

# **The Leader Stephen, Acts 6-7**

**Series: The Early Days**

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What happened to the signers of the Declaration of Independence?

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the revolutionary army, another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the revolutionary war.

They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags.

Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward.

Vandals or soldiers or both, looted the properties of Ellery, Clymer, Hall, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr., noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. The owner quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children

vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

We live in the shadow of those early patriots. But, what of the early leaders in the church?

Stephen was among the seven chosen to care for the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1-7)

67 verses of the Bible are devoted to Stephen. Here is what we know about him:

- He was full of God's grace and power, performing miracles (6:8)
- He got into an argument with some men from the Synagogue of the Freedman, men from Cyrene and Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. (6:9)
- He was a very learned man with great wisdom and the strength of the Holy Spirit (6:10)
- These men stirred up trouble accusing Stephen speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God, against the Holy Place and the Law. Specifically they claimed he taught that Jesus would destroy the temple and change their customs. (Jesus did.) (6:11-14)
- The Sanhedrin-the same group that condemned Jesus-while looking intensely at Stephen, "saw that his face was like the face of an angel." (6:15)
- Stephen was invited to answer the charges by the High Priest. (7:1)
- Stephen delivered one of the longest sermons in the Bible, giving them a history lesson. His sermon included:
  - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (7:2-8)
  - Joseph in Egypt (7:9-19)
  - Moses (7:20-44)
  - Joshua (7:45)
  - David and Solomon (7:46-50)
- Stephen issued a scathing indictment against these Jewish rulers (7:51-53)
- The stoning of Stephen (7:54-60)

What should we strive to imitate in Stephen?

- He was a man of superior spiritual strength.
- He was a man willing to spread the gospel in difficult places
- He was a man who was accused of some the same things Jesus was
- He was a man who was well-versed in Scripture.
- He was a man who was zealous for God
- He was a man who was willing to tell the truth
- He was a man who was not afraid to die for his faith
- He was a man who imitated Jesus even in death

Stephen is our spiritual ancestor. He is in our spiritual bloodline. He leaves us a great heritage of faith, a great example of faith, and a great testimony of faith. He holds the

distinction of being the first Christian martyr, the first of thousands who died in the first century.