

## Lesson Fifteen

# The Declaration Of Independence

### LESSON IDEA

To show that the Declaration of Independence is based on God-given, not government-given, rights.

### PREPARATION

Make copies of the words from the Declaration of Independence that appear on the last page of tonight's lesson, so that each family member can follow along as the excerpts are read during the discussion.

**L**ET'S REVISIT where we left off last week, and learn what happened after England declared war on its American colonies. In 1775 and early 1776, it still amounted to a family fight, with the British soldiers and ships anchored near Boston, and George Washington's volunteer army skirting the west edge of the city. Each waited for the other to back down, but neither did.

As the Second Continental Congress (which was still in session) struggled to find and finance food, uniforms, and ammunition for Washington's troops, talk of cutting all ties with Britain escalated. In January, Massachusetts passed a resolution calling for independence. In April, North Carolina took the bold step, followed by Rhode Island. Virginia declared its own independence from

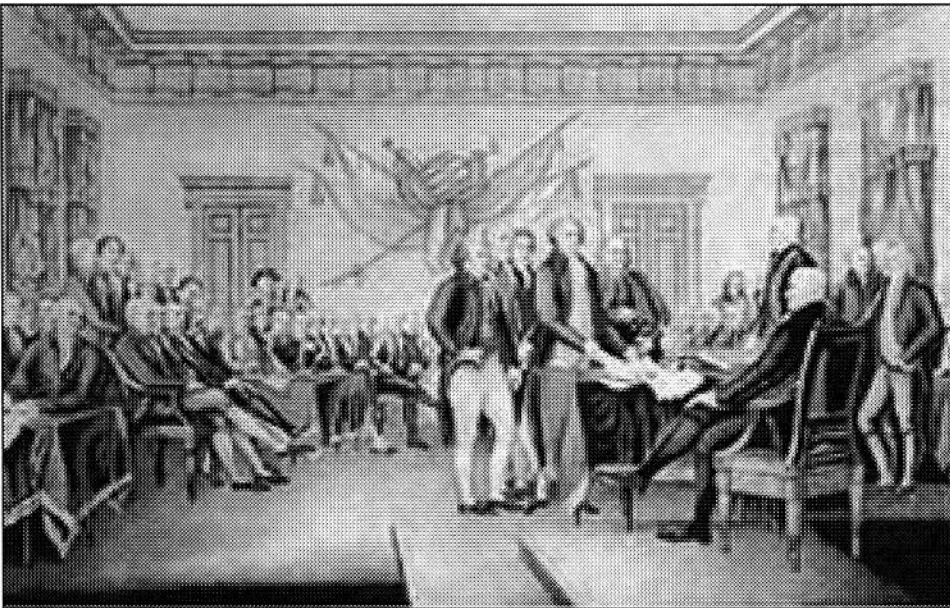
England. New York and Pennsylvania opposed the break, but in other colonies the idea gained steady momentum.

Finally, on June 7th, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia asked the Continental Congress to vote on a resolution stating: "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connections between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved."

**T**HE LONG-ANTICIPATED moment of decision had arrived. The vote, however, had to be unanimous. If some colonies voted "Yea," while others voted "Nay," England could take advantage of the division and the drive for independence would likely fail. Rather than press for an immediate decision, the vote was postponed until July 2nd.

To save time in the event the resolution passed, the Congress appointed a committee of five (John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston) to draft a declaration detailing reasons for the break with

England. Even unanimous support of Lee's resolution would not be quite sufficient. The delegates desired a formal statement that all men and governments could read, making clear that their quarrel with England was more than a tax dispute or a fight over who had what rights. They intended to challenge the very "right" of a king to be a king; the idea that a man could be a government "god" who could give and take liberties at whim. For many thousands of years kings, pharaohs, and emperors had been venerated, even worshiped, as the source of rights. Few of their subjects had dared look such deified beings in the eye and



The signing of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

