

# East Asia insight

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## MYANMAR THE GOLDEN LAND

by Chad Berry, staff writer



W edged between China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, sits the country of Myanmar. Known as the “Golden Land” for its many Buddhist pagodas, Myanmar is a diverse country with a turbulent history in recent decades. Theravada Buddhism and the country’s military junta government exert influence over almost every area of life.

Despite ample natural resources, Myanmar is a poor, third-world country due to the effects of political strife and the illicit drug trade. One in four children are malnourished. And yet, God is doing a mighty work there. Myanmar is home to a strong and growing church, especially

This issue looks at the diverse country of **Myanmar**—a land filled with hardship and hope.

among the country’s many minority groups.

This issue of East Asia Insight looks at this diverse country, a land filled with hardship and hope. ■

*\*Until 1989, Myanmar was known as Burma. Today, it is still recognized as Burma by some foreign governments. The two names are used interchangeably in this issue.*

### Adoniram Judson: Paving the Way

***I will not leave Burma until the cross is planted here forever!*** ADONIRAM JUDSON

Myanmar’s history of Protestant mission work began with American Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson. Judson and his wife Ann arrived in Burma (now Myanmar) in 1813 and labored for nearly 40 years to see the people of Burma come to Christ.

It was hard work. It was six years before he saw his first convert to Christianity. Judson later spent 17 months in a Burmese prison where he was subjected to severe torture. As a husband and father, he outlived five children and three wives.

Through it all, Judson’s passion for the lost of Burma remained strong. He translated the Bible into Burmese and wrote English-Burmese dictionaries and grammar books. His pioneering work laid the foundation for greater success. As his son Edward later said, “Suffering and success go together. If you are succeeding without suffering, it is because others before you have suffered; if you are suffering without succeeding, it is that others after you may succeed.”

Today there are nearly 4 million Christians in Myanmar. In July many of them celebrate “Judson Day” commemorating Adoniram Judson’s arrival in Myanmar. ■



# MYANMAR (BURMA)

## Pray for Myanmar

*I believe it will only be known on the last day how much has been accomplished in overseas missions by the prayers of earnest believers at home.* J.O. FRASER

Below are some ways to pray for the people of Myanmar. Prayer is an essential part of reaching this nation with the gospel. For more information on how to pray for Myanmar, go to [www.p4mm.com](http://www.p4mm.com).

- ❖ Praise God for the growth of the church among the minority groups in Myanmar.
- ❖ Pray for the physical and emotional healing of a nation that has suffered much, and whose minorities still experience persecution.
- ❖ Pray for thousands more to become Christians—especially among groups such as the Bamar, the Shan, the Mon and the Rakhine—through gospel radio, cassette tapes and films.
- ❖ Pray for trust and unity among Christian leaders and greater cooperation between the various Bible schools and churches.
- ❖ Pray for the 1.3 children million born in Myanmar this year. Of these, it is predicted that 61,000 will die before their first birthday and 93,600 will die before the age of five.
- ❖ Pray for more Western Christians to work in Myanmar. Businesses, aid organizations and private schools are looking for foreign experts.
- ❖ Pray for the production of effective and appropriate gospel materials, good distribution of the Bibles currently available and permission to print the Bible in Myanmar.

**POPULATION:** 50 million

**CAPITAL:** Naypyidaw\*

**LANGUAGE:** Burmese

**RELIGIONS:** Buddhist 82.9%, Christian 8.7%, Muslim 3.8%, Chinese religions 3%, Animist 0.8%, Hindu 0.5%, Other 0.3%

**ETHNICITY:** Bamar 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, Kachin 2%

**GEOGRAPHY:** Myanmar is dominated by mountains in the north (reaching nearly 20,000 feet) and plains in the central lowlands. The long, rocky coast in the west provides many natural harbors. Myanmar is roughly the size of Texas.

**NICKNAME:** “The Golden Land” due to the country’s many Buddhist pagodas glinting in the sun.

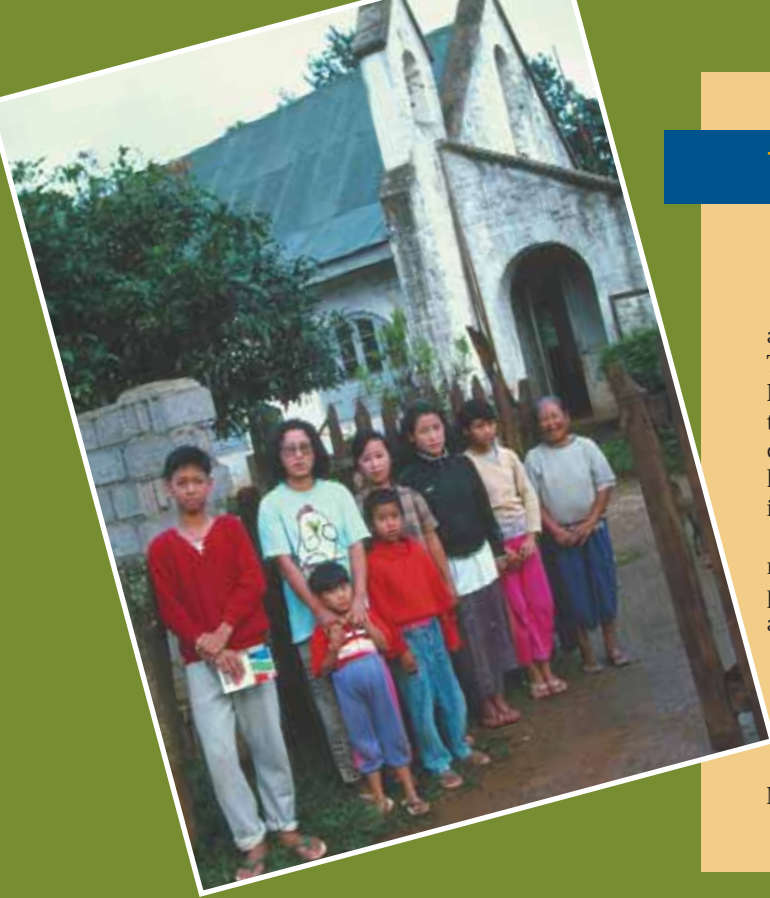
**HISTORY:** The first unified Burmese state was founded by King Anawratha in 1044. The next 250 years were relatively peaceful. In 1287 the Mongols under Kublai Khan invaded Burma, ushering in a turbulent period for the country. Western powers began showing an interest in Burma in the 16th century, culminating in British rule beginning in 1824. Following Japanese occupation during World War II, an independence movement swept across the country. Burma gained freedom from Great Britain in 1948. Over the next 30 years, the land was filled with political and ethnic turmoil. Attempts were made at establishing a totalitarian government under General Ne Win. In 1989 the country’s name was changed to Myanmar. Though elections are held, Myanmar’s military junta government retains tight control over many areas of life. ■

*\*Until November 2005 the capital of Myanmar was Yangon (formerly known as Rangoon), the country’s most populous city with 5 million people. Reasons for the move from Yangon to Napyidaw are unclear.*



### The Golden Triangle

On the eastern edge of Myanmar is an area known as the Golden Triangle for its location at the intersection of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. This densely forested and mountainous region is also home to a heavy drug trade. Though trafficking has been on the decline in recent years, Myanmar remains the world’s second largest producer of illicit opium. The drug trade has wreaked havoc on the people of Myanmar, resulting in much of the country’s poverty.



## The Church in Myanmar

In the 1960s foreign missionaries were banned from Myanmar, then known as Burma. It was thought that the church would soon wither and die. Thankfully, the opposite happened. Christianity actually grew among many of the minority groups in Myanmar. Today Myanmar is home to nearly 4 million Christians. Traditionally, Myanmar churches have been strong in evangelism and reaching out to the needy, but weak in the areas of unity, discipleship and in-depth Bible study. That may be changing, however, as the country has seen an increase in the number of Bible schools and seminaries in recent years.

Coinciding with that growth has been a surge in the overall numbers of Christians in the country, from six percent of the population to nearly nine percent in the past decade. However, almost all of that growth has been among Myanmar's minority groups.

The Bamar people, who make up more than two-thirds of the country's population, remain unreached. Less than one percent of the Bamar know Christ. Instead, they cling to Buddhism, which is often linked with nationalism in Myanmar. As such, Christians in Myanmar sometimes face persecution in various forms. ■

## G O D   A T   W O R K   I N   M Y A N M A R

### Back from the brink

In despair, Susie\* stood at the window of her fifth floor apartment. She owed a huge amount of money which she could never pay back. If she jumped and killed herself, the problem would go away. But if she jumped and was badly hurt, it would be so much worse. There seemed to be no way out.

At that moment, she heard a knock on the door. It was some young men selling Christian videos. The normal price was 2,000 Burmese kyat, but she only had 500. When they agreed to that, Susie burst into tears. When they told her about Jesus, she responded in faith and felt that "a bright light came into her head." She knew she had gone from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

Susie now sells shoes, telling others of Jesus along the way. On top of that, her debts are gone! \*Name changed. ■

### Proud to be Rakhine

Tin Naing was once a proud Buddhist from Rakhine State on the southwest coast of Myanmar. After spending three years in prison for political reasons, he came to Christ soon after his release. He was taught to lovingly obey all of the commands of Jesus, and, as a result, seven new churches have recently been born. Thirty-three new leaders were enrolled in a mentoring program and given Burmese Bibles.

Pray that the message of their new King would spread. Many of these new believers are undergoing serious opposition for their faith in Christ. ■

### Family likeness

Zaw Min's parents died young, leaving him and his brother orphans. Thankfully, through the compassion of a local pastor, they were brought to a Christian orphanage in Yangon. The tangible love of God, expressed through the house parents and the other children, is rekindling hope in Zaw Min's heart. He is starting to realize that he is precious in the eyes of his heavenly Father and that his life has a clear purpose. ■

### Whose army?

At the age of five, Ban Mau was sent to a temple in Myanmar to become a Buddhist priest. At 13 he escaped and joined the Wa guerrilla soldiers, fighting the Burmese. Later he joined a mercenary group in Thailand. Eventually, Ban Mau settled in North Thailand and began making illegal liquor for a living. In his village, Ban Mau noticed a group of Wa Christians. They had a strong work ethic; Ban Mau was impressed and began to inquire about Christianity. After several meetings with a missionary, Ban Mau renounced his former ways and turned to Christ.

The former Buddhist monk and guerrilla fighter now works as a Bible translator, producing Christian literature for Myanmar's people. ■

# OPPORTUNITIES IN MYANMAR



**F**or many years, Myanmar was relatively isolated from the outside world. In recent years, however, the country has begun to open its doors again. Visas for foreign workers are becoming easier to obtain. Opportunities abound to use your skills in business, computers, English and even sports as a way to bless the people of Myanmar and bear witness for Christ. Part-time openings are also available at Bible colleges and seminaries.

**For more information, contact us at  
[info@omf.org](mailto:info@omf.org) or 1-800-422-5330**

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