

HARRIET TUBMAN (1820-1913)

THE BLACK MOSES AND CONDUCTOR ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY

Born in Bucktown, Maryland, Harriet Tubman's story is one of faith, risk and danger: The boatman eyed the pair of black women suspiciously. "You just stand aside, you two; I'll attend to your case later." Inwardly the women trembled. They knew that their forged pass could not withstand close scrutiny. Harriet Tubman led young, terrified Tilly to the bow of the boat where no one else was standing. Then Harriet knelt, fixed her eyes on the water, and groaned a prayer. "Oh, Lord! You've been with me in six troubles; don't desert me in the seventh!" She continued to pray as Tilly's panic mounted. Finally the boatman came over and touched Harriet on the shoulder. Tilly thought the game was up. She would be returned to the South for a whipping and a forced marriage. Harriet would go to prison, or be burned at a stake--the death one friend predicted for her. "You can come now and get your tickets," said the boatman. It was but one of many narrow escapes for Harriet Tubman. Harriet was a conductor on the underground railroad. This meant she led runaway slaves to freedom in the northern states or Canada.

Prepared by Extreme Adversity Had Harriet been kindly treated as a slave, she might not have become a conductor. Instead, vicious masters and mistresses forced her to perform tasks that were almost beyond human endurance. One mistress, who paid only a pittance for the hire of young Harriet, expected her to slave night and day. By day, she must clean and cook, and by night rock the little white baby so the mistress could sleep in peace. Should Harriet fall asleep and the baby cry, a lash was at hand. Scars on Harriet's neck proved that the whip was often employed. Needless to say, Harriet's body broke down, and she was returned to her owner, exhausted and starving. Her mother nursed her back to health. The hardship served a purpose. She learned to go without food and sleep when she must. This ability stood her in good stead in the long nights when she guided other slaves to freedom. Indeed, she insisted that slave owner cruelty served to prepare her for the rescues that made her name legendary. When she recovered a little, her master rented her out to another brute who made her to lift and haul heavy burdens and flogged her if she failed. She grew strong. Later, brawny men marveled at her feats of strength. Once more, her body broke down, but she kept her powerful muscles. Years later, she saved a slave from capture by dragging him out of a sheriff's office and carrying him to safety against the resistance of a sheriff and deputies.

God with Her Harriet would not have become a Moses to her people had not God been with her. Raised to fear him, she was at first a difficult child, but she learned while young to call upon the Lord for help at any hour of the day and night. Her need for divine assistance was great. When she was about thirteen, an overseer cracked her skull by flinging a two pound weight at a disobedient slave whom Harriet had refused to help tie up. As a result of the

blow, she suffered bouts of uncontrollable sleepiness until the end of her life. This sleepiness made her appear stupid. Behind the appearance of laziness and stupidity, however, was a keen mind, that prayed for her master: "Oh, dear Lord, change that man's heart and make him a Christian."

A Prayer She Repented of But when she heard that she was to be sent to a chain gang in the far south, she changed her prayer. "Lord, if you ain't never going to change that man's heart, kill him, Lord, and take him out of the way, so he won't do no more mischief." The master died suddenly, as bad as he had lived. "Oh, then it appeared like I would give the world full of silver and gold, if I had it, to bring that poor soul back, I would give myself; I would give everything! But he was gone, I couldn't pray for him no more." Broken hearted, she began to pray without ceasing. When she washed, she asked to be washed white of sin. When she swept, she pleaded to be swept clean in her soul.

Harriet's Escape Many Christians claim that God can communicate directly with a heart that is in touch with him. Harriet may not have known the Bible, but she seemed able to hear the Lord's voice. In some mysterious way that she could not fully explain, the voice warned her to flee northward. She urged her brothers to join her, and they started north toward freedom, but the men soon fell away from fear of the consequences should they be caught. Harriet went on alone. Traveling at night, she fixed her eyes on the North Star. By day she hid. Like the revolutionary orator Patrick Henry, she knew she was entitled to liberty or death. If she could not be free, she vowed not to be taken alive but to fight with all her strength. Guided by God and assisted by an almost superhuman cunning, she made good her escape. She escaped to find herself alone. There was no one to help her, none of her own folk to share her joy. All remained behind in slavery. She came to a solemn resolution: She would make a home for her family in the North and, by the Lord's help, bring them there. "Oh, how I prayed then, lying on the cold, damp ground, 'Oh, dear Lord, I ain't got no friend but you. Come to my help, Lord, for I'm in trouble!'"

Huge Price For Her Capture

Then she saw the opportunity in front of her. Instead of clinging to security, she would use her contacts and hard-won knowledge to bring others to freedom. Night and day she worked, saving pennies, and when she had enough money, off she slipped from her home to rescue slaves and pilot them north. When the strength of men failed and they wanted to turn back, she pulled out a revolver and fiercely warned them, "Dead niggers tell no tales; you go on or die!" Invariably, they went on. Nineteen times she ventured South, bold to the point of brazenness. She delivered over three hundred slaves, drugging the babies so they could not cry out. So successful was she, that \$40,000 was offered for her, dead or alive. Many times Harriet experienced narrow escapes. Always the Lord sent help. She had to lie wet in a swamp; she had to bury herself in a potato field--but deliverance came, sometimes through a friend on the underground railway, sometimes by her own wits. She gave the Lord the credit. **As biographer Sarah Bradford wrote, ". . . sudden deliverance never seemed to strike**

her as at all mysterious; her prayer was the prayer of faith and she expected an answer
. . . . When surprise was expressed at her courage and daring, or at her unexpected deliverance, she would always reply, 'Don't, I tell you, Missus. It wasn't me. It was the Lord!' " Thanks to Him, she could declare, "On my underground railroad, I never run my train off the track and I never lose a passenger."

A Narrow Escape

Once a premonition warned her she must turn aside from the path and cross a swollen stream at once. Not knowing the depth of the river, the men with her hung back. Harriet stepped boldly in, and found it never came above her chin. When the men saw she was safely across, they followed her. Later Harriet learned that a party of toughs had been waiting on ahead to seize them. Except for the whisper of warning to detour in her mind, she would have been captured. And yet Harriet had to pay for her boldness. Traveling in those wet, cold clothes, she became seriously ill. Harriet's persistence was notable. Once the Lord warned her inwardly that her parents were in special danger. She felt he told her to go to a certain house and ask for twenty dollars. The owner of the house told her that the Lord had sent her to the wrong place. Harriet would not budge, but drifted asleep, waking only long enough to insist that she wasn't leaving until she got the money. Visitors passing through the busy house spread her story and collected \$60 for her. Her father, it turned out, was facing criminal charges for helping runaway slaves, and the money was needed to whisk him to Canada.

Civil War Scout During the Civil War, Harriet scouted for the Union armies and walked battlefields unscathed where shots fell like hail. Harriet also nursed wounded soldiers, even those with deadly diseases that she might catch. She was not paid for her efforts and Congress jeered at an attempt to award her a pension. Consequently, Harriet was impoverished in her old age. But her spirit remained unquenchable, and the God she trusted did not disappoint her. Her life is a powerful vindication of step by step trust in the Lord. Today she is honored as one of the most remarkable women in American history. After her escape to freedom, Harriet made 19 more dangerous trips to rescue other slaves.

WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
HARRIET TUBMAN
BLACK MOSES - LEADER OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
Women's Discipleship Group
Terri McFaddin Series #5-2

Scripture Focus: *(Exodus 3:10) I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.*

Opening Statement: Women who are trailblazers are often called by God to perform tasks that are highly unusual and sometimes seemingly impossible. Harriet Tubman was much like Moses in that God used her circumstances to bring her to a place of surrendering to his will. As you think about the adversities in your life, try to find God's purpose in the challenges that you have faced.

Observations:

In the story of Harriet Tubman find 1 scripture for each paragraph that brings spiritual clarity to what is taking place.

Example: In paragraph 1 Harriet was almost caught trying to free a slave called Tilly. Miraculously, they were both delivered. I have selected the following verse: Psalms 3:8 - *From the Lord comes deliverance.*

Paragraph 1: How do we see the Lord's hand protecting Harriett and Tilly?

Paragraph 2: How did enduring extreme adversity work to Harriett Tubman's advantage?

Paragraph 4: What traumatic event change the way she prayed?

Paragraph 5: How did Harriett Tubman's sensitivity to the voice of the Lord help her escape?

Paragraph 6: How was she viewed by slave traders? How were they like the Pharaoh of the Bible?

Paragraph 6: How was her conduct unbecoming of a Christian woman? Do you think it was necessary?

Paragraph 8: In what additional ways was she used to help others?

How does her story encourage you as a woman and as a believer?