

Real Life Stories
Ann Hasseltine Judson - 1st American Woman Missionary



Many of her friends and neighbors thought Ann was wild and romantic when she went off to India in 1812. It was unthinkable then that a young woman would travel to some little known spot on the globe to work among the heathen in primitive surroundings. It meant leaving behind her family with little hope of seeing them again in this world. But Ann Hasseltine Judson insisted on going; she knew this was the work God had called her to do.

Ann Hasseltine was born in Bradford, Massachusetts the same year the young United States began its government under the Constitution 1789. When she was a teenager Ann accepted Christ as her Savior and began to spend time in Bible study and prayer. She wanted to be used by God and prayed, Direct me in Thy service, and I ask no more. I would not choose my position of work, or place of labor. Only let me know Thy will, and I will readily comply.

By 1810, when she was 21, Ann wanted to become a missionary to foreign lands, so did the Congregational minister named Adoniram Judson that she married on February 5, 1812. The next day, the newlyweds sailed from Salem, Massachusetts for Calcutta, India! Six other missionaries were also sent to Calcutta. At that time the government in India and the East India Company were opposed to missions, and they were soon ordered to leave the country. So the Judsons began their missionary work in Burma, located between India and China. The gospel had never reached that land of over 15 million people, and Ann prayed, O thou Light of the world, dissipate the thick darkness which covers Burma, and let thy light arise and shine. O display thy grace and power among the Burmese. Subdue them to thyself, and make them thy chosen people.

The Judsons settled in Rangoon, the principle seaport of Burma, and began learning the language. There were no rapid conversions, but Ann and Adoniram were "sensible that the hearts of the heathen, as well as those of Christians, are in the hands of God, and in his own time he will turn them unto him." The Burmans frequently told the Judsons, "Your religion is good for you, ours for us." The missionaries hoped the lives they lived would convince the Burmese people that Christianity was good for them as well. Even so, there were only eighteen converts after nine years in Rangoon.

Ann and Adoniram learned the Burmese language and translated the Scriptures. The Burmans had no idea of a God who was eternal, without beginning or end, and it was difficult to find words to accurately describe the Christian truths. Nevertheless, within three years the Judsons had prepared a Burmese grammar, printed two tracts, and translated the gospel of Matthew. Ann had formed a society of native women who met together on Sundays to pray and read the Scriptures.

In spite of difficult living conditions, Ann came to love Burma as a place where she had learned much of the Lord's mercy and grace. It was difficult for her to leave her adopted land in 1822, when a severe liver problem forced her to return to America. While in America, Ann wrote a history of the Burmese mission that was widely read in America and encouraged many to become missionaries. Ann awakened many to the conditions of the Burmese women and the importance of female missionaries working among them.

When Ann returned to her home in Rangoon in 1823, war between Britain and Burma was threatening. When war did break out, the Burmese thought the Americans to be associates of the British, and Adoniram was thrown into death prison. Ann, then two months pregnant, became a prisoner in the inner room of her own house. She valiantly pled with government officials for her husband's life and was secretly able to bring supplies and food to Adoniram and his fellow prisoners.

Shortly after their daughter was born, Adoniram caught a tropical fever. Ann devotedly cared for him from a small hut near the prison gate. One night, however, Adoniram was moved secretly to another prison. He was forced to walk barefoot eight miles over sand and gravel. The soles of his feet were raw flesh, and he was near death when he finally arrived at Oung-pen-le. Ann took her three-month-old daughter and followed after her husband. She was able to share a room with the jailer and his family, but became seriously ill herself from both smallpox and

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spotted fever. Ann later wrote her brother: The acme of my distress, consisted in the awful uncertainty of our final fate. My prevailing opinion was, that my husband would suffer violent death; and that I should, of course, become a slave, . . . But the consolation of religion, in these trying circumstances, were neither 'few nor small!' It taught me to look beyond this world, to that rest, . . . where Jesus reigns and oppression never enters.

When Burma and the British made peace, Adoniram was released and united with his wife and infant daughter. Ann, however, was still weak. She died of a fever on October 24, 1826. Her daughter died within six months. Ann Hasseltine Judson was the first woman missionary to leave America; her story of constant love for Christ encouraged many other women to serve Christ on the mission field.

In spite of his suffering at the hands of the Burmans, Adoniram stayed in Burma to bring the gospel of Christ to the people. After twenty-four years he completed a translation of the entire Bible into Burmese. By the time of his death in 1850, Burma had sixty-three churches with 163 missionaries and native church leaders.

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A little while, we are in eternity;
before we find ourselves there,
let us do much for Christ.

~ Ann Hasseltine Judson

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