MY REPORT:

Well-known author, Patricia St. John penned the book Twice Freed. This 190 page fascinating historical fiction is based on the book of Philemon. It takes place in the Roman Empire in the first century AD. Onesimus, a slave boy born in Colosse, passionately hates slavery, longs for inner peace, loves Eirene (a rich merchant's daughter) and ardently refuses to heed the call of Jesus.

This story begins with Onesimus hating his boyhood friend who now plays the role of master. This hatred intensifies when he is beaten for a crime Archippus committed and blamed him for. The revenge he seeks leaves Archippus crippled for life and Onesimus haunted by heavy guilt. Instead of heeding the “Feet” that pursue him, he spurns Christ's call, steals a large sum of money, runs away from his master, and finally ends up in far away Rome. In Rome, dire conditions drive him to sell himself a gladiator and begin a new kind of slavery. Forced to kill his only gladiator friend (or be killed himself) he plans to drown himself.

One overriding theme in this book is that Christ unceasingly pursues our hearts. In the story many of Onesimus' close associates become Christians but he repeatedly spurns the call of Christ. Yet again and again Christ calls him--through the joy on Archippus' face when he wasn't healed, through Nestor's testimony of his changed life, through Epaphras' witness that night in the field, through the Briton's gentle spirit and forgiveness. But knowing yielding to Christ meant he had to reveal his dark secrets, he decided the cost was too great. Another theme of the book is that only Christ offers true satisfaction and meaning in life. Onesimus tried all kinds of other things—such as beauty, freedom from slavery, wild sinful living, hatred and revenge. Only at the end, when he finally responds to Christ does he find the peace and satisfaction he sought so passionately all his life.

I really liked reading this book because it makes Bible characters and the culture of that time come alive. Now when I read in the Bible about Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and Onesimus—or about Epaphras, Tychicus, John Mark, Epaphroditus, and many others—I see them as interesting people, real people with flesh and blood instead of another list of dry names. The author includes many fascinating historical facts about this Roman Empire era into the story; they help me understand the culture of the time much better. This book is full of references to Bible events and quotations. I really liked recognizing many of the Scripture quotes in the book and reading the context in which they might have been spoken. Although I know Patricia St. John used her imagination and added many details not mentioned in the Bible, I think they only add to the story rather than detract. I heartily recommend this book to anyone—but keep a map and Bible handy while you read!