

Judson, The Scriptures Made Him a Baptist

Taken from the book entitled, "The Story of the Baptist," by Richard Cook, 1887

On the 19th of February, 1812, four American missionaries embarked in the brig "Caravan," from Salem, Mass., for Burmah. They arrived at Calcutta, June 17th. Two of them were Adoniram Judson, and his wife Ann H. Judson. He was born in Maiden, Mass., August 9th, 1788, and was educated at Brown University. He entered the Theological Seminary at Andover, in 1808, and was converted soon afterward, and joined the Congregational church.

While at Andover, he and a few other pious students turned their attention to foreign missions, and, impressed with the wretched condition of the heathen, resolved to devote themselves to the work, and presented themselves to their older brethren in the ministry and the churches, as ready to be sent abroad for that purpose. This led to the formation of the "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," in June, 1810. And Judson and wife, with others, were sent to Burmah by the board.

The long voyage to Calcutta was partly occupied by Mr. Judson in examining the subject of Christian baptism.

There were two reasons for this special study. First, he hoped to have conversions among the heathen, and what to do about the baptism of children and servants he did not know. Then he was going to reside for awhile among the Baptist missionaries at Serampore, and expected that they would introduce the subject of baptism, and that he would be called upon to defend his views.

Hear the result in his own words: "I could not find a single intimation in the New Testament that the children and domestics of believers were members of the church, or entitled to any church ordinance in consequence of the profession of the head of their family. Everything discouraged the idea. When baptism was spoken of, it was always in connection with believing. None but believers were commanded to be baptized, and it did not appear to my mind that any others were baptized."

"I knew that I had been sprinkled in infancy, and that this had been deemed baptism. But throughout the whole New Testament I could find nothing that looked like sprinkling in connection with the ordinance of baptism."

He felt that he had never yet received Christian baptism, and that his only consistent course was to join the Baptists. This plunged him into great difficulty and distress, and it cost him a struggle to decide.

"Must I, then," he asked, "forsake my parents, the church with which I am connected, the society under whose patronage I have come out, the companions of my missionary undertaking? Must I forfeit the good opinion of all my friends in my native land, occasioning grief to some, and provoking others to anger, and be regarded, henceforth, by all my former dear acquaintances as a

weak, despicable Baptist, who has not sense enough to comprehend the connection between the Abrahamic and the Christian system? All this was mortifying; it was hard to flesh and blood. But I thought, again, it is better to be guided by the opinion of Christ, who is the truth, than by the opinion of men, however good, whom I know to be in an error."

"If I quieted my conscience in regard to my own personal baptism, and concluded that, on account of my peculiar circumstances, it was best to consult my own convenience, rather than the command of Christ, still the question would return, with redoubled force: How am I to treat the children and domestics of converted heathens?" Mrs. Judson, in a letter to a friend, said: "An examination of the subject of baptism commenced on board the Caravan. As Mr. Judson was continuing the translation of the New Testament, which he began in America, he had many doubts respecting the meaning of the word baptize. After arriving at Burmah, he continued the examination of the foundation of the Pedobaptist system. The more he examined, the more his doubts increased; and, unwilling as he was to admit it, he was afraid the Baptists were right and he was wrong. I felt afraid he would become a Baptist, and frequently urged the consequences, if he should. I always took the Pedobaptist side in reasoning with him, even after I was as doubtful of the truth of their system as he. We procured the best authors on both sides; compared them with the Scriptures, examined and re-examined the sentiments of Baptists and Pedobaptists, and were finally compelled, from a conviction of truth, to embrace those of the former."

They requested baptism at the hands of the Baptist missionaries at Serampore, who were "extremely surprised," for nothing had been said upon the subject by either party. They were baptized on the 6th of September, 1812, in the Baptist chapel at Serampore. Luther Rice, who was ordained with Mr. Judson, and who arrived in India a short time afterward, also joined the Baptists. The effect of the baptism of Judson and his, companions, upon the Baptists of America, was truly startling.

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