

## American Minute with Bill Federer

### Ben Franklin: Printer, Postmaster, Ambassador, Author, Inventor, Scientist, and Founding Father

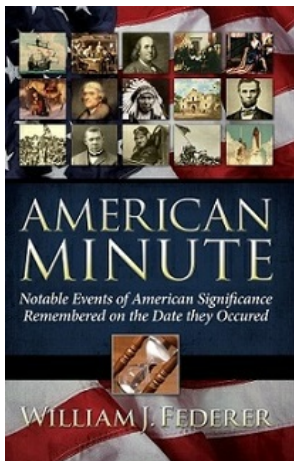
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**Benjamin Franklin** was born in Boston, January 17, 1706, the **15th of 18 children**, to Josiah Franklin, a poor **Puritan candle and soap maker, and dyer of cloth.**

At age 12, **Benjamin** was apprenticed to his brother **James Franklin's** print shop ... [continue reading American Minute here ...](#)



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[American Minute-Notable Events of American Significance Remembered on the Date They Occurred](#)

**James** founded what is considered the first truly independent newspaper in the colonies: ***The New-England Courant.***

**James** formed The Hell-Fire Club and in 1722 published **unflattering articles** about the **Massachusetts governor**, resulting in him being arrested and **jailed for**

**four weeks.**

**Benjamin** continued to run the paper, publishing articles under the **pseudonym "Mrs. Silence Dogood,"** whom he had quote the Roman poet **Cato**:

**"Without freedom of thought there can be no such thing as wisdom, and no such thing as public liberty without freedom of speech."**

When **James** found out the identity of **"Mrs. Silence Dogood"** was none other than his younger brother, they had a **falling out.**

At age 17, **Benjamin ran away,** leaving his apprenticeship **without permission,** which was illegal and made him a **fugitive.**

Later in life, the brothers reconciled, with **Benjamin** even providing an apprenticeship for James' son, James, Jr.

In 1723, **Franklin** arrived in **Philadelphia** and worked at several print shops.

He soon met **Deborah Read.**

They fell in love and he proposed in 1724, but **her mother refused to let them marry** due to his unstable financial situation.

**Franklin** left for Europe, being promised support from Pennsylvania Governor Sir William Keith, which soon failed.

While in London, **Franklin** worked as a **typesetter** at a print shop near the Church of St. Bartholomew the Great.

In the meantime, **Deborah Read's mother** had her marry **John Rogers,** a sweet-talking ne'er-do-well, who could not hold a job. Four months after the wedding, they found

out he had another wife in London.

**Rogers** spent all of **Deborah's dowry**, incurred more **debt**, ran off the **British West Indies** where he was **killed in a fight**.

In 1726, **Franklin** returned to Philadelphia and renewed his relationship with **Deborah**.

He proposed, but they could **not legally marry**, as the **colony would not grant a divorce based on Rogers' desertion**, and **they could not prove that Rogers was dead**, so **Franklin** and **Deborah** had a **private ceremony** and a **common-law marriage**.

In 1729, at the age of 23, he began publishing the ***Pennsylvania Gazette***..

He designed some of the very first political cartoons.

In 1732, he began publishing ***Poor Richard's Almanack***, which sold 10,000 copies a year.

**Franklin** retired at age 42, taught himself **five languages**, then invented:

- the **rocking chair**;
- **Franklin stove**;
- **bifocal glasses**;
- **swim fins**;
- **a catheter**;
- **odometer**, for measuring postal routes;
- **glass armonica** musical instrument;
- **long-arm reaching device** to get books off high shelves; and
- **lightning rod**, which earned him **degrees from Harvard and Yale**.

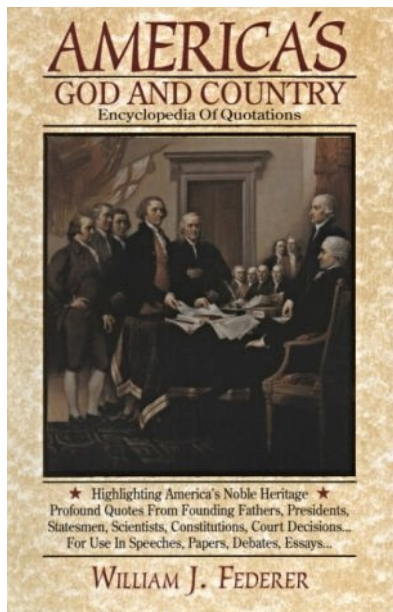
He helped found America's:

- first postal system,
- fire department,
- fire insurance company,
- hospital,
- public lending library, and
- the **University of Pennsylvania**, one of America's oldest institutions of higher learning.

He studied **wind speeds** and **water currents**, their **depth, speed, temperature**, from the West Indies, along the Eastern coast of North America, and across the Atlantic to Europe, being the **first scientist to map the Gulf Stream**.

In his ***Poor Richard's Almanac***, May 1757, **Ben Franklin** wrote:

**"Work** as if you were to live 100 years; **pray** as if you were to **die tomorrow**."



[America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations](#)

**Franklin** wrote May 9, 1731:

"There seems to me ... to be great occasion for raising a United Party for **Virtue**, by forming the **virtuous and good men of all nations into a regular body** ...

Whoever attempts this aright, and is well qualified, cannot fail of **pleasing God** and of **meeting with success**."

At the age of 29, young **Ben Franklin** attended the **First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia**.

He wrote in his *Autobiography*:

"About the Year 1734, there arrived among us from Ireland, a young **Presbyterian Preacher named Samuel Hemphill**, who delivered with a good voice, and apparently extempore, **most excellent discourses**, which drew together considerable numbers of different persuasions, who join'd in admiring them.

Among the rest **I became one of his constant hearers, his sermons pleasing me**, as they had little of the dogmatical kind, but inculcated strongly the practice of **virtue**, or what in the religious style are called good works ...

Those however, of our Congregation, who **considered themselves as orthodox Presbyterians, disapprov'd his doctrine**, and were join'd by most of **the old Clergy**, who arraign'd him of heterodoxy before the Synod, **in order to have him silenc'd**.

**... I became his zealous partisan, and contributed all I could to raise a party in his favor; and we combated for him a while** with some hopes of success.

There was **much scribbling pro and con** upon the occasion; and finding that tho' **an elegant preacher** he was but a **poor writer**, I lent him my pen and wrote for him **two or three pamphlets, and one piece in the Pennsylvania Gazette of April 1735.** "

The pamphlet titles were:

- **A Defense Of the Rev. Mr. Hemphill's Observations:** or, an Answer to the Vindication of the Reverend Commission (October 30, 1735); and



- **Dialogue Between Two Presbyterians** (April 10, 1735).

These pamphlets written by Franklin contained numerous revealing statements, as recorded in *The Christian Pamphlets of Benjamin Franklin* (Fortenberry, 2014); and *Franklin on Faith: The Definitive Guide to the Religion of the First American* (Fortenberry, 2015):

- "Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of Good-Works. And there is scarcely a chapter in the whole Gospels or Epistles from which this Doctrine can't be prov'd."
- "It is the duty of every Christian Minister to explode such errors which have a natural tendency to make men act as if Christ came into the world to patronize vice, and allow men to live as they please."
- "I would advise these Reverend Gentlemen impartially to read the Scriptures."
- "They should acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the Messiah promised by the Prophets, the Son of God."
- "Those Doctrines delivered by our Savior and the Apostles, which are absolutely necessary to be believed, are so very plain, that the meanest capacities, may easily understand 'em."
- "Christ by his Death and Sufferings has purchas'd for us those easy Terms and Conditions of our Acceptance with God, propos'd in the Gospel, to wit, Faith and Repentance."
- "I am conscious I believe in Christ, and exert my best

endeavors to understand his Will aright, and strictly to follow it."

In defense of **Hemphill, Franklin** wrote that:

**"Christianity ... is plainly nothing else, but a second Revelation of God's Will founded upon the first Revelation, which God made to us by the Light of Nature."**

Despite **Franklin's** efforts, **Rev. Samuel Hemphill** was **removed from preaching at the church.**

After this, **Franklin ceased attending the church,** though **he continued to support it financially.**

**Franklin** experienced his version of the "**cancel culture,**" as he explained in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 10, 1731:

"Being frequently **censur'd** and **condemn'd** by different persons for printing things which they say ought not to be printed, I have sometimes thought it might be necessary to make a standing apology for myself, and publish it once a year,"

He wrote:

"That when truth and error have fair play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter."

He wrote in his *Autobiography*:

"I had been religiously educated as a **Presbyterian**; and tho' some of the **dogmas** of that persuasion, such as the **eternal decrees of God, election, reprobation, etc.,** appeared to me unintelligible ... I early absented myself from the public assemblies of the sect ,..

I never was without some **religious principles.**

I never doubted, for instance, the **existence of the Deity**; that **he made the world, and govern'd it by his Providence**; that the **most acceptable service of God was the doing good to man**; that **our souls are immortal**; and that **all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter.**"

Franklin continued:

"These I esteem'd the essentials ... found in **all the religions** we had in our country, **I respected them all**, tho' with different degrees ...

This respect to all, with an opinion that the worst had **some good effects**, induc'd me to **avoid all discourse** that might tend to lessen **the good opinion another might have of his own religion** ...

As our province increas'd in people, and **new places of worship** were continually wanted, and generally erected by **voluntary contributions, my mite for such purpose**, whatever might be the sect, **was never refused** ..."

Franklin added:

"Tho' **I seldom attended any public worship**, I had still an opinion of **its propriety** ... and **I regularly paid my annual subscription** for the **support** of the only **Presbyterian minister** or meeting we had in **Philadelphia**.

**He us'd to visit me** sometimes as a friend, and **admonish me to attend his administrations**, and I was now and then prevail'd on to do so, **once for five Sundays successively**.

**Had he been in my opinion a good preacher, perhaps I might have continued** ... but **his discourses** were



chiefly either polemic arguments, or explications of the peculiar doctrines of our sect, and were all to me **very dry, uninteresting, and unedifying** ... and I attended his preaching no more ...

My conduct might be blameable, but I leave it, without attempting further to excuse it."

**John Adams** described **Franklin**:

"The **Catholics** thought him almost a **Catholic**. The **Church of England** claimed him as one of them.

The **Presbyterians** thought him **half a Presbyterian**, and the **Friends** believed him a **wet Quaker**."

When **France** and **Spain** were raiding the American colonies, **Ben Franklin** raised **Pennsylvania's first volunteer militia**.

He then proposed a **General Fast**, which was published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 12, 1747:

"We have ... thought fit ... to appoint ... a **Day of Fasting & Prayer**, exhorting all, both Ministers & People ... to join with one accord in the most **humble & fervent supplications**

that **Almighty God** would mercifully **interpose** and still the rage of war among the nations & **put a stop to the effusion of Christian blood**."

**Franklin** printed the works of **Presbyterian Rev. Alexander Craighead**:

- *The 1743 Renewal of the Scottish National Covenant* (1744); and
- *Solemn League and Covenant* (1748).

**Rev. Craighead** had anonymously written the **first treatise denouncing the King of England** in 1743.

**Craighead** left Pennsylvania for **North Carolina** to be the **Pastor of Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church** in **Mecklenburg County**.

There, his teachings may have inspired the **1775 Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence**, a precursor to Jefferson's 1776 Declaration of Independence.

**Franklin** published works of other prominent Presbyterian and Great Awakening ministers:

- **Ralph Erskine**, *The Gospel Sonnets*, "Faith, without trouble or fighting, is a suspicious faith; for true faith is a fighting, wrestling faith";
- **Josiah Smith**, Pastor in Charleston, SC, supported Rev. Whitefield, prisoner of war during Revolution;
- **Henry Scougal**, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, praised by Rev. Whitefield;
- **Samuel Finley**, trustee and president of Princeton, influenced Declaration Signer Benjamin Rush and Constitution Signer Richard Stockton, his great-grandson was Samuel Finley Breese Morse, developer of the telegraph;
- **Gilbert Tennent**, most famous sermon "On the Danger of an Unconverted Ministry," his father founded the Log College, which transitioned into Princeton;
- **Samuel Davies**, fourth president of Princeton, a strong advocate of religious freedom, missionary to slaves, profoundly influenced Patrick Henry;

- **Samuel Jacob Blair**, educated at the Log College, he helped train Samuel Davies, Blair's son was the second chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives.

**Franklin** printed the sermons of Great Awakening evangelist **George Whitefield**.

As **joint postmaster general** of the colonies, he helped distribute **Whitefield's sermons** throughout the country.

**Franklin** attended **Whitefield's meetings** at **Philadelphia's Courthouse steps**, estimating 25,000 were in attendance.

He described in his *Autobiography*:

"It was **wonderful to see the change soon made** in the **manners of our inhabitants**.

From being thoughtless or indifferent about **religion**, it seemed as if **all the world were growing religious**, so that one could not walk thro' the town in an evening without **hearing psalms sung** in different families of **every street**."

**George Whitefield** wrote to **Franklin** in 1752:

"My **Dear Doctor** ... I find that you grow more and more famous in the learned world."

**Franklin** wrote to **Whitefield**:

"I sometimes wish you and I were jointly employed by the Crown to **settle a colony on the Ohio** ... a strong body of **religious and industrious people!** ...

Might it not greatly facilitate the **introduction of pure religion among the heathen**, if we could, by such a

colony, show them a **better sample of Christians** than they commonly see in our **Indian traders?**"

In 1764, **Franklin** wrote to **Whitefield**, ending with the salutation:

"Your frequently repeated Wishes and **Prayers for my Eternal as well as temporal Happiness** are very obliging. **I can only thank you for them, and offer you mine in return.**"

In **Whitefield's** last surviving letter, he shared his desire that both he and **Franklin** would:

"... be in **that happy number** of those who is the midst of the tremendous final blaze shall cry **Amen.**" (Revelations 7:12; 19:4).

In 1749, **Benjamin Franklin** stated in his ***Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania:***

"History will also afford the frequent opportunities of showing **the necessity of a public religion, from its usefulness to the public;** the advantage of a **religious character among private persons** ... and the excellency of **the Christian religion above all others, ancient or modern.**"

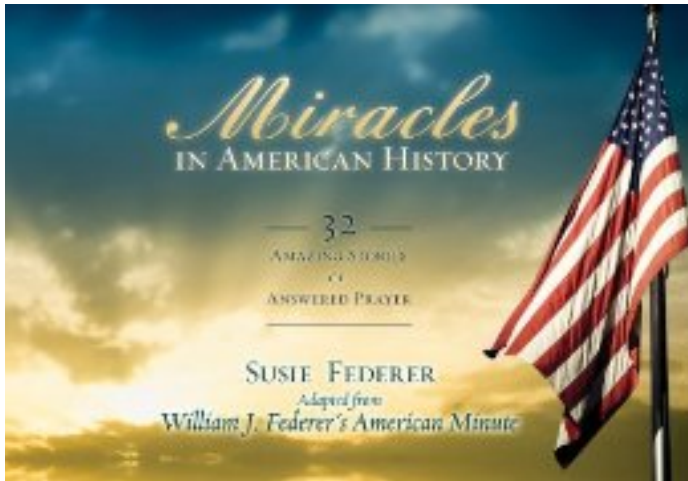
**Benjamin Franklin** believe Christians should be involved in meeting the needs of their communities, as he wrote to Joseph Huey, On June 6, 1753:

"The **worship of God is a duty;** the hearing and reading of sermons may be useful; **but, if men rest in hearing and praying,** as too many do, it is **as if a tree should value itself on being watered** and putting forth leaves, **though it never produce any fruit.**"

**Franklin** helped found the **first hospital in America -- Pennsylvania Hospital.**

He composed the text for the **cornerstone** of the hospital:

"In the year of **Christ**, 1755 ... This building, by the bounty of the Government and of many private persons, was **piously founded, for the relief of the sick and miserable. May the God of mercies bless the undertaking!**"



[Miracles in American History-32 Amazing Stories of Answered Prayers](#)

In a pamphlet for Europeans titled *Information to Those Who Would Remove to America*, 1754, **Benjamin Franklin** wrote:

"**Atheism is unknown there; Infidelity rare and secret; so that persons may live to a great age in that country without having their piety shocked by meeting with either an Atheist or an Infidel.**

And the **Divine Being** seems ... pleased to **favor the whole country.**"

**Ben Franklin** was a printer, a postmaster, an ambassador, an author, an inventor, a scientist, and a **Founding Father**.

He was a delegate to the **Continental Congress** where he signed the **Declaration of Independence**.

He was **President (Governor) of Pennsylvania**, where

he signed the **state's first Constitution**, September 28, 1776, which included Frame of Government, Section 10:

"And each member, before he takes his seat, shall make and subscribe the following declaration, viz:

"I do believe in one **God**, the **Creator** and **Governor of the Universe**, the **Rewarder** of the good and the **Punisher** of the wicked. And I do acknowledge the **Scriptures** of the **Old and New Testament** to be given by **Divine Inspiration**.

And **no further or other religious test** shall ever hereafter be required of any civil officer or magistrate in this State."

As the first U.S. ambassador to France, **Franklin** helped negotiate and sign the **Treaty of Alliance with France**, 1778.

He signed the **Treaty of Paris**, 1783, ending the Revolutionary War, which began:

"In the name of the most **Holy and Undivided Trinity**."

He was a signer of the **U.S. Constitution**.

During a deadlock at the **Constitutional Convention**, **Franklin** called for **prayer**, June 28, 1787:

"In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had **daily prayer** in this room for the **divine protection**.

**Our prayers**, Sir, were heard and they were **graciously answered**.

All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed **frequent instances of a superintending providence in our favor** ...



I therefore beg leave to move -- that henceforth **prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessing on our deliberations**, be held in this Assembly **every morning before we proceed to business.**"

After the **Constitution** was approved, **Franklin** wrote to the editor of the *Federal Gazette*, April 8, 1788:

"I beg I may not be understood to infer, that our general **Convention was divinely inspired** when it form'd the **new federal Constitution ...**

yet I must own I have so much **faith in the general government of the world by Providence,**

that I can hardly conceive **a transaction of such momentous importance** to the welfare of millions now existing, and to exist in the posterity of a great nation, **should be suffered to pass without being in some degree influenc'd, guided and governed by that omnipotent, omnipresent Beneficent Ruler**, in whom all inferior spirits live and move and have their being."  
(Acts 17:28)

**Benjamin Franklin** gave advice on financial matters.

In *The Way to Wealth*, 1758, he cited **debt** as a contributing factor to the **Spanish Empire's downfall:**

"If you would be wealthy, says he ... **think of saving** as well as of getting:

the **Indies** have not made **Spain** rich, because **her outgoes are greater than her incomes.**"

**Franklin** expounded the dangers of debt in *The Way to Wealth*, 1758:

"**God** gives all things to industry.

Then plough deep, while **sluggards sleep**, and **you shall have corn to sell and to keep**, says Poor Dick.

**Work while it is called today**, for you know not how much you may be **hindered tomorrow**, which makes Poor Richard say, **one today is worth two tomorrows**; and ... **have you somewhat to do tomorrow, do it today ...**

And in another place, pride breakfasted with plenty, dined with poverty, and supped with infamy ...

**What madness** must it be to **run in debt** for these **superfluities** (unnecessary expenditures) ...

We are offered, by the terms of this vendue (public auction), **six months' credit**; and that perhaps has induced some of us to attend it, because **we cannot spare the ready money**, and **hope now to be fine without it ...**"

He continued:

"When you **run in debt**; you give to **another power over your liberty ...**

**If you cannot pay** at the time, you will be **ashamed to see your creditor**;

you will be **in fear when you speak to him**, you will make **poor pitiful sneaking excuses**, and by degrees come to **lose your veracity**, and **sink into base downright lying**;

for, as Poor Richard says, the **second vice is lying**, the **first is running in debt ...**

And again to the same purpose, **lying rides upon debt's**

**back."**

This is similar to the **Greek historian Herodotus**, who gave an account of **Persia** during the 5th century BC:

**"The most disgraceful thing in the world (as Persians) think, is to tell a lie;**

the next worst, to **owe a debt**: because, among other reasons, **the debtor is obliged to tell lies."**

**Franklin** added:

**"Poverty often deprives a man of all spirit ... 'tis hard for an empty bag to stand upright, as Poor Richard truly says...**

And yet you are about to **put yourself under that tyranny** when you **run in debt** for such dress!

**Your creditor has authority at his pleasure to deprive you of your liberty**, by confining you in gaol (jail) for life, or to sell you for a servant, **if you should not be able to pay him!**

**When you have got your bargain**, you may, perhaps, **think little of payment**; but **creditors**, Poor Richard tells us, **have better memories than debtors ...**

**The day comes round before you are aware, and the demand is made before you are prepared to satisfy it ... "**

**Franklin** continued:

**"Those have a short Lent**, saith Poor Richard, who **owe money to be paid at Easter.**

Then since, as he says, **the borrower is a slave to the lender** (Proverbs 22:7) and **the debtor to the creditor,**

disdain the **chain, preserve your freedom;** and **maintain your independency:** be industrious and free; **be frugal and free.**

At present, perhaps, you may think yourself in thriving circumstances, and that you can bear a little extravagance without injury; but, For age and want, **save while you may;** No morning sun lasts a whole day, as Poor Richard says.

Gain may be temporary and uncertain, but ever while you live, **expense is constant and certain ...** as Poor Richard says. So **rather go to bed supperless than rise in debt."**

**Ben Franklin** became President of America's **first anti-slavery society -- Pennsylvania's Society for the Abolition of Slavery.**

Less than three months before he died, **Franklin** petitioned Congress to ban slavery:

"For promoting the **Abolition of Slavery, the relief of free Negroes unlawfully held in bondage, & the Improvement of the Condition of the African Races ...**

an Association was formed ... in this state by a number of her citizens of **various religious denominations** for promoting the **abolition of Slavery ...**

... A just and accurate conception of the true principles of liberty ... by the blessing of **Divine Providence,** have been successfully directed to the **relieving from bondage** a large number of **their fellow Creatures of the African Race ...**

That **mankind** are all formed by the same **Almighty Being, alike objects of His care** and **equally designed** for the **enjoyment of happiness** the **Christian Religion** teaches us to believe and the **political creed of America**

fully coincides ...

that these  **blessings ought rightfully to be administered, without distinction of Color, to all descriptions of People ... that equal liberty ... is still the birthright of all men ...**

They earnestly entreat  **your serious attention to the subject of Slavery ... restoration of liberty to those unhappy Men, who alone, in this land of Freedom, are degraded into perpetual Bondage ... groaning in servile subjection,**

that  **you will devise means for removing this ... promote mercy and justice towards this distressed Race, and ... for discouraging every species of traffick in the Persons of Our Fellow Men.**

Philadelphia February 3, 1790

**B. Franklin**

President of the Society."

**Franklin** died April 17, 1790.

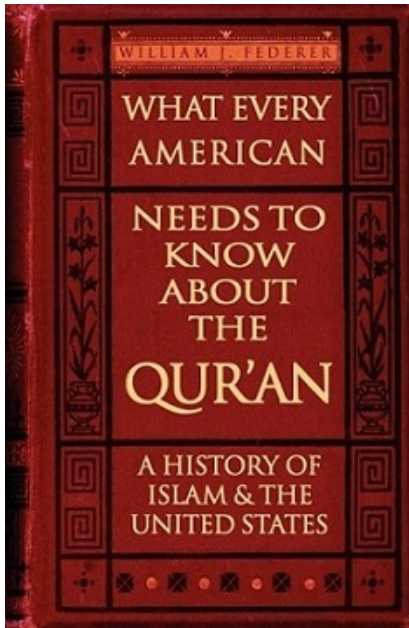
In his last published letter, March 23, 1790, (*Federal Gazette*), **Franklin condemned** the Southern state's economic argument for continuing **slavery** by satirically **comparing them to Muslim Barbary pirates who enslaved Christians:**

"If we cease  **our cruises against Christians,** how shall we ...  **make slaves of their people ...** to cultivate our land ... to perform common labors ...

Must we be our own slaves: And is there not more compassion due to us as **Mussulmen** than to these **Christian dogs.**

We have now about **50,000 slaves** in and near **Algiers**

... If we then cease **taking** and **plundering** the **infidel ships** and **making slaves of the seamen and passengers**, our lands will become of no value for want of cultivation."



[What Every American Needs to Know About the Qur'an-A History of Islam & the United States](#)

Images of **Franklin** are throughout the U.S. Capitol complex in Washington, DC:

- a **bust** of him is in a window of the Library of Congress' Thomas Jefferson Building;
- U.S. Capitol's House wing Cox Corridors depicts **Franklin** in the **paintings** of "The Constitutional Convention" and "The Declaration of Independence";
- the Senate-side President's Room has **Franklin** on the ceiling sitting in a chair holding papers;
- a **portrait medallion** of **Franklin** is in the Senate wing, North Corridor;
- a **lunette** of **Franklin** is above a door of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations;
- a **watercolor** "Reading of the Declaration" shows **Franklin** on the steps with Thomas Jefferson and John Adams presenting the document to colonists;



- an **etching** of **Franklin**;
- a **marble statue** of **Franklin**.

**Franklin** gave a warning at the **Constitutional Convention**, June 28, 1787:

"I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more **convincing proofs I see of this truth** -- that **God governs** in the **affairs of men**.

And if a **sparrow** cannot fall to the ground **without His notice**, is it probable that **an empire can rise without His aid?** ...

We have been assured, Sir, in the **Sacred Writings**, that **'except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it'** ...

I also believe that **without His concurring aid** we shall succeed in this political building no better than the **Builders of Babel.**"

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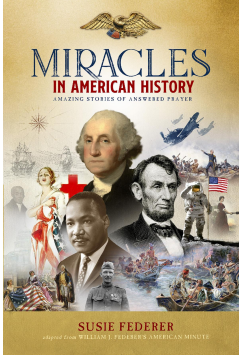
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