

Adinoram Judson was born the same year the U.S. Constitution was ratified and George Washington was elected president. He became the very first missionary ever sent from America. In his first nineteen years in Burma he spent one a half years in the Death Prison, which was given that name for obvious reasons. Most never made it out alive. His first wife “Ann bore three children to Adinoram. All of them died. The first baby, nameless, was born dead just as they sailed from India to Burma. The second child, Roger, lived 17 months and died. The third, Maria, lived to be two, and outlived her mother by [exactly] six months and then died.”¹ Judson would go on to lose two wives and seven of his thirteen children to diseases in the jungles of Burma. When the British invaded Burma, hundreds of British soldiers died in battle, but thousands succumbed to cholera.

He and Ann labored for six years before God gave them their first convert. By year ten they still only had eighteen converts, but then some of them died or moved far away. In his twentieth year, Judson made the following entry into his journal.

Some come two or three months journey, from the borders of Siam and China—Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.

Others come from [hundreds of miles away]—Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? We want to know the truth before we die.

Others come from the interior of the country—Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells about Jesus Christ.²

These men had heard about Judson's gospel tracts and the Spirit prompted them to leave their pagan beliefs and seek out the ultimate truth of the gospel. The last question Judson was asked is the theme of this biography and the question I want to leave with you this morning. Are you Jesus Christ's man? Are you Jesus Christ's woman? I share an annual biography³ to encourage you with the faithfulness of those who have gone before us. But this morning I want to do more than just encourage you. I want to challenge you. For several weeks I have been praying about

this message, that God might use it to call one or more of you to a higher level of obedience and service. There will never be another Adinoram Judson. No one can duplicate his life but anyone believer can duplicate his obedience. Are you Jesus Christ's man? In other words, is there anything you are not willing to do in pursuit of following Jesus? Would you leave this land to become a missionary? Would you be willing to serve in some other form of vocational ministry somewhere? If God calls you to be or to do something, would you obey? Have you ever said to the Lord, "I am willing to go wherever and do whatever you ask of me?" Are you Jesus Christ's man?

Even Judson himself was not always Jesus Christ's man. Though his father was a pastor, Judson wasn't saved until he was twenty years old. Judson was a brilliant child. When he was three years old his mother taught him to read in one week while his father was away. He read an entire chapter of the Bible aloud to his father when he returned home.⁴ His father knew that his oldest son was destined for greatness and he often told him so. He was always the smartest kid in the room and usually far ahead of everyone else, including when he graduated as the valedictorian of Brown University at age 19. He narrowly succeeded in besting his closest friend, Jacob Eames, for this honor.

He had gained the world, but he had lost his faith. He told his father that he could not believe that "the Bible was anything but the work of men—any more than were the Koran or the sacred writings of Buddha—great as his principles might be. Even Jesus...he was certainly the son of man but almost certainly not the son of God."

He turned from his God and broke his parent's hearts when he decided to go to New York city and join the theater. Things didn't work out for him, so he started his way home on horseback. One night he stayed in an inn but shared the room with what sounded like a dying man. He could hear the man gasping and coughing all night long. He was no stranger to death, but this experience unnerved him. He began to wonder if the dying man was prepared for death. Then he turned the same thought on himself. Was he ready? He knew about his father's God but did not believe in him. When he awoke and went to settle the bill he asked the owner about the man and was told that he was dead. Adinoram asked the owner if he knew the man's name. "Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence. Name was Jacob Eames."⁵ Eames was his best friend from college with whom he had just graduated that very summer.

This experience shook him to his core. He knew it could not have been a coincidence. What was worse was that his friend Jacob was a deist and most certainly was not prepared for death. Almost immediately he had this overwhelming sense that the God of the Bible was the real God. In the next two months he repented of his rebellion and completely trusted in Christ and trusted Christ with his future.

A year later he began to feel the call to become a missionary. "It was during a solitary walk in the woods, while meditating and praying on the subject, and feeling half inclined to give it up, that the command of Christ, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature' was presented to my mind with such clearness and power that I came to a full decision, and though great difficulties appeared in my way, resolved to obey the command."⁶

There were indeed great difficulties. There had never been a foreign missionary sent from America and there were no missionary organizations that could send him. Can you imagine what Judson had to overcome to follow Christ? An entire missions organization had to be formed, officers appointed and huge sums of money raised before he could think of leaving the shores of New England.

1. He married well.

While this was happening, his eye was fixed on a young woman he had met. He had only met her one time but wanted to marry her, so he sent her father this request.

I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair.⁷



If you were Ann or her father, how would you have responded? Such a thing had never happened to anyone in U.S. before. This was Ann's reply. "I feel willing, and expect, if nothing in providence prevents, to spend my days in this world in heathen lands. Yes, Lydia, I have about come to the determination 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."⁸

Ann learned the Burmese language much faster than her husband. He eventually became an expert in the language, but she was way ahead of him in terms of being able to converse with the Burmese people.

Ann wrote, "My mornings are busily employed in giving directions to the servants, providing for the family, etc. I have found, by a year's experience, that it is the most direct way I could have taken to acquire the language, as I am frequently obligated to speak Burman all day. I can talk and understand others better than Mr. Judson, though he knows more about the nature and construction of the language."⁹

2. He was committed to God's Word despite every cost.

Judson was a Congregationalist, which is close to a Presbyterian. He believed in and practiced infant baptism. On the initial voyage to India, Judson changed his mind regarding baptism. From a detailed study of God's word, He became convinced that believer's baptism was the correct

view. He had been sent out as a Congregationalist but became a Baptist. This meant that his sending organization—the only one of its kind in the U.S.—would no longer support him. This cost him greatly. He was the first American missionary ever and now he lost his only means of financial support. From the mission field they had to build a Baptist mission's agency. When they landed in India, he and Ann were baptized by one other than William Carey, great missionary to India.



After 33 straight years in Burma, Judson returned to America for several months. He was like a Rockstar. Everyone wanted him to speak at their church and missionary conference. “Adinoram had been the subject of thousands of sermons and hundreds of thousands of prayers. Thousands had named their children for him. Scarcely any celebrity, any public figure, any hero, could hope to rival the interest

aroused by the visit of Adinoram Judson to the United States.”¹⁰

They all begged him to tell harrowing stories of missionary life in Burma. His third wife Emily had a conversation with him about this.

“Well I am sure I gave them a story—the most thrilling one that can be conceived of.”

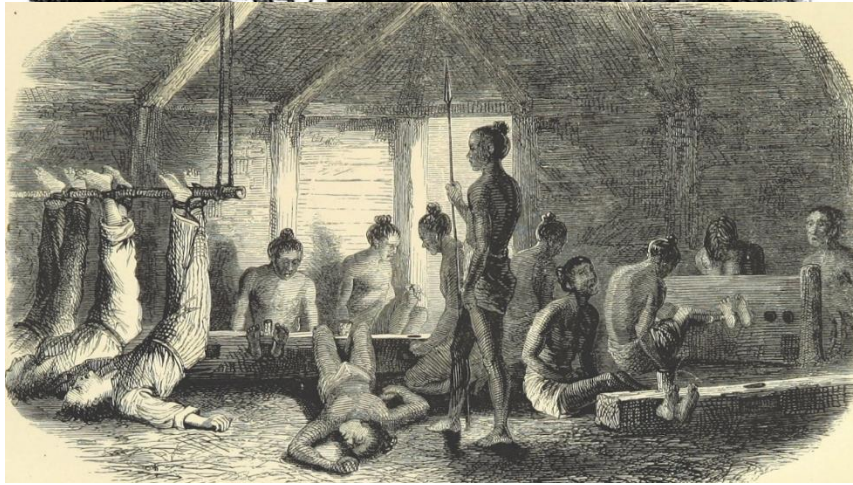
“But they had heard it before. They wanted something new of a man who had just come from the other side of the world.”

“Then I am glad they have it to say, that a man coming from the other side of the world had nothing better to tell them than the wondrous story of Jesus’ dying love.”

3. He was willing to suffer but did not seek martyrdom.

Everyone told him not to go to Burma. It was far too dangerous for missionaries. William Carey’s son had spent a few years there but had made almost no headway and sailed back to India. They tried to avoid going to Burma. Many warned them of the extreme danger, but God directed them like a funnel and they essentially “had no choice.”

There was much danger, but they were also constantly changing their tactics to avoid greater persecution. They sent one couple away because it was too dangerous. They stopped worshipping at their little church building while Buddhist festivals were occurring. They befriended and sought help from government officials to allow more religious freedom. One time they left for seven months until the threat of persecution died down. They were faithful and trusted the Lord, but they were never reckless. Ann was very sick much of the time, so she returned home to the U.S. to try to regain her health. She was gone for a total of 2 years and 4 months and for the last ten months of that time he had not heard from her. He didn’t know if she were dead or alive or if or when she was returning to Burma. That’s the sort of sacrifices they made together.



Judson experienced all manner of persecution in his 38 years in Burma, but the worst occurred during his year and a half in the Death Prison. Beginning the very first night in prison they were hung upside down all night. “With jests and jokes, they lowered the long bamboo pole from the ceiling, passed it between the fettered legs of the prisoners...and hoisted it up with the aid of the block and tackle. Gradually the feet of the prisoners rose into the air until only their shoulders and head rested on the floor.”¹¹ Eleven months into his imprisonment, the guards brought in a caged lion into their prison area,

most likely for psychological intimidation. The prisoners were convinced that they would be fed to the lion one by one. When the lion died, Adinoram asked to be placed in a lion’s cage rather than be chained up with the others. Imagine how bad things must have been to have begged to live in the cage of a dead lion.

To make matters worse, shortly after he was imprisoned, Ann discovered she was pregnant. She was constantly caring for her husband. She would walk a four-mile round trip to the prison each day to bring him a small amount of food. After her daughter Maria was born she carried her infant daughter and made the same daily journey. While he was concerned for his wife, Adinoram “believed she would come to no harm. The Burmese had always treated her with respect. Her steadfast courage, persistence and utter honesty had won their admiration.”¹²

Eventually, baby Maria contracted smallpox and after she recovered, Ann had severe dysentery. She could not care for herself or for her baby so Adinoram was allowed to leave his lion’s cage for a few hours every day to walk around town and beg other young mothers to feed his daughter a small amount of milk. Ironically, the British invasion is what caused his imprisonment. They thought he was a spy. And the British government got him out of prison because Burma needed him for translation work between the British and Burmese governments. Ann died while he was away on this assignment.¹³

4. Death remained bitterly hard despite its commonness.

Two of Judson's wives and seven of his thirteen children died on the mission field. But some of these deaths were likely to have occurred whether he was on the mission field or back home in New England. Even by 1900, by percentage of the population, more people died from infectious diseases than the top ten causes of death today. Listen to this description and see what it reminds you of. "Hysterical panic gripped the whole country. The people had never seen the disease before and had no idea how to deal with it."¹⁴ This disease was cholera and had never been seen in Burma before. Doesn't that description sound like our current pandemic?

There was very little that could be done for these illnesses, which can be seen in a journal entry from his third wife, Emily, who, by the way, had not been born when he first sailed to the mission field.¹⁵

I begged him to take calomel [mercury], and he would have administered it to any other person but in his own case, he procrastinated. But last night...he became alarmed and for the first time took a dose of rhubarb and calomel. I am afraid, however, that it is too late, for he is in a terrible condition this morning. The last resort is a sea voyage...¹⁶

I read this again and again, especially the part about taking a sea voyage. Some people get seasick on a fantastically large cruise ship. I can't imagine being horribly ill and then getting on a large sailboat headed out into rough ocean waters. We know those days before modern medicine were horrible, but we tend to think that since death was so common, it was somehow easier for them to deal with. I think we are largely mistaken in this idea. I think we need to understand that if one death was grievous, ten deaths were ten times as grievous.

While Judson was away doing translation work—and remember, this was immediately after his one and a half years in prison—someone brought him a letter and told him that his daughter Maria had died. "My dear sir. To one who has suffered so much and with such exemplary fortitude, there need but little preface to tell a tale of distress. It were cruel indeed to torture you with doubt and suspense. To sum up the unhappy tidings in a few words—Mrs. Judson is no more."¹⁷ It wasn't his daughter who died, it was his wife and he wasn't told this news one month after she had died. These were Ann's last words.

I must die alone and leave my little one, but as it is the will of God, I acquiesce in His will. I am not afraid of death, but I am afraid I shall not be able to bear these pains. Tell the teacher that the disease was most violent and I could not write. Tell him how I suffered and died. Tell him all that you see.¹⁸

About ten years later, Sarah would become his second wife. Long before then, he wrote a letter to her after her first husband died in Burma. You can feel the pain and suffering in his words.

You are now drinking the bitter cup whose dregs I am somewhat acquainted with. And though for some time you have been aware of its approach, I venture to say that it is far bitterer than you expected. I can assure you that months and months of heart rending anguish are before you. Yet take the bitter cup with both hands...you will soon learn a secret, that there is sweetness at the bottom.¹⁹

Toward the end of his life, he had a powerful reflection on all of his sufferings. “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.”²⁰ Just before he left for his final sea voyage, he said to Emily, “If otherwise, I am willing and glad to die now. I leave myself entirely in the hands of God, to be disposed of according to his holy will.”²¹ While he was dying, he related his degree of suffering to his traveling companion. “How few there are who suffer such torment—who die so hard.”²² Judson was buried at sea in a wood coffin weighted with sand.

5. He experienced deep depression and great pride.

Shortly after the death of his third child and his first wife, Judson entered a several years long depression. During that time he delved deeply into the writings of a Catholic mystic, Madam Guyon who taught sinless perfectionism, among other troubling teachings. He went into an extended period of seclusion. He lived in a little hut he called the hermitage. He gave away all of his money. Three years later he still had not found relief. “Have either of you learned the art of real communion with God? God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not.”²³

During this period he also began to come to terms with something far worse than infectious diseases—hidden pride.

“He began to suspect that his real motive in becoming a missionary had been ...ambition to be the first American foreign missionary; the first missionary to Burma; the first translator of the Bible into Burmese; first in his own eyes and the eyes of men. He had a lust to excel. He had always known that his self-pride and desire to stand out were serious flaws in his nature. They made his entire missionary career up to now a kind of monstrous hypocrisy, a method of securing prominence and praise without admitting it to himself. He had deluded himself.”²⁴

So here we have a trailblazing, faith-filled, first ever missionary from America but he was just as broken as you and me. But the Lord did humble his pride and begin to lift his grief and depression

6. He grew in humility and grace.

About a year later, he wrote a tract with the title, Advice to Missionaries where he warned future missionaries to:

Beware of pride; not the pride of proud men, but the pride of humble men—that secret pride which is apt to grow out of the consciousness that we are esteemed by the great and good. In order to check its operations, it may be well to remember how we appear in the sight of God, and how we should appear in the sight of our fellow-men, if all were known. Endeavor to let all be known. Confess your faults freely, and as publicly as circumstances will require or admit...improve the opportunity for subduing your pride.²⁵

One biographer wrote, “Though his creed was as conservative as ever...the love and grace of God took a larger and larger place in his heart and teaching.”²⁶ Not long before he died he confessed, “I know all that and feel it in my inmost heart. Lying here on my bed, when I could not talk, I have had such views of the loving condescension of Christ and the glories of heaven as

I believe are seldom granted to mortal man. I am willing to live a few years longer, if it should be so ordered.”²⁷

7. He possessed a tireless, missionary zeal.

Obviously, this is what led him to Burma in the first place. As I said, it was six years of effort before they saw their first convert. Here is how Judson described it.



I begin to think that the grace of God has reached his heart. He expressed sentiments of repentance for his sins, and faith in the Saviour. The substance of his profession is, that from the darkness and uncleanness, and sins of his whole life, he has found no other Saviour than Jesus Christ; nowhere else can he look for salvation and therefore he proposes to adhere to Christ and worship him all his life long.²⁸

Judson was very careful not to declare someone to be saved until he was as confident as possible in their conversion. And this caution helped produced very solid believers. One of the first converts expressed great faith in God’s work through the gospel. “Notwithstanding present difficulties and dangers, it’s to be remembered that this work is not yours or ours, but the work of God. If he gives light, the religion will spread. Nothing can impede it.”²⁹

Gospel proclamation was a slow, painful process with 38 years worth of grief but by the time Judson died, there were an estimated 100 churches dozens of missionaries and 8000 believers in Burma where the gospel had never been preached before.³⁰

8. Some religious freedom is necessary for missions and evangelism.

There has always been a fine line between religious freedom and persecution. This was true in Burma for the Judsons and it’s still true today around the world. You can see this reflected in the



2020 World Watch List³¹ of nations with the most persecution. Myanmar, which is Burma, is 19th on the list. Almost 10,000 Burmese Christians have settled next door in Iowa in the past ten years.³² Since 2010, 40% of Iowa’s population growth has come from immigration.³³ Burma has an ongoing 70-year civil war, the longest running

civil-war in the world.³⁴ In the past three years almost a million Muslims have fled from Burma because of persecution.³⁵ So the Buddhists there are equal opportunity oppressors.

As they were able, the Judsons used their contacts within the government to request more religious freedom. So even as foreigners they petitioned the government for help. But all throughout his 38 years in Burma, the level of persecution would ebb and flow based on who was in charge at the moment. And if things got too difficult, they would leave the area and find a new place to start again. Judson's wife Emily recorded this enlightening comment after nearly 38 years of missionary expansion. "But Adinoram could [no] longer deny that the prospects for real missionary work were far darker than they had been thirty years before."³⁶

Wherever the gospel is proclaimed there will always be persecution but as you can see from this same list of nations, the worst of them have zero toleration for missionary work. When religious freedom is reduced to essentially zero freedoms, gospel work grows incredibly slowly in the shadows and great secrecy. China is an interesting example. We know there is a lot of persecution in China but we also know there have been tens of millions of conversions in the past several decades. Notice that China is not listed in the top 20 nations on this list. In 2020 they were 23rd, which means there has been severe persecution but not so much that gospel proclamation has ceased altogether.



Iowa has two more fascinating links to Burma. Arthur and Laura Carson were raised in Iowa and became missionaries to the Chin people who live 500 miles north of where the Judsons ministered.³⁷ For the sake of comparison, here is the size of Burma compared to the U.S. and here is where the Judsons are Carsons served as missionaries. The Carsons did not arrive in Burma

until fifty years after Judson died. Because of their work, today over 90 percent of Chin professed to be Christians.³⁸

One of those Chin converts lives in Iowa and served at Living Waters this past summer. And he attended our church as well. Sui is on the far right of the summer staff photo. I had a fascinating conversation with Sui this summer and called him last week to learn the rest of his story.

Sui lived in Burma until he was ten years old and then his family fled to Malaysia to escape persecution. Malaysia was only slightly more safe than Burma so they applied for asylum and were able to settle in Des Moines. Sui told me that there are ten Chin churches in the city, and almost every Burmese person attends church. The largest Chin church has about 300 in



attendance. The Chin and Karen people are the two largest ethnicities in Iowa. Like a lot of immigrants, his people mostly have factory jobs, but they are grateful to live in the U.S. and experience freedom to worship.

I love the fact that Sui feels called to become a pastor. He felt the call as a young boy and his call has been more confirmed over the past several years. He is finishing his undergrad at Emmaus Bible College and may go to seminary when he graduates. He has a lot of support from his home church and they want him to serve as their youth pastor.

I love the fact that Sui fled persecution yet still feels called to vocational ministry. He is very concerned for his own generation. He is already seeing the influence of American culture on them and is saying that his generation will truly understand and embrace the gospel. He also shared with me that he has learned that prayer is everything. He said if you are serious about ministry, you have to depend on prayer. Good knowledge is essential, but ministry is different. It requires constant prayerful dependency.

To use the language from earlier, Sui is “Jesus Christ’s man.” He knows Jesus and can share his writings. He feels called by God to share Jesus with those who don’t know him and to strengthen the faith of those who do. He wants to stand on the shoulders of men like Adinoram Judson and Arthur Carson.

What about you? Are you Jesus Christ’s man? Are you Jesus Christ’s woman? Would you go to the other side of the world to tell others? Would you cross the street to do the same? Is God calling you to something, but you have shied away from it? Are you willing to go anywhere and do anything that the Lord asks of you?

Rich Maurer
November 1, 2020

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-few-there-are-who-die-so-hard>

² Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adinoram Judson* [Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1987], p. 399

³ Past biographies

William Tyndale, b. 1536

Ulrich Zwingli, b. 1484

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- David Brainerd, b. 1718
George Whitefield, b. 1714
Amy Carmichael, b. 1867
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, b. 1906
Benjamin Rush, b. 1746
Fanny Crosby, b. 1820
Richard Baxter, b. 1615
J. Gresham Machen, b. 1881
Elizabeth Elliot, b. 1926
Richard Wurmbrand, b. 1909
Martin Luther, b. 1483
R.G. LeTourneau, b. 1888
Adinoram Judson, b. 1788
⁴ Golden Shore, p. 14.
⁵ Golden Shore, p. 45
⁶ Golden Shore, p. 56-57.
⁷ Golden Shore, p. 83.
⁸ Golden Shore, p. 84.
⁹ Golden Shore, p. 179.
¹⁰ Golden Shore, p. 446.
¹¹ Golden Shore, p. 305.
¹² Golden Shore, p. 333
¹³ The British gave Ann a seat of honor at a joint gathering. She could have pointed out her enemies and had them severely punished, but she elected to show grace. (The Golden Shore, p. 363.)
¹⁴ Golden Shore, p. 211
¹⁵ The Golden Shore, p. 465
¹⁶ Golden Shore, p. 485.
¹⁷ The Golden Shore, p. 370.
¹⁸ The Golden Shore, p. 378
¹⁹ Golden Shore, p. 401
²⁰ Giants of the Missionary Trail (Chicago: Scripture Press Foundation, 1954), 73
²¹ The Golden Shore, p. 499.
²² Golden Shore, p. 503.
²³ The Golden Shore, p. 391
²⁴ The Golden Shore, p. 383
²⁵ <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bjudson4.html>
²⁶ Golden Shore, p. 499.
²⁷ Golden Shore, p. 499.
²⁸ The Golden Shore, p. 223
²⁹ The Golden Shore, p. 261
³⁰ During Judson's tenure in Burma, at a state convention in Alabama, a controversy arose over whether or not a missionary could also be a slave owner. The convention said that no one who owned slaves could be appointed and sent as a Baptist missionary. "The Southern churches who supported slavery promptly severed their ties with the board and formed the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention has soundly condemned slavery since then. But the northern churches formed the American Baptist Churches which has since abandoned the gospel and has become as liberal as any other mainline denomination.
³¹ https://www.opendoorsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2020_World_Watch_List.pdf

³² <https://www.embarciowa.org/about/our-story/>

³³ <http://www.embarciowa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Child-Care-Workforce-Report-Waterloo.pdf>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ <https://care.org/our-work/disaster-response/emergencies/myanmar-refugee-crisis/>

³⁶ Golden Shore, p. 483.

³⁷ It would take six long years before they had their first profession of faith and baptism, the exact length of time for Judsons to have one convert.

³⁸ <http://www.tribune.org/arthur-laura-carson/>