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Ten Baptists Everyone Should Know: Adoniram Judson

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Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) was born August 9, 1788 in Malden, Massachusetts. His father, Adoniram Judson, Sr., was a congregationalist minister in New England. The younger Judson was a precocious child who learned to read by the age of three. He proved to be an excellent student, mastering Greek and Latin at an early age. His father had high hopes for him as a minister of the gospel. He would, however, abandon the faith of his father and embrace deism while in college.

Judson had been led into infidelity through the influence an unbelieving college classmate. Ironically, this same classmate would prove to be the instrument that God used to bring Judson to repentance. One night, while staying at a random inn, Judson was kept awake by a fellow-guest who was dying an agonizing death. The next morning Judson learned that the dying man had been his own non-Christian friend. He realized that he, like his friend, would die without hope unless a change took place. Judson subsequently called out in faith to Christ and experienced the assurance of the full pardon of his sins.

After graduating from Brown University, Judson enrolled at Andover Seminary in 1808. While at Andover, he made a profession of faith and joined the Congregational church pastored by his father. It was also during his time at Andover that Judson made a commitment to foreign missions. By 1810, with the influence of Judson and some friends, the Congregationalists moved to form a board for foreign missions. In February of 1812,

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Judson and his friends Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice were commissioned as the first American missionaries to be sent out by a mission board.

The day before Judson was ordained for mission work he had married Ann Hasseltine. Ann would prove to be a wonderful help-meet to Adoniram. They served God together in Burma. Ann heroically cared for her husband while he was imprisoned falsely as a spy. Shortly after Adoniram's release from prison, Ann succumbed to a fever and died. She is rightly regarded today as a missionary hero by all who know her story. Adoniram would outlive two wives and have a total of three before his own passing. Each of the Judson women were remarkable in their own way. [*The Lives of the Three Mrs. Judsons*](#) tells their respective stories.

While enroute from America to India during 1812, the Judsons studied the biblical teaching on baptism in preparation for their meeting with the British Baptism missionary, William Carey. A surprising thing happened. They had only intended to fortify themselves against Carey's arguments for believer's baptism by immersion. Instead they became convinced that New Testament indeed taught this doctrine. Remarkably, Luther Rice underwent the same transformation on a separate boat on the same journey. They were each subsequently immersed by Carey's associate William Ward in India.

The conversion of Judson and Rice to a Baptist viewpoint left them in a precarious position. They had been sent out by and were being supported by Congregationalists in America. When they let their board know of their changed convictions on baptism, they were understandably defunded. Consequently, Luther Rice, whose health had been poor, was sent back to the United States to raise money for the mission work among the Baptists. His efforts resulted in the formation of the Triennial Convention in 1814. Adoniram Judson became their first missionary. This marked the beginning of Baptist foreign missions.

Judson Resources

In 2012, in celebration of the bicentennial of the Judsons departure from America, Jason Duesing compiled a collection of essays that were published by B&H Academic: [*Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary*](#). The classic biography of Judson was done by Courtney Anderson and is still available under the title [*Toward the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*](#).

Tons of resources related to the Judsons are available for free online ([see here for example](#)). To read Francis Wayland's two volume memoir of Judson see here ([Vol. 1](#) and [Vol. 2](#)). Of special interest will be Judson's sermon on [*Christian Baptism*](#) which he prepared and preached in India shortly after his arrival there. In this sermon Judson

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outlines his newfound position on the subject. As a gifted linguist Judson had devoted his life to providing the Bible in Burmese. Remarkably, nearly two hundred years later, his translation is [still in use today](#). When Judson died on April 12, 1850, he was working on a Burmese dictionary. The fruit of his labor can be seen [here](#). This brief introduction does not begin to do justice to the remarkable story of Adoniram Judson. Please do yourself a favor and take the time to track down some of the resources mentioned above and read them. You will be both encouraged and challenged by this remarkable life.

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This is Part Six of ten of an ongoing series by Steve Weaver.



Steve Weaver

Steve Weaver (@steveweaver) has been the pastor of Farmdale Baptist Church in Frankfort, Ky., since 2008. He also serves as a Fellow for The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he is an adjunct professor of church history. Steve is the author of [Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins \(1647-1702\) and Particular Baptist Identity in Early Modern England](#) and has co-edited of a modern edition of [An Orthodox Catechism](#) (a 1680 Baptist revision of the Heidelberg Catechism). Steve and his wife Gretta have been married for twenty-four years and have been blessed with six children. You can follow him on Twitter at [@steveweaver](#).

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