

Adoniram Judson Father of American Missions

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Adoniram Judson is commonly called the “Father of American Missions.” This title is proper. Judson was the first minister of the gospel to depart from American shores in order to dedicate himself to the proclamation of Jesus Christ to the heathen abroad. Several aspects of Judson’s ministry earn him the position of “Father” or originator. First, Judson was a vocational minister. In other words, his financial support was raised entirely from his gospel ministry. Second, he departed from the boundaries of America. David Brainard and others were home missionaries within the known territory of the United States, but God directed Judson to leave the country. Third, Judson’s entire financial support was derived from local churches in the United States. By faith, churches chose to support a man who would represent them abroad. Fourth, Judson was the first American to accept this task of world evangelization. Though others went with him, Judson was the acknowledged leader and the one whose foreign ministry extended the longest time span. These four elements combined earn Judson the title as “Father of American Missions.” As such, Judson’s life and ministry is a pattern upon which other missionaries, from his contemporaries until the present, can look for instruction and encouragement.

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His Conversion And Call

Judson’s life and ministry cannot be covered adequately in this short article. When surveying Judson’s life and ministry, multiple joys, discouragements, and turning points are easily noted. One of these turning points occurred after Judson left America and prior to his arrival in Burma, which would be his home for thirty-eight years. He decided to reject pedobaptism and become a post-conversion immersionist, a resolution that shook the ecclesiastical world of his day. This decision proved to be not only a personal turning point for Judson, but it consequently compelled American Baptists as a whole to join the efforts of world evangelization. Our purpose in this article is to briefly survey Judson’s life prior to his foreign service, his decision to become an immersionist, and the eventual response to his decision.

Judson’s Conversion

Adoniram Judson was born on August 9, 1788, in Malden, Massachusetts. He was the eldest son of Adoniram Judson Sr, a Congregational minister. At an early age, Adoniram’s parents recognized his intellectual prowess. In fact, by age three he could read an entire chapter of the Bible.² By age ten, Judson had a reputation for his proficiency in both arithmetic and Greek.

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