A Short History of Christianity in Burma

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November 12, 2012
Burma (Myanmar) has an area of 261,789 sq miles – roughly the size of Texas, USA.

Population of Burma currently is around 58 millions. 89% are Buddhists; Christians: 5%.

Bounded on the West by Bangladesh, Northwest by India, North - N. East by China, On the east by Laos, and on the East and south east by Thailand.

Burma was a Sovereign Country with its monarchy system beginning 1044 AD.

Burma was colonized by Britain in 1885; Burma’s monarchy was abolished.

Separated from India in 1935 as limited self-Government.


Military took over (coup d’état) on March 2, 1962. And the country declined in all aspects.
- **Adoniram Judson**: First Protestant Missionaries to Burma from the USA:
  - Judson was born August 9, 1788, in Malden, Massachusetts, USA.
  - He arrived with his wife Ann Judson in Burma on July 13, 1813.
  - His counterpart from Britain was William Carey, arriving in India in 1793.
  - Dr. William Carey founded Serampore College in West Bengal, India.

- Judson’s initial works: Learn Burmese language 12 hours a day, for 3 years;
  - Started a preaching booth in Rangoon – known as “Zayat” – to attract the populace in the city to hear the Gospel preached.
  - Wore white robe of similar pattern with the Buddhist monks’ yellow robe.
  - Started to translate the Gospel of Matthew in Burmese.
  - After 7 years received a first Burmese convert named U Naw.
Judson appealed to the Burmese King in Mandalay for permission for Christians to practice and propagate their new religion with freedom.

His appeal rejected, his documents thrown and trampled on the ground.

He was arrested and tortured as suspected British spy,

- He was put in stocks, in up-side-down position for 7 days.
- He was forced to walk in dirt road without shoes in hot sun many miles
- He was moved to crude and dirty jail in a village called Aungpinlay.
- Many of his fellow prisoners died on the torturous road
Judson's wife Ann saved his NT translation who hid it in her pillow.

Judson survived the “hellish ordeal” and began translating the OT.

He suffered loss of his two wives, children, and his ill-health; He even suffered a long year of depression. Miraculously he recovered!

Judson finished translating the Bible into Burmese - still revered by the Burmese today. It took 24 years for Judson to finish translation into Burmese;

It was printed and published in 1835. The first ever Bible in Burmese.

--- His wife Ann died on Oct 24, 1816, and buried in Amherst, now Kyaikkami.

Judson was seriously ill, advised to travel to USA by Sea.

On the way to USA, he died in the Sea of Bengal on April 12, 1850.

He was buried in the Sea – at the age of 61.
Missionaries to Chin Hills (later Chin State) in Burma:
- The Chins were described as “uncivilized and savage”.
  - Rev. Carson died after laboring for 7 years,
  - Laura Carson continued to serve for 12 years.
  - A dozen of missionaries arrived in Chin Hills.
- After the Second World War Christianity grew in strength and numbers;
  - Association was formed in 1938 as “Chin Baptist Association”
  - Joining Christians from 3 townships;
  - Zomi (Chin) Baptist Convention was formed in 1954.
  - Currently, Zomi Baptist Convention is the largest Organization in Chin State: consisting of 28 Associations, with over 200,000 members.
- Half a million Chins live in the Chin State, and over 75% are now Christians.
- The last American Missionaries were the Rev. Robert & Mrs Johnson, arriving in Hakha, Chin State in July 1946, and were forced to leave Burma by the Government in May 1965.
- The total population of Christians in Burma: about 5% of the total population.
- In spite of difficulties and challenges for Christians in Burma, Christians grow slowly but steadily during the last 50 years, in the midst of military dictatorship and persecutions – to be seen below.
- Falam Baptist Church – largest church in the Chin State