

MODERN TRAINS AND ANCIENT SLAVERY

Early in the life of the United States of America, the country was slowly expanding from the Atlantic Ocean toward the Pacific. America was mostly wilderness without street signs, cars, or even streets—just dirt roads if you were lucky. Traveling over land was difficult, so intelligent men tried intelligent things



and in 1831 the Mohawk & Hudson Railroad built one hundred miles of train tracks in New York State.

The first passengers on the Mohawk & Hudson line were in for an adventure. The railway placed thirty passengers in three stagecoaches mounted on train trucks. There was a wood-burning steam engine in front. Have you ever seen sparks fly from a campfire? Well, imagine riding a train while your clothes are on fire. Those passengers had an exciting story to tell after their first fiery train ride.



Americans read about the new trains roaring across the country in their newspapers. It was during this time—when everything seemed possible and trains filled the imagination of every American—that Tice Davids swam across the Ohio River. He would have borrowed a boat to row across the wide river, but there just wasn't time.



Tice's owner reached the Kentucky banks of the Ohio River just in time to see Tice crawl out of the river and disappear into the Ohio town of Ripley. The man rowed himself across the river and interviewed townspeople. Surely someone had seen a dripping, poorly clothed, runaway slave? They had not. Angry, the man traveled home and told friends that Tice must have disappeared on an underground road.



Abolitionists—people who wanted to abolish, or end, slavery—loved the railroad word picture. Fugitive slaves were disappearing from the South just like trains disappeared into underground tunnels. The Underground Railroad became the name of a secret system through which runaway slaves escaped north to freedom.

From the early 1800s, abolitionists had been hiding fugitives in their homes during the day and sending them to another home at night. Now, abolitionists called safehouses stations. Helpers were station masters and conductors, and the paths fugitives took to freedom were lines.

Passengers on the Underground Railroad often later became station masters or conductors, so the system continued to grow. Historical records list the names of over three thousand people working on the Railroad. Certainly, many more helped quietly. From 1830 to 1860, perhaps one hundred and fifty thousand people fled from slavery. That's about five thousand people every year. That's enough people to start a good-sized town.

Perhaps you're wondering if disobeying the law and helping people escape was right or biblical. That's a good question. Most abolitionists were Bible-reading, God-fearing Christians. But, many southern plantation owners also claimed to be Christians. They pointed

to Bible verses that tell us to obey our government leaders since God put them in place. Then, they did wicked, unbiblical things to the people they enslaved.

Christian abolitionists from the North spoke and wrote about Exodus 21:16, where God's law says: "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death." They reminded slave owners that African Americans are made in God's image. God commands us to love our neighbors. Also, the sin of slavery led to more sin. For example, slaves were kept from God's Word and the good news of Jesus. Slaves were often not allowed to marry. Children were sold away from parents. God's good gift of family was destroyed.

When we have questions about living according to God's Word, we should always search the Bible. Nearly three thousand years ago, probably between 875 and 853 BC—that means Before Christ—there was an evil king in Israel named Ahab. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was murdering God's prophets. So, Ahab's household manager, Obadiah, hid one hundred prophets in a cave. Obadiah risked his life to save the prophets. He also disobeyed the king and his wife. What does God's Word say about Obadiah? In 1 Kings 18:3, it says, "Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly."

There's more. About nine hundred years later, after Jesus died and rose from the dead to free sinners who follow him from their sins, Peter and the apostles were teaching about Jesus in Jerusalem. The high priest demanded they stop talking about Jesus. Do you know what they said to this leader? You can read it in Acts 5:29. In the ESV it reads, "We must obey God rather than men." The Bible has even more examples of people disobeying leaders when their laws oppose God's laws.



Enslaving people is an evil sin that leads to even more sin. Christians believed they were loving their neighbors by helping them escape slavery. They believed obeying the laws of the land would cause them to sin. Enslaved Christians believed the people enslaving them were sinning wickedly. Escaping was simply righting a terrible wrong. They cried out to God in songs and prayers as they looked toward freedom—for themselves and for others.

This is the story of those believers and of the American Underground Railroad. Christians' faithful efforts to serve God and to love their neighbors helped lead to ungodly laws being overturned and to freedom for more than four million Americans.



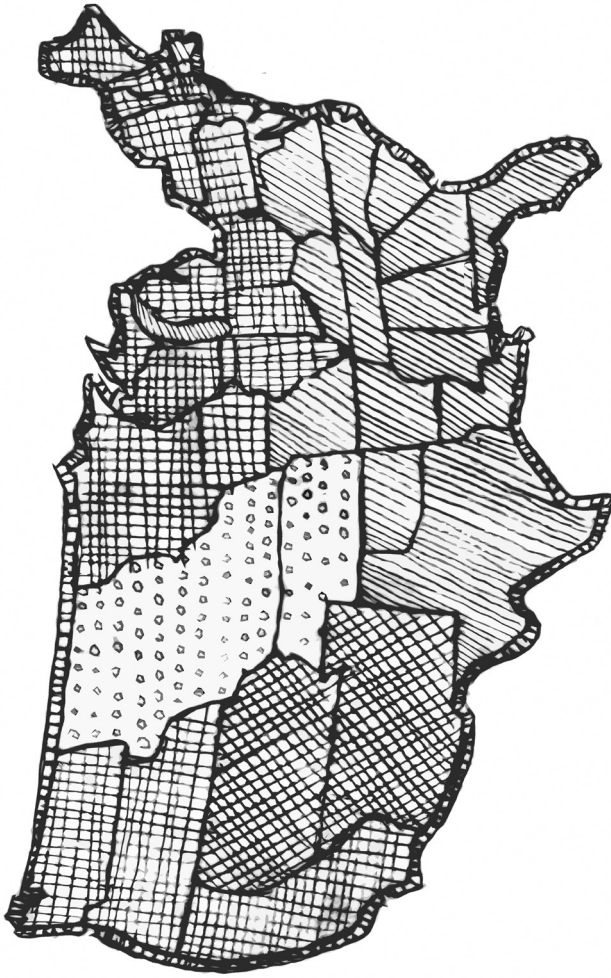
ENDING ENSLAVEMENT

In 1688, American Quakers—members of a religious people who follow some of the Bible’s teachings—protested slavery. Soon, Christians of all denominations began helping slaves escape. In 1850 the Fugitive Slave Law allowed southern slave owners to recapture slaves in the North. Free blacks were kidnapped, and northern whites were required to help recapture fugitives. There were insurrections, riots, and battles. It was a mess.

When a Christian lady named Harriet Beecher Stowe published a novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, many imagined what it might be like to be enslaved for the first time. A few years later, the Supreme Court ruled that a man, Dred Scott, was property and not a citizen of the United States. People were outraged.

Over six hundred thousand Americans died in the Civil War as the North and South fought over the rights of states to make their own rules—especially rules over slavery. In January 1865, the Constitution was amended to forbid slavery in the United States.

WHAT WAS THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD?



Free States & Territories 1864



Open to Slavery by Kansas Nebraska Act 1854



Open to Slavery by Compromise of 1850



Slave States & Territories