

What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 1: Cromwell in his own words – Source 4

Cromwell's reply to Parliament, when asked to be king, 1657

(W.C. Abbott (ed.), *The writings and speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, Vol. III, pp.442-44. Published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1947)

What is this source?

These extracts come from a speech that Cromwell made to Parliament in 1657.

He was responding to the 'Humble Petition and Advice', which asked Cromwell to become king.

What's the background to this source?

Cromwell was already Lord Protector. In 1657 Parliament asked him to accept the 'Humble Petition and Advice'. This was basically a new constitution or plan for government, which would make Cromwell king.

Cromwell became Lord Protector in December 1653. He hoped to try and achieve settlement in the country. This meant trying to make Britain an orderly place and put an end to all the wars and fighting over religion and political views. He tried to work with MPs to achieve this. However, he found this difficult and dismissed the first Protectorate Parliament in January 1655. To help him rule after this, he appointed eleven army commanders (Major Generals) from August 1655. That was unpopular and unsuccessful. So Parliament suggested this new plan.

It's worth knowing that ...

Cromwell eventually refused the crown. We do not know for sure why he did this.

Most MPs wanted him to accept. However, most of the army officers and soldiers did not want him to become king. Some historians think that Cromwell refused the crown because he thought God would frown on him. Accepting the crown would show pride and ambition and Cromwell thought this would offend God.



Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. Study the notes that support this source. What was Cromwell offered?
2. What does this suggest about Parliament's view of Cromwell?
3. Study the source. What was Cromwell's response?
4. Some critics accused Cromwell of greed and ambition. Does this source support that accusation?
5. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?

Source 4

MR. SPEAKER,

This frame of government, that it hath pleased the Parliament by your hand to offer to me, truly I should have a very brazen

forehead, if it should not beget in me a great deal of consternation of spirit, it being of so high and great importance, as by your opening of it, and by the reading of it, is manifest to all men to be. The welfare, the peace, the settlement of three nations, and all that rich treasure of the best people in the world being involved therein, I say, this consideration alone ought to beget in me the greatest reverence and fear of God, that ever possessed a man in this world.

I have therefore but this one word to say to you: That seeing you have made this progress in this business, and completed the work on your part, I may have some short time to ask counsel of God and of my own heart. And I hope that neither the honour of any weak or unwise people, nor yet the desires of any that may have lusting after things that are not good, shall steer me to give other than such an answer as may be ingenuous and thankful, thankfully acknowledging your care and integrity, and such an answer as shall be for the good of those, that I presume you and I serve, and are ready to serve.