

Baptist Heritage

Pioneer Missionaries

Born in 1788, Adoniram Judson was one of the first missionaries sent from the United States to spread the Good News of the Jesus Christ.

In June of 1810, Judson and three other aspiring missionaries met with the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, newly organized by the Congregationalists. The Board advised them to 'wait for the openings and guidance of Providence.'

While he was waiting, Judson met a deeply devout schoolteacher named Ann Hasseltine. When the call came from the Board, Ann and Adoniram quickly married. The following day, February 6, 1812, Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice were ordained as 'Christian Missionaries to carry the Gospel of Salvation to the Heathen.'

On February 19, the cargo ship *Caravan* sailed out of Salem (Massachusetts) harbor with the Judsons and the Newells on board. Thus started their four-month journey to India.

In anticipation of needing to defend the Congregational practice of infant baptism before British Baptist missionary William Carey, the Judsons studied their Bibles. The result was the Judsons' conviction that believers' baptism was correct. Upon arriving in India, they asked for baptism by immersion, although they knew that meant breaking ties with the Congregationalists who were supporting them.

The political situation prevented the Judsons from remaining in India. They eventually found themselves on a boat to Burma. On July 13, 1813 Ann and Adoniram finally arrived in the land that would be their home. Their companion, Luther Rice, had also become persuaded of the Baptist position on baptism and returned to the United States to work with Baptists congregations to support the mission in Burma. Because of his work, the first Baptist mission board was formed in 1814.

Ann and Adoniram learned to speak Burmese, and Adoniram spent years studying the language in order to translate the entire Bible into Burmese. Ann wrote a catechism in Burmese.

Life was not easy for New Englanders in this tropical climate. There were no other English-speaking people, no western conveniences, and no tolerance for religious diversity. Their children died young, and Adoniram and Ann suffered frequent illnesses. Adoniram was accused of being a spy and was imprisoned by the king of Burma. Thanks to



Adoniram Judson

Ann's care, Adoniram was eventually released. Ann died of exhaustion shortly thereafter.

Other missionaries were now coming to Burma, working with the Chin and Karen peoples. The missionaries were eager to teach the Burmese to read, especially to read the Bible. Education of children and adults was one of the primary legacies of the Judsons and other missionaries. Translating the Bible, religious tracts, and other educational materials into the local language was also a focus.

Other enduring effects include the development of mission boards to raise funds for mission work. Women's leadership in the U.S. developed as women organized for mission and trained as missionaries.

Missionary letters to churches along with the work of the missionary societies educated and raised awareness about conditions in foreign countries not just in religious circles, but throughout the whole society. The interface of politics and social issues became apparent as missionaries sought ways to improve the lives of impoverished and uneducated people.

The autonomy of the local church has always been a fundamental principal for Baptists. Missionaries lived it out by raising up indigenous leaders through education and leadership training. Churches in Burma and elsewhere are strong today because of this.

The American Baptist Historical Society holds correspondence to and from the Judsons – Ann, Adoniram, and his two successive wives, Sarah Broadman and Emily Chubbuck.



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