

**The Lord is My Refuge Plainly Put on Display  
in the Life of Missionary Ann Hasseltine Judson  
Psalm 142:1-7**

**Introduction**: Ann (“Nancy”) Judson has rightly been called, “the mother of modern missions” (Dana L. Robert, “The Mother of Modern Missions,” *Christian History and Biography*, #90). This statement is all the more amazing when you consider she died from cerebral meningitis at the young age of 37 in the Southeast Asia Country of Burma, modern day Myanmar. Her grave, along with her little daughter Maria, is located there under what her husband Adoniram called “the hope tree.” Not a long life, but a full life in service to King Jesus.

Psalm 142 is a Psalm of lament written by David from a cave (either Adullam in 1 Samuel 22 or En Gedi in 1 Samuel 24). It could easily have been written by Ann Hasseltine Judson on numerous occasions as she served King Jesus and labored among the Burmese people for their salvation. It is a psalm filled with “great distress” (Van Gemeren, *Psalms*, EBC, vol. 5, 974). The honesty of the psalm in its cries for help should instruct us about the realities of forsaking all to follow Jesus. The hope that arises even in the midst of difficult and painful circumstances should inspire us. Three movements will be noted and examined in our study of these seven verses.

## **I. God hears the cries of your heart**

**142:1-2**

The first two verses flow with words of passionate verbal petition to the Lord (Yahweh): “I cry;” “I plead;” “I our out;” “I tell.” Out loud David pleads “for mercy” from the Lord. Out loud he complains and tell his troubles to the One who is his “refuge,” “portion” and “deliverer” (vs. 5-6). This crying is not a one-time event. The crying and pleading is ongoing and continuous. Spurgeon wisely points out, “we do not show our trouble before the Lord that he may see it, but that we may see him. It is for our relief, and not for his information...” (*TBD*, vol. 3, 324).

Ann Judson, of all those who followed the Lord’s call to the international mission field, knew we have a God who anywhere, anytime and under any circumstances hears our prayers. She learned this early in her life and it sustained her until her death. Ann was born just before Christmas in 1789 in Bradford, Massachusetts. She was the youngest of five children. She was lovely, cheerful, popular, highly intelligent and very beautiful. During her first 16 years she seldom felt any real conviction concerning salvation. God, however, used Hannah More’s *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and a visit to an aunt to stir her heart and bring her to Christ. Her own words from her journals beautifully describe her conversion as she cried out and fled to Jesus:

“I longed for annihilation; and if I could have destroyed the existence of my soul, with as much ease as that of my body, I should quickly have done it. But that glorious Being, who is kinder to his creatures than they are to themselves, did not leave me to remain long in this distressing state. I began to discover a beauty in the way of salvation by Christ. He appeared to be just such a Savior as I needed. I saw how God could be just, saving sinners through him. I committed my soul into his hands, and besought him to do with me what seemed good in his sight. When I was thus enabled to commit myself into the hands of Christ, my mind was relieved from that distressing weight which had borne it down for so long a time...A view of his purity and holiness filled my soul with wonder and admiration. I felt a disposition to commit myself unreservedly into his hands, and leave it with him to save me or cast me off, for I felt I could not be unhappy, while allowed the privilege of contemplating and loving so glorious a Being. I now began to hope, that I had passed from death unto life. When I examined myself, I was constrained to own, that I had feelings and dispositions to which I was formerly an utter

stranger. I had sweet communion with the blessed God, from day to day; my heart was drawn out in love to Christians of whatever denomination; the sacred Scriptures were sweet to my taste; and such was my thirst for religious knowledge, that I frequently spent a great part of the night in reading religious books. O how different were my views of myself and of God, from what they were, when I first began to enquire what I should do to be saved! I felt myself to be a poor lost sinner, destitute of everything to recommend myself to the divine favour; that I was, by nature, inclined to every evil way; and that it had been the mere sovereign, restraining mercy of God, not my own goodness, which had kept me from committing the most flagrant crimes. This view of myself humbled me in the dust, melted me into sorrow and contrition for my sins, induced me to lay my soul at the feet of Christ, and plead his merits alone, as the ground of my acceptance” (Sharon James, *Ann Judson: A Missionary Life for Burma*, 24-25).

In 1806, at the age of 16, Ann publicly confessed Christ. During the same revival, her entire family also was converted. God quickly planted a missionary heart in Ann. Somewhere around the age of 19 she wrote,

*“March 17 [probably 1809]. Have had some enjoyment in reading the life of David Brainerd [pioneer missionary to the North American Indians]. It had a tendency to humble me, and excite desires to live as near to God, as that holy man did. Have spent this evening in prayer for quickening grace. Felt my heart enlarged to pray for spiritual blessings for myself, my friends, the church at large, the heathen world, and the African slaves. Felt a willingness to give myself away to Christ, to be disposed of as he pleases. Here I find safety and comfort. Jesus is my only refuge...”* (James, 33).

By the age of 21, Ann was determined to become a missionary. The same was true of a young Congregational minister named Adoniram Judson who was smitten the first time he saw Ann. On February 5, 1812 they married. Twelve days later they, along with Samuel and Harriet Newell, set sail for India on a ship called the Caravan as the first commissioned missionaries from America. God had heard the cries of Ann’s heart in salvation and the cries of her heart to know and do his will. Again, her journals gave us a glimpse into God’s powerful work in her heart:

*“August 8, 1810. Endeavoured to commit myself entirely to God, to be disposed of, according to his pleasure...I do feel,*

that his service is my delight. Might I but be the means of converting a single soul, it would be worth spending all my days to accomplish.”

*September 10.* For several weeks past, my mind has been greatly agitated. An opportunity has been presented to me, of spending my days among the heathen, in attempting to persuade them to receive the Gospel. Were I convinced of its being a call from God, and that it would be more pleasing to him, for me to spend my life in this way than in any other, I think I should be willing to relinquish every earthly object, and in full view of dangers and hardships, give myself up to the great work.”

A consideration of this subject has occasioned much self-examination, to know on what my hopes were founded, and whether my love to Jesus was sufficiently strong to induce me to forsake all for his cause.

*October 28.* I rejoice, that I am in his hands—that he is every where present, and can protect me in one place as well as in another. He has my heart in his hands, and when I am called

to face danger, to pass through scenes of terror and distress, he can inspire me with fortitude, and enable me to trust in him, Jesus is faithful; his promises are precious.

If I have been deceived in thinking it my duty to go to the heathen, I humbly pray, that I may be undeceived, and prevented from going. But whether I spend my days in India or America, I desire to spend them in the service of God, and be prepared to spend an eternity in his presence. O Jesus, make me live to thee, and I desire no more.”

*Sabbath (updated)*. Blessed Jesus, I am thine forever. Do with me what thou wilt; lead me in the path in which thou wouldest have me to go, and it is enough. (James, 39-42).

## **II. God know what you are going through                      142:3-4**

Verses 3-4 contain “the lament proper” (Ross, *Psalms*, vol 3, 870). David is weighed down by his trials. Yet, even in his distress, David is confident that the Lord knows his way, that the Lord sees everything that he is going through. Still, what he is experiencing is almost overwhelming.

- My spirit is weak (ESV, “faints”).
- My path is paved with hidden traps.

- No one will stand up for me.
- I have no place of retreat or rescue, security or safety.
- Bottomline: “no one cares about me.”

If we are honest, we have all been where David is. This is how we feel when times are tough and service to Jesus is excruciatingly difficult. Again, few people, who have followed in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, knew this better than Ann Judson. Just reflect on the following:

- On the way to India they became convinced of believer’s baptism and had to forgo all support from the Congregationalist who sent them.
- They would be denied entry into India and forced to go to Burma which was extremely hostile to Christianity.
- Harriett Newell, Ann’s dearest friend, would die in childbirth (as would the child) at the tender age of 19, never making it to the mission field.
- Ann’s first child was stillborn.
- Her second child, a boy named Roger, died before his first birthday.
- In 1820, after 6 years on the field, Ann nearly died and had to go to Calcutta, and eventually back to America to recover. She would be separated from her beloved husband for 2 years.

- When Ann returned to Burma in 1824, she became pregnant. Soon thereafter, Adoniram, and fellow missionary Jonathan Price were imprisoned for 17 months. The conditions were beyond brutal. He nearly died several times and considered suicide. During this period Ann gave birth to a baby girl named Maria, pled repeatedly for her husband's release, and daily walked 2 miles to supply him and others with water and food. Of this time she would write:

“Sometimes for days and days together, I could not go into the prison, till after dark, when I had two miles to walk, in returning to the house. O how many, many times, have I returned from that dreary prison at nine o'clock at night, solitary and worn out with fatigue and anxiety. . . My prevailing opinion was, that my husband would suffer violent death; and that I should, of course become a slave, and languish out a miserable though short existence in the tyrannic hands of some unfeeling monster. But the consolations of [Christ], in these trying circumstances, were neither “few nor small.” It taught me to look beyond this world, to that rest, that peaceful happy rest, where Jesus reigns, and oppression never enters” (James, 191-92).

- During this time Ann again became seriously ill and nearly died, as did little Maria. Her own words are truly more than one can fathom, both in her suffering but also in her faith in God's providence:

“Our dear little Maria was the greatest sufferer at this time, my illness depriving her of her usual nourishment and neither a nurse nor a drop of milk could be procured in the village. By making presents to the jailers, I obtained leave for Mr. Judson to come out of prison [in fetters] and take the little emaciated creature around the village, to beg a little nourishment from those mothers who had young children. Her cries in the night were heart-rending, when it was impossible to supply her wants. I now began to think the very afflictions of Job had come upon me. When in health I could bear the various trials and vicissitudes, through which I was called to pass. But to be confined with sickness, and unable to assist those who were so dear to me, when in distress, was almost too much for me to bear: and had it not been for the consolations of [my Lord], and an assured conviction that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy,

I must have sunk under my accumulated suffering” (James, 213-14).

God knows what we, what you, are going through. Any pain, any suffering, any trial, must first pass through the hands of an infinitely wise and loving heavenly Father.

### **III. God will deliver you as your refuge**

**142:5-7**

In spite of his dire circumstances, David is confident that the Lord will meet his needs. James Boice helpfully identifies four things God was to David in verses 5-7 (*Psalms*, vol. 3, 1232-33). First, God is our refuge (v. 5). In verse four as he looked around, he saw no refuge. Now, as he looks up, he sees God as his refuge. I cry out or shout, “you are my shelter (*ESV*, “refuge”). You are “a trustworthy place of safety” as my refuge (Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day*, 405).

Second, you are “my portion in the land of the living.” You are my living inheritance, far more valuable than any earthly possession. Third, you are my Savior. In my broken, weak and humbled condition, those who persecute and pursue me are too strong. They are too much for me to handle. Only you can deliver me. Only you can rescue me. Only you can save me. Fourth, you are my liberator. You are the one who can set me free literally and figuratively

from prison. In response, I will “praise your name” and “the righteous will gather around (*ESV*, “surround”) me because you deal generously with me.” Interestingly, the verb gather or surround could possibly mean, in this context, “put a crown on me” (Motyer, 405).

Ann Judson would experience the truth of verse seven, but not in the way we would expect. Adoniram would be released from prison and he and Ann joyfully reunited. However, it would be for only two weeks. Adoniran would be called away on business for the Burmese government. While he was away Ann would die on October 24, 1826 from cerebral meningitis. Her body had simply been broken from the ordeal and sufferings of the previous two years. Tragically, little Maria would follow her mother in death to glory six months later. Concerning his loss Adoniram would write to Ann’s mother:

“The next morning we made [Maria’s] last bed in the small enclosure that surrounds her mother’s lonely grave. Together they rest in hope, under the hope tree, which stands at the head of the graves, and together, I trust, their spirits are rejoicing after a short separation of precisely six months. And I am left alone in the wide world. My own dear family I have buried; one in Rangoon, and two in Amhurst. What remains for me but to hold myself in readiness to follow the dear departed to

that blessed world, “Where my best friends, my kindred dwell, Where God my Saviour reigns” (Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore*, 380-31).

## **Conclusion**

It is difficult to summarize all that this incredible woman accomplished in her short life. Her story and writings alone mobilized untold numbers of women to GO to the nations for the cause of Christ and the Great Commission. And to this we may add the following:

- 1) She modeled joint ministry partnership with her husband. In a letter to her sister in 1812 she wrote, “Good female schools are extremely needed in this country. I hope no missionary will ever come out here without a wife, as she, in her sphere, can be equally useful with her husband.” (“The Mother of Modern Missions,” 24). They were truly a dynamic duo in ministry.
- 2) She was an evangelist, taught women the Gospel, adopted orphans, and started schools for children.
- 3) She was a superb linguist and translator who learned spoken Burmese and Siamese better than her husband. She translated the gospel of Matthew, Daniel and Jonah into Burmese, as well as tracts and a catechism.

4) She wrote a history of their mission work entitled, "A Particular Relation of the American Baptist Mission to the Burmese Empire." Her plan was to use the proceeds to redeem little girls sold into slavery ("The Mother of Modern Missions," 24).

In an appeal to American women entitled, "Address to Females in America, Relative to the Situation of Heathen Females in the East," she closes with these powerful words:

"Shall we, my beloved friends, suffer minds like these to lie dormant, to wither in ignorance and delusion, to grope their way to eternal ruin, without an effort on our part, to raise, to refine, to elevate, and to point to that Saviour who has died equally for them as for us? Shall we sit down in indolence and ease, indulge in all the luxuries with which we are surrounded, and which our country so bountifully affords, and leave beings like these, flesh and blood, intellect and feeling, like ourselves, and of *our own sex*, to perish, to sink into eternal misery?' No! by all the tender feelings of which the female mind is susceptible, by all the privileges and blessings resulting from the cultivation and expansion of the human

mind, by our duty to God and our fellow creatures, and by the blood and groans of him who died on Calvary, let us make a united effort; let us call on all, old and young, in the circle of our acquaintance to join us in attempting to meliorate the situation, to instruct, to enlighten and save females in the Eastern world; and though time and circumstances should prove that our united exertions have been ineffectual, we shall escape at death that bitter thought, that Burman females have been lost, without an effort of ours to prevent their ruin” (James, 259).

Ann Judson was a remarkable woman of God. Of that there can be no doubt. May our great God multiply her tribe 10,000 times over that His name might be made famous among the nations for their eternal good and for His eternal glory.