



Harriet Tubman 1821-1913

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

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 surly 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. She fell into a stupor and wasted away almost to nothing. Her mother nursed her. As she lay on her bed, her master offered her for sale, assuring slavers that Harriet would be a real work horse once she recovered. No one would give much for her, even when she regained a little strength. 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."

Harriet had a heart that was close and in touch with her Savior. She seemed able to hear the Lord's voice. In some mysterious way that she could not fully explain, He 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. 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 supernatural 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."

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 men don't tell 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!'"

During the Civil War, Harriet scouted for the Union armies and walked battlefields unscathed, where shots fell like hail. By her songs and cheerful words she coaxed slaves to reveal important information. 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. She was active in the women's suffrage movement until illness overtook her and she had to be admitted to a home for elderly African-Americans she had helped open years earlier. After she died in 1913, she became an icon of American courage and

freedom. Her life is a powerful vindication of step by step trust in the Lord. And she is honored today as one of the most remarkable women in American history.