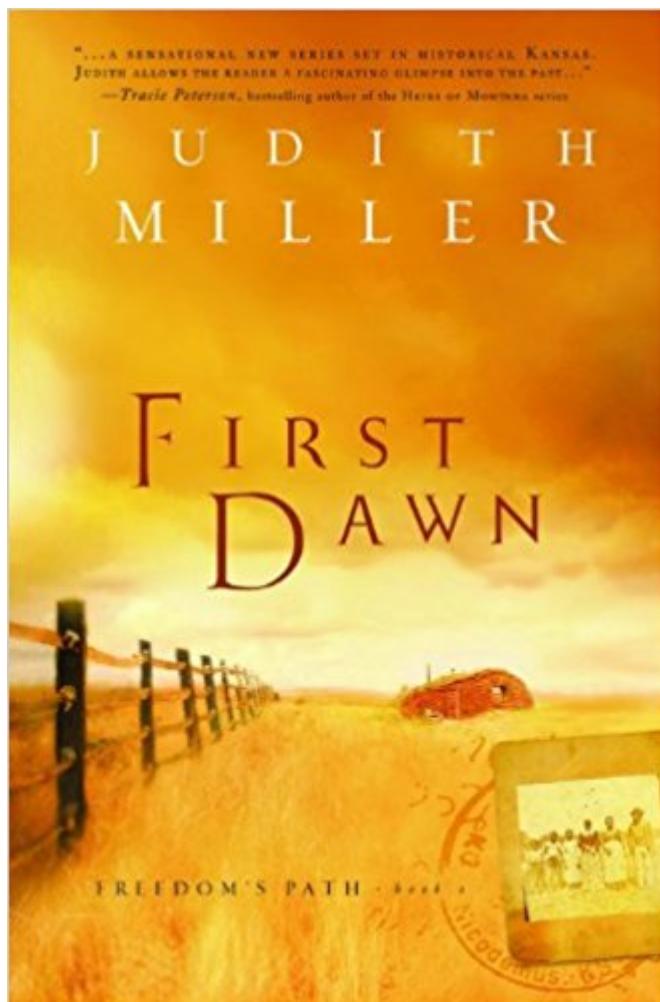


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# First Dawn (Freedom's Path Series #1)



## **Synopsis**

Lured by the promise of "real" freedom and a new town to call their own, sharecroppers Ezekial Harban and his three daughters leave behind remnants of slavery in the war-torn south and set off for Nicodemus, Kansas. When they arrive, they are shocked to see that little of what they were promised actually exists. Many head back home, but Ezekial and his daughters are determined to build a new life in the stark territory. Dr. Boyle, a newly arrived doctor in neighboring Hill City, is called to deliver a baby in Nicodemus. He and his family are moved by the plight of the settlers there and vow to help. But the white pioneers of Hill City face problems, too. When the lives of these two families intersect, neither town will ever be the same. Freedom's Path Book 1.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Miller, coauthor with Tracie Peterson of the popular Bells of Lowell series, offers a historical novel all her own. In 1877 Kansas, prospectors have developed two new towns: Nicodemus is to be settled by former slaves, and Hill City will be inhabited by white folks. The Harban family, hard-working African-Americans, are disappointed when they arrive in Nicodemus and find that it boasts only "wretched" lean-tos and eight small campsites. Similarly, Samuel Boyle, a white physician from Kentucky, moves his family to Hill City and is stunned when he finds that the supposed "town" is really just "a few houses and several sad-looking buildings." The womenfolk, especially, yearn for the comforts of civilization, and a few unmarried gals pine for beaux they left behind. But sustained by a strong work ethic and a firm faith in God, the pioneers begin to settle into their new

environment. Boyle finds that his medical services are badly needed in Nicodemus, and as he shuttles between the two towns, he and his family begin to develop relationships with some of the black settlers. The novel has its share of implausible coincidences (apparently the sine qua non of CBA historical fiction), but these usher the story to its climax and a reasonably satisfying conclusion. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Miller's name is familiar to Christian fiction readers as Tracie Peterson's collaborator in the Bells of Lowell series. Here she begins her own series, called Freedom's Path, about pioneers in Kansas in the late 1870s. The white community of Hill City is represented by Dr. Samuel Boyle, who is surprised at the primitive conditions he finds there but remains determined to soldier on. More interestingly, because it has rarely been treated in fiction, Miller portrays the town of Nicodemus, settled by ex-slaves called Exodusters. There are the usual loves and losses typical of romantic historicals here, the usual overwrought action, the usual rewards for faith and hard work. But Miller's original material points to a superior series. John MortCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I didn't like the book ending with the story so incomplete. The only reason I bought the second book was because I purchased it before reading/finishing the first. Good story lines but a book should be able to stand on its own without requiring the reader to purchase another.

Perhaps it is only the Kindle version that has this problem, but the book was full of jarring and sudden shifts in point of view and location. Usually, such a shift is indicated with a break in text, a sub-heading, or some visual marker to indicate that the story is shifting. Not so in the version I read. Without any warning, the story leaped from the point of view of Jarena in Nicodemus to another figure, sometimes even another figure in an entirely different location. I was surprised to find such a rookie mistake in a book by an established author like Judith Miller, and from a reputable publisher such as Bethany House. Nevertheless, it was there, and it made the book difficult and unpleasant to read. The story itself was adequate.

Judith Miller in the first of her "Freedom Path" series, First Dawn, introduces the readers to two groups of Americans moving to Kansas in 1877. We see a few families who have been freed from slavery only to stay in the same environment as sharecroppers. A few of these are able to save enough money leave. They take their families to what they are told is a new city in Kansas called

"Nicodemus" which is already prosperous and welcoming newcomers. It is a city for colored people to live free and to own land. Another group we see is those who are also promised land in a Kansas city. They are ready for a change, ready to farm rich land and to get in on the start of something big. Both groups have been grossly misled by the fraudulent business men who took their money. To even stay may cost some their lives. Miller eventually weaves the tale of both these group together as their lives intertwine. She tells us a story of faith and courage in extremely difficult times. It was also historically rich in offering us a narrative of westward expansion with new material as we learn of the colored city, the challenges faced, the types of developments in that area in this time period and the mindset of many after the Civil War. This was a story which could have been told in a real page-turner, one of those can't put it down stories. Sadly it was not. It was slow as molasses and entirely too predictable. The ending was abrupt.

I enjoyed the story line but was put off by the gaps in the story. The Drs. Children were self centered and then in a new chapter they were not. There was nothing to explain the transition. The homes of the settlers were burned and nothing was ever mentioned about what they did to overcome that, the story just went on as if it hadn't happened.

First Dawn is historical fiction at its best because it is told in a realistic setting and tells of the trials pioneers faced when they moved to the plains of Kansas in hope of owning their own land. The story tells of a land promoter that told many lies to entice settlers to his land developments. The story revolves around two communities, Hill City, Kansas where Dr. Boyle and his family relocated from Kentucky to leave behind the prejudices of the Southern south toward black people. The other family was a black family of Ezekiel Harban, a sharecropper from the same Kentucky area that came to Nicodemus, Kansas for a new start using all their savings to buy land to farm. The reality of Nicodemus, was bare prairie and not a town at all but they stayed and worked to make it into a home based on the hope for a better life in this harsh environment.

I enjoyed reading this book. I enjoyed the historical significance of the period and seeing the struggles of recently emancipated slaves, and their gut wrenching determination to make it no matter how bad the conditions were. I enjoyed the basic goodness of the characters. It had just enough romance, danger, and mystery to make it interesting. The only thing that bothered me a little is that the set up for the story was a bit too long. T

I enjoyed First Dawn. It had an eye witness sense to it that reaches back into a complex historical period. It has a live story teller quality that gives it presence in your mind's eye. It is a story of struggle, courage, character and victory told with empathy. Every novelist brings a piece of themselves to their work. Miller succeeds in projecting her convictions into her story in a subtle and palatable way. To whet your appetite and give it context, it is the story of freed slaves who pioneer the founding of a new town with little more than their bare hands and the people who reach out to help them succeed. Good story. Worthy read. It's a buy signal from me.

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