

CHRISTIAN HEROES: THEN & NOW

ADONIRAM JUDSON

Bound for Burma

JANET & GEOFF BENGE

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P.O. BOX 55787 SEATTLE, WA 98155

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Adoniram Judson: Bound for Burma
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12 11 10 09 08 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

Published by YWAM Publishing
P.O. Box 55787
Seattle, WA 98155

ISBN 13: 978-1-57658-161-2
ISBN 10: 1-57658-161-6

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Printed in the United States of America.

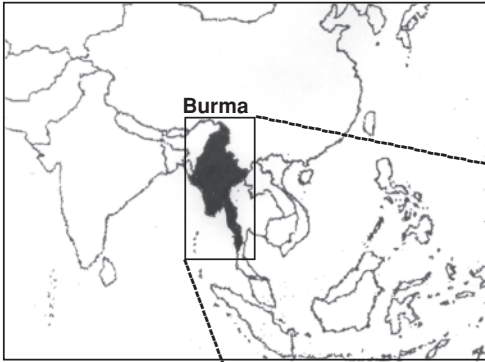
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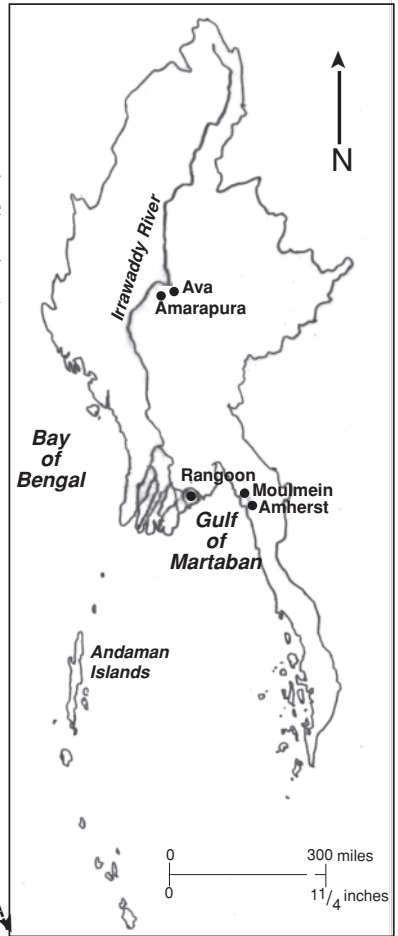
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Southeast Asia



Burma during the life of Adoniram Judson



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Something Was Wrong

Twenty-two-year-old Adoniram Judson awoke to the gentle rolling of the *Packet*, the three-masted schooner that was carrying him from Boston across the Atlantic Ocean to London. It was the fifteenth day of the voyage, and after he'd had breakfast with the captain, Adoniram planned to spend the remainder of the day in his cabin reading. He would have much preferred to sit on deck while he read, but it was mid-January 1811, and a raw, biting breeze straight from the Arctic had been whipping around the ship for several days, making it impossible to stay on deck for more than a few minutes at a time, even when the sun was shining brightly.

As he climbed from his bunk, Adoniram wondered whether the only other two passengers

aboard, both men, would be joining him and the captain for breakfast. The other men spoke only Spanish, and it was amusing trying to work out what they were saying from hand gestures and other forms of body language. Normally, the *Packet* would have had twenty passengers aboard, but the ongoing war between England and France meant that only the most desperate or determined passengers risked crossing the Atlantic Ocean these days, especially aboard a British ship.

As a passenger, Adoniram fit the latter category. He was determined to get to London and meet with the leaders of the London Missionary Society. He had been sent out on behalf of the newly formed Congregational church missionary society, or American Board, as it was called, to ask the London society for money and support so that the fledgling mission could send out the first group of American foreign missionaries. If all went well, Adoniram and the other three missionaries waiting in New England for his return could all be in East Asia by Christmas.

As he splashed some water on his face, Adoniram noticed that something was wrong. Instead of the gentle creaking of the hull of the *Packet*, he heard the sound of feet pounding across the deck above him. He could hear voices, too. It sounded as if everyone was yelling at once. Pulling his pants and jacket on, Adoniram quickly made his way up on deck to investigate.

Once on deck he saw what all the fuss was. A French ship, its sails billowing in the stiff breeze,

was skimming across the water towards them. In response, the crew were darting about the deck hoisting sails and tightening halyards as the captain and first mate barked orders. As he yelled, the captain spun the wheel of the *Packet*, trying to maneuver the ship to take maximum advantage of the wind.

“A privateer,” yelled the captain when he spotted Adoniram. “She’s armed to the gunwales, and we’re trying to outrun her.”

Within a few minutes, Adoniram realized that despite the crew’s frenzied effort, the French ship was still gaining on them.

Adoniram had heard about French privateers and the way they plundered British ships. He had also heard horror stories of the end some sailors had met at the hands of privateers. Now that it seemed certain that the *Packet* would be overrun by the French ship, he wondered what his end would be. He was an American, and he hoped that that would protect him. But he knew that it probably wouldn’t protect his belongings from being looted. That thought spurred him to race to his cabin.

Just as Adoniram finished stuffing his three Bibles—one in English, one in Hebrew, and one in Latin—and his fiancée’s last letter to him into a cloth bag, two French sailors burst into the cabin. Adoniram turned, shocked at how fast the French privateers had overtaken and overrun the *Packet*. When he had left the deck, the French ship was at least one hundred yards behind them. Now,

apparently, the privateers had boarded the *Packet* and taken complete control.

With gestures, Adoniram was ordered up on deck. He was then herded with the rest of the British crew to the starboard side of the ship and forced to climb down a rope over the side and into a waiting longboat. Within minutes of reaching the French ship, Adoniram was thrown into the hold along with the *Packet's* crew. The dark and dank hold was overcrowded. There was no food, water, or chamber pots. The only illumination was a dull shaft of sunlight that filtered down through the dusty air of the hold.

Dark thoughts taunted Adoniram Judson as he sat in the overcrowded hold. He would never see New England again. It would be only a matter of time before the French privateers dumped him overboard, as they liked to do with their prisoners. Now he would never see East Asia. All his efforts to become a missionary had been in vain. He had given his all just to drown in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Hot tears rolled down Adoniram's cheeks. As a child growing up in Wenham, Massachusetts, this was not how he had imagined his life ending.