

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

Saturday, July 4

Reading: Colossians 3:15-17

During the War of 1812, a Maryland lawyer watched from a British vessel as they bombarded Fort McHenry in Baltimore for 25 hours straight. He had been sent to negotiate the release of an American doctor which was successful, but he was not allowed to leave until the battle was over. As the smoke cleared on the morning of September 14, 1814, Francis Scott Key saw the American flag still flying above the fort. The British attempt to destroy it had failed. This inspired Key to write a poem which was later published and put to music. It began, “O say can you see by the dawn’s early light / what so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming.” This song was named “The Star-Spangled Banner” and would become the official national anthem of the United States some 100+ years later in 1931. Key continued his successful career in law becoming District Attorney for Washington, D.C. in 1833.

What you may not know about Francis Scott Key is that he was a devout Christian and played a big role in establishing the Sunday School movement in America. He taught a large Sunday School class at his church and served as Vice President of the National Bible Society from 1817 until his death in 1843. He also sat on the board of the American Sunday School Union starting in 1824.

The aim of this mission was “to start Sunday Schools across America where individuals from lower economic classes heard the Gospel and learned to read and write “using the Bible as a primary text.” Sunday Schools typically comprised of children “who rarely or never attend[ed] church,” and adult classes often formed as a secondary ministry.”¹

In 1830, Key chaired the Sunday School convention in Washington that instituted the ‘Mississippi Valley Enterprise’ that would establish over 61,000 Sunday Schools west of the Appalachian Mountains over the next 50 years. Many of these Sunday Schools grew to become established churches.

Like all of us, Key was a product of his time. We may not agree with all his stands and beliefs,² but his faith and dedication to bringing God’s Word to people are unquestioned. Francis Scott Key once wrote: “The patriot who feels himself in the service of God, who acknowledges Him in all his ways, has the promise of Almighty direction, and will find His Word in his greatest darkness, ‘a lantern to his feet and a lamp unto his paths’”³

¹ <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/francis-scott-key-was-steadfast-sunday-school-backer/>

² See the following for more information on his views: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Scott_Key

³ <https://mypulsenews.com/reflections-from-history-and-faith-francis-scott-key-the-star-spangled-banner/>

PERSONAL NOTE: My parents served as missionaries with the American Sunday School Union for over 40 years. The organization changed its name to the American Missionary Fellowship in 1974. It is now called InFaith. But the goal has not changed – to spread the gospel so people can come to Christ and grow in their faith. (Website: infaith.org)