on the ground, the feet high in the iron rings. 'Durance vile' assumes a vile reality. Judson in his diaries passed over the anguish, crudities and cruelties in a few modest words. We follow his example. Of more concern to him were the pages of his unfinished Burmese Bible — ten years of diligent, prayerful labour.

Ann's anxious care for her husband included the preservation and transmission of his text of the Burmese Bible: a thrilling episode in Bible history. She importuned all possible helpers: governors, princesses, generals — none were ignored. From having no access at all, she came by insistent stages to have day access to her husband. In the midst of this she gave birth to a daughter, Mary Elizabeth Judson. With mother and tiny daughter sinking into smallpox and spotted fever, Ann administered what comfort and help she could to Adoniram. They discussed the problem of the Scripture manuscripts: buried in the ground they would not survive the rainy season. Ann determined to sew them into a pillow, and there, under Adoniram's head, they survived his time in Oung-pen-la. The pillow was once stolen by a jailer, but restored because it was too hard. The foreign prisoners were suddenly moved, Ann knew not where, nor what had become of the precious pillow. One of the Burman disciples went to the prison compound, hoping to see the pillow; instead he found the Scripture pages. A jailer had wanted the pillow case, but had thrown away the too-hard stuffing!

'...All Things But Loss...'

Through many dangers, toils and snares, the sufficient Grace of God sustained the Judson's, and at last they were able to return together to Rangoon in March 1826. They found the workers scattered and mission property destroyed. Famine, anarchy, an infestation of wild beasts, all convinced Adoniram to relocate the remaining believers to Amherst, and continue the mission work in greater safety there. In September Adoniram had to go to Ava, scene of his loathsome imprisonment, to help the British negotiate a treaty there. During his absence Ann sank again into a fevered disease, and on the evening of October 24, 1826, crying out one last time in Burmese, she died, thirty-seven years old. On November 24th Adoniram at last received this trying news in Ava; on January 24th (1827) he returned to Amherst on April 24th the daughter, Maria Elizabeth, his earthly comfort, being bereft of Ann, also died, age two years and three months.

*'...And I am left alone in the wide world. My own dear family I have buried; one in Rangoon and two in Amherst. What remains for me but to hold myself in readiness to follow the dear departed to that blessed world — **Where my best friends, my kindred, dwell, Where God, my Saviour, reigns?***

During Judson's absence from Amherst Mr. and Mrs. Wade had arrived there — Mrs. Wade caring for his motherless child. Two months later Mr. and Mrs. Boardman joined them,¹⁷ strengthening the work. They resolved to move the mission to Moulmein, where it was centred for the rest of Judson's life. First they had the bitter-sweet task of burying, beside Ann and Maria Judson, Mah-men-la, the first woman convert. They also learned at Amherst of the death of Adoniram Judson senior in Massachusetts, aged seventy-five. Not surprisingly the forty-year-old Adoniram reveals a great sense of loneliness at this time in his letters, sharpened by sorrow over the seeming tardiness of support from America.

Moulmein: The Scriptures Completed

The congregation at Moulmein included inquirers and nineteen scholars, a splendid nucleus for work in four scattered 'zayats', or 'reading rooms'.¹⁸ Soon the first convert was baptized and others followed. Renewed by this joyous labour Judson resumed his translation work in the Old Testament, still the only person able to do so. He had begun with thirty Psalms, perhaps needing the consolations of the sweet psalmist of Israel. Alongside the Bible work tracts and outlines were produced and distributed — or demanded! *'Teacher, are you asleep? We want a writing to learn by heart'* — *'Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings?'* — *'Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells about Jesus Christ'*. Twenty thousand tracts were printed for use at a Buddhist festival, and Adoniram speaks of distributing almost ten thousand tracts, *'giving to none but those who ask'*. In 1831, 217 people were baptized. In September that year Adoniram journeyed amongst the Karen people, and baptized the first tribal believers. The ministry among the Karen people was an enduring one, and a Karen Church exists still today, albeit sorely tried and persecuted.

When the first serious enquirer had approached Judson in 1817, all that he had was two and a half pages, the first chapters of Matthew. Now the whole Bible was complete, in draft. Amidst all the toil and trial, anguish and affliction, this work had groaned on. I say 'groaned' advisedly — because Adoniram was the exact opposite of Henry Martyn in this. Martyn saw preaching as taking him from the enduring work of translation; but still he preached. Judson saw translation as hindering his calling to tell the Good News face to face with his beloved Burmans; but still he translated.

Both yielded themselves of the Living God, mortifying their own desires and even gifts, and displaying the Apostolic spirit, *'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?'*¹⁹ Prevented from ministering among the gospel-hungry Karens by the constraint of translation he groans, *'the tears flow as I write'*. The Bible was essential to the continuance of the Burman churches, and at last in 1834, Judson recorded,

'Thanks be to God, I can now say I have attained. I have knelt down before him with the last leaf in my hand, and imploring his forgiveness for all the sins which have polluted my labours in this department, and his aid in future efforts to remove the errors and imperfections which necessarily cleave to the work, I have commended it to his mercy and grace; I have dedicated it to his glory. May he make his own-inspired word, now complete in the Burman tongue, the grand instrument of filling all Burma with songs of praise to our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen'.

And let all Bible-lovers say, 'Amen!'

A Second Marriage and a Printed Bible

George Boardman had died in 1831. His indefatigable labours to carry the Gospel to regions beyond in Central Burma, leading inexorably to ill health and death, is another soul-stirring testimony. His wife, Sarah, had been a heroic fellow-labourer, and now as his widow she continued the work among the Karens at Tavoy. This intrepid woman put aside the appeals of friends in America to return home with her little boy. Instead she made long missionary trails into the Karen jungles, conducting her 'schools' so well that the authorities came to require that all such establishments be *'conducted on the plan of Mrs. Boardman's schools at Tavoy'*. Adoniram Judson found in Sarah Boardman a kindred spirit, who wept as she read the handwritten pages of the Burmese Bible. Perhaps, as well as the sufferings of Christ and the Glory that should follow, she saw the fellowship of his sufferings in the sacrificial labours of Ann and Adoniram Judson in those costly pages. In April 1834 the thirty-one-year-old widow married the forty-five-year-old widower. In November 1835 their daughter Abigail Ann Judson was born.

Adoniram's burden now was the laborious work of revising his full draft of the Bible. He had a passion for improving, reluctant to leave any task before he considered it 'finished'. He tells us that he never read a chapter without pencil in hand, the original language text beside him, a dictionary

close by. His object was *'to bring the translation to such a state that it may be a standard work'*, and it was printed in 1835. In 1840 he notes *'I enjoyed the great happiness of committing to the press the last sheet of the new edition of the Burmese Bible'*.

Adoniram and Sarah continued their ministry among the Taling people around Moulmein. Sarah addressed herself to learning the language, tract translation and preparation. Adoniram met daily with the Taling disciples before sending them out to the work, and conducted meetings in the zayat. The birth of their sons, Adoniram Brown in 1837, Elnathan in 1838 and Henry in 1839, meant that Sarah must concentrate more upon the children, and also upon Adoniram's health. In the fiftieth year of his life, twenty-fifth in Burma, he was troubled by an illness which affected his lungs. This brought intense pain and loss of voice, and once more a restorative sea voyage was thought to be needed. Adoniram sought the comforting fellowship of the Serampore Mission once again, and found some relief.

Having laboured to complete the Burmese Bible, another daunting task was laid upon him by the Mission Board, to write the first English-Burmese dictionary. He had long shrunk from this. He longed to be engaged in directly declaring Christ to needy souls, and had no relish for the secluded work which lexicography required. He thought it an 'un-missionary' task, but, again, no one else was adequate to it, and the failure of his voice prevented all preaching. The young man who had thought true religion and a Personal God to be unreasonable, here in his maturity brings every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, the God of his father, and faithfully takes up a work which was to occupy the greater part of the rest of his life.

Sarah's Failing Health

In Mardi 1841 Sarah gave birth to a stillborn boy, Luther Judson, and her own health never fully recovered. Serampore was again chosen to be sanatorium for Adoniram and Sarah and the four children. The sea journey afforded some relief, but no real recovery. To compound the anguish Henry died there, just nineteen months old. Their journey back across the Bay of Bengal assumed nightmare proportions, yet in the worst storms of all Adoniram's experience, God blessed him: nineteen seamen professed faith in Jesus Christ, seventeen of whom he subsequently deemed to have endured. They returned to Moulmein in December 1841, and in July 1842 another baby boy was born, named Henry in remembrance of the son buried at Serampore.

Sarah attended to the needs of her family, and worked steadily at a Burmese translation of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Two more sons were born, Charles in December 1843 and Edward in December 1844. Sarah was utterly worn out, prone to any disease. She took short journeys along the coast, with no lasting benefit. The situation shocked Adoniram into seeking leave to bring her to America. *'The hand of God is heavy upon me'*, he wrote to the Board.

'The complaint to which Mrs. Judson is subject has become so violent that nothing but a voyage beyond the tropics can possibly protract her life beyond a period of a few weeks ... She is willing to die, and I hope I am willing to see her die, if it be the divine will ... She is now so desperately weak, and almost helpless, that all say it would be nothing but savage inhumanity to send her off alone. The three younger children, the youngest but three and a half months old, we must leave behind us, casting them, as it were, on the waters, in the hope of finding them after many days. The three elder, Abby Ann, Adoniram, and Elnathan, we take with us, to leave in their parents' native land.'

To America...

On April 26, 1845, the Judson's with the three elder children took ship for London, Adoniram intending to spend a portion of each day working on the Burman dictionary. This voyage was so rough that the captain determined to put in at the Isle of France. On July 5 the ship arrived at Port Louis.²⁰

T I M E L I N E

- 1812** Judson married Ann Hasseltine in Bradford, Mass., and embarked for Calcutta.
Napoleon begins retreat from Moscow.
- 1812–14 USA and Britain at War.
- 1813** The Judsons arrived in Rangoon, in connection with Felix Carey.
- 1814 American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions established.
- 1815** Judson's son, Roger Williams Judson, born.
- 1816** Roger Williams Judson died.
- 1817–25 James Monroe, U.S. President.
- 1817** Judson's Gospel of Matthew in Burmese.
- 1819** Judson began public ministry in Burmese language. First Burmese convert.
- 1820–30 George IV, King of England.
- 1821–23** Ann visits U.S. for health reasons.
- 1823** Judson's New Testament in Burmese completed, with an outline of the Old Testament.
- 1824–26 The first Anglo-Burmese war. Judson imprisoned.
- 1825** Maria Elizabeth Butterworth Judson born.
- 1825–29 John Adams, U.S. President.
- 1826** Ann Hasseltine Judson died. Adoniram Judson senior died.
- 1827** Maria Judson died.
- 1829–37 Andrew Jackson, U.S. President.
- 1830–37 William IV, King of England.
- 1831 TRINITARIAN BIBLE SOCIETY.
- 1833 The Oxford Movement began.
- 1834 William Carey died.
- 1834** Judson finished translating the Old Testament. Married the widow Sarah Boardman.
- 1835** Abby Ann Judson born.
- 1837–41 Martin Van Buren, U.S. President.
- 1837–1901 Victoria, Queen of England.
- 1837** Adoniram Brown Judson born. 'Digest of Scripture' in Burmese finished.
- 1838** Elnathan Judson born.
- 1839** Henry Judson born.
- 1841 William Henry Harrison, U.S. President.
- 1841** Luther Judson still-born. Henry Judson died.
- 1841–45 John Tyler, U.S. President.
- 1842** Henry Hall Judson born. Adoniram's mother died, age 83, Plymouth, Mass.
- 1843** Charles Judson born.
- 1844** Edward Judson born.
- 1845** Embarked for journey to America. Sarah Boardman Judson died and was buried at St. Helena.
Charles Judson died in Burma.
- 1845–49 James Polk, U.S. President.
- 1846** Adoniram Judson married Emily Chubcock at Hamilton, NY, and returned to Burma.
- 1847** Emily Judson writes memoir of Sarah Judson. Emily Francis Judson born.
- 1849–50 Zachary Taylor, U.S. President.
- 1849** English and Burmese Dictionary finished.
- 1850 Millard Fillmore, U.S. President.
- 1850** Adoniram Judson died, April 12th. Charles Judson born and died the same day.
- 1854** Emily Chubcock Judson died.

Dawn in the Batang Valley, Myanmar

Sarah was improved in health and they discussed separating, thinking that she would now be able to continue the voyage to America alone, Adoniram returning to the work in Moulmein. It was not to be. Sarah suffered a severe relapse. Finding another ship about to sail directly for the United States, the Judson's sailed on July 25th. One month later the ship was at anchor in St. James Bay, St. Helena.²¹ In the pre-dawn of September 1 Sarah Judson died, and, as dictated by the climate, was buried the same day. The forlorn husband and children were at sea again the same evening.

When they had talked of parting at Port Louis in July, Sarah had penned some valedictory verses for her husband — with what emotion he would now read them. I give just two stanzas:

*My tears fall fast for thee, love;
How can I say Farewell!
But go; thy God be with thee, love,
Thy heart's deep grief to quell.*

...

*Then gird thine armour on, love,
Nor faint thee by the way,
Till Buddh shall fall and Burma's sons
Shall own Messiah's sway.*

They arrived in Boston, October 15, 1845. Judson was ill-prepared for the greeting that awaited him. He was not well, could scarce speak above a whisper, and his very English was become strange and rusty to him. But all wanted to hear him, and so he addressed audiences with a helper beside him to repeat his whispers. Some were disappointed that he would rather speak of Christ than tell of his own labours. Visiting Ann Judson's hometown, Bradford, he there learned of the death of Charlie, one of the younger children left at Moulmein.

...and Back to Burma

Ann Judson's story was already an inspiration to many in the U.S., and amongst those moved was Emily Chubbock, who had professed faith in Christ when eight years old. Writing under a nom de plume she had good standing in literary America, and Adoniram saw some of her work in a friend's home. He expressed regret that a person of such obvious gifts should devote them to the writing of light literature. '*I should be glad to know her,*' he remarked. '*The lady who writes so well ought to write better. It is a pity that such fine talents should be employed on such subjects*'. In January 1846 when they met, Emily agreed to write a sketch of the life of Sarah Judson. In June, Emily being two months short of twenty-nine, they married.²² In July, with other helpers for the Mission, they embarked for Moulmein. In November they arrived, Emily becoming mother to Edward²³ and Henry.

Adoniram, still labouring with the dictionary, and still burdened to reach into the heart of Burma with the Gospel, decided to cross the Gulf of Martaban to Rangoon once more. Burma was now ruled by a king more cruelly intolerant than ever, whose opposition to Christianity meant that missionary work must be done in utmost secrecy. During the day Judson worked on his dictionary; at night in his home he saw the local Christians, risking their lives to meet him. The stress, inadequate diet, continued sickness in his family and the intolerance of the king compelled him to withdraw to Moulmein. He had hoped that the home Board would authorize him to go and face this fierce king; but '*the timid and narrow policy of his brethren in America*' did not allow it.

In December 1847 Emily Frances Judson was born. Judson, from sad experience, feared for his wife's health, but it was he who went into severe decline. On April 3rd, 1850, he resorted to the well tried tonic of a sea voyage. On April 12th he died, and was buried at sea. The dictionary was half done (English-Burmese), and the second part (Burmese-English) would need another hand to complete it. On April 22nd Emily, unknowing of her husband's death, gave birth to a son, Charles, who died the same day. Soon after Adoniram's death Emily returned to the United States, and she died in June 1854, in Madison County, New York.

Let Edward Judson, Sarah's son, give the review:

(His) achievements far transcended the wildest aspirations of his youth. During the early years in Rangoon, when the mighty purpose of evangelizing Burma began to take definite shape in his mind; even before the first convert, Mounng Nau, was baptized; when, indeed, the young missionary was almost forgotten by his fellow-Christians at home, or merely pitied as a good-hearted enthusiast, the outermost limit reached by his strong-winged hope was

that he might, before he died, build up a church of a hundred converted Burmans, and translate the whole Bible into their language. But far more than this was accomplished during the ten years in Rangoon, the two years in Ava, and the twenty-three years in Moulmein. At the time of his death the native Christians (Burmans and Karens publicly baptized upon the profession of their faith) numbered over seven thousand.

Besides this, hundreds throughout Burma had died rejoicing in the Christian faith. He had not only finished the translation of the Bible, but had accomplished the larger and the more difficult part of the compilation of a Burmese dictionary. At the time of his death there were sixty-three churches established among the Burmans and Karens. These churches were under the oversight of one hundred and sixty-three missionaries, native pastors, and assistants. He had laid the foundations of Christianity deep down in the Burman heart, where they could never be swept away.

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Endnotes:

¹ Jonathan Edwards 1703-58, graduate of Yale, Congregational Pastor at Northampton, Massachusetts, in the Great Awakening.

² Myanmar is the name now used for Burma. In this article I will mostly use Burma, the name that the Judson's would have used in English. Please see QR 546 1999 for an article on Myanmar.

³ Please see QR 554 2001 for an article on Carey, QRs 562 and 563 2003 for articles on Martyr.

⁴ He had dreams of the theatre, and associated with strolling players, admitting later to a vagabond and reckless time. He also remarked some singular Providences in this time, no doubt preparing the heart and mind for that which was to happen.

⁵ Two of the group were from Williams College, where the famous 'haystack' mission prayer meeting had occurred.

⁶ It parallels the church at Olney separating Carey to preach the Gospel 'wherever the providence of God might open his way'.

⁷ Ann is the first of Adoniram's three heroic wives, two of whom loved him until their deaths. Speaking in human foolishness I feel that without Ann the Burmese Bible would never have been completed. The suffering, strength, faith, patience and sheer wifely help and encouragement of these magnificent sisters in Christ deserves to be much more widely known.

⁸ A war which brought British forces to attempt burning the White House, before it was concluded by the treaty of Ghent in 1814

⁹ This first American Mission fatality, on being informed of her imminent death, lifted up her hands in triumph and exclaimed, 'Oh! Glorious news

¹⁰ I have in mind the poem of that name by Edwin Arnold.

¹¹ 'When we take up a language spoken by a people on the other side of the earth, whose very thoughts run in channels diverse from ours, and whose modes of expression are consequently all new; when we find the letters and words all totally destitute of the least resemblance to any language we have ever met with, and these words not fairly distinguished, as in Western writing, by breaks, and points, and capitals, but run together in one continuous line, a sentence or a paragraph seeming to the eye but one long word; when instead of clear characters on paper, we find only obscure scratches on dried palm leaves strung together, and called a book; when we have no dictionary and no interpreter to explain a single word, and must get something of the language before we can avail ourselves of the assistance of a native teacher, that means work' (Judson on his Burmese beginnings).

¹² Romans 5:3.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 12:9.

¹⁴ Ann was away from Adoniram for almost twenty-eight months because of the travelling. Some of his letters at this time reveal the cost of the separation, especially as he did not receive anything from her for the last ten months of his anxious waiting.

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 2:9.

¹⁶ See *Quarterly Record* No. 570, page 18.

¹⁷ Boardman had arrived just in time to construct the coffin for little Maria, and later recorded, 'After leaving the grave we had a delightful conversation on the kindness and tender mercies of our Heavenly Father. Brother Judson seemed carried above his grief'.

¹⁸ Zayat: a public hall for meeting or shelter. There is a delightful anecdote that one of Judson's disciples at this time, wishing to draw the Teacher back from his sorrows and to the teaching, had erected a zayat overnight where Judson could not fail to find it, knowing that he would not be able to resist sitting and reading aloud until someone came to discourse with him. It worked

¹⁹ Acts 9:6. I cannot forbear a pastoral aside — how refreshing to see this spirit, when today some with the shadow of a grain of a gift insist on the 'right' to use it regardless of order, need or guidance.

²⁰ For a sharp taste of déjà vu, see Part I, *Quarterly Record* No. 570, page 18.

²¹ Napoleon had died there in 1821.

²² The marriage offended the literary and the religious world. The one thought that the brilliant 'Fanny Forester' was throwing herself away on 'an old missionary'; the other feared that the missionary cause was compromised by an alliance between its founding father and a writer of fiction.

²³ Edward, perhaps benefitting from his stepmother's tutelage, wrote a most affective life of his father, published in 1894, and available in full (a 72-page pdf file) on the Wholesome Words Web site at www.wholesomewords.org