…break down your pride, and yield to the Word of God’

‘…WE GLORY IN TRIBULATIONS ALSO: KNOWING THAT TRIBULATION WORKETH PATIENCE’

by C.P. Hallihan
CRISES AND COURAGE

We left Judson translating the New Testament, preaching, at last, in Burmese, and seeing Burmans 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 intention to leave the country. His converts and inquirers, together, warned him not to leave. ‘Stay,’ they said, ‘at least until a little Christ. They begged him not to leave. Even death, rather than renounce standing firm, willing to suffer persecution, to hasten the work.

In this demanding hour God worked mightily, their weakness the occasion of His strength. 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 stay was in the country stirred great interest, as well as much concern for her health. Adoniram was anxious about them, but Ann returned December 5th, 1823. Rangoon had eighteen conversions, 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 Judsons were once more regarded as ‘enemy aliens.’ Adoniram was imprisoned in Oung-pen-lar; 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 imported all possible helpers: governors, princesses, generals—none were ignored. From having no access at all, she came by insistent stages to have daily 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

WHEREIN I SUFFER TROUBLE, AS AN EVIL DOER, EVEN UNTO BONDS; BUT THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND.

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 wait 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.

The Emperor of Burma.

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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 translated. 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 utterly to the guidance of the Living God.
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 an 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 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, El Nathian 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 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,
TIMELINE

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.
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.
1831 TRINITARIAN BIBLE SOCIETY.
1833 The Oxford Movement began.
1834 Judson finished translating the Old Testament. Married the widow Sarah Boardman.
1834–29 John Adams, U.S. President.
1835–41 Martin Van Buren, U.S. President.
1837–1901 Victoria, Queen of England.
1838 Henry Judson born.
1841 William Henry Harrison, U.S. President.
1841–45 John Tyler, U.S. President.
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 Chubbock 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.
1854 Emily Chubbock Judson died.

TO AMERICA…

On April 26, 1845, the Judsons 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. 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 Judsons sailed on July 25th. One month later the ship was at anchor in St. James Bay, 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 Buddha shall fall and Burma’s sons
Shall own Messiah’s sway.

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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 home-town, 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.11 In July, with other helpers for the Mission, they embarked for Moulmein. In November they arrived, Emily becoming mother to Edward12 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 authorise 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, Moung 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 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.
Endnotes

1 Romans 5.3
2 2 Corinthians 12.9
3 Ann was away from Adoniram for almost twenty-eight months because of the traveling. 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.
4 2 Timothy 2.9
5 See Quarterly Record No. 570, page 18.
6 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.’
7 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!
8 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.
9 For a sharp taste of déjà vu, see Part I, Quarterly Record No. 570, page 18.
10 Napoleon had died there in 1821.
11 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.
12 Edward, perhaps benefitting from his stepmother’s tutelage, wrote a most affectionate 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.