Why did people go to war in 1642?

Case study 1: 1637-39 - Source 5

Letter from a gentleman called Edward Norgate with Charles's army against Scotland, 4 May 1639

(Catalogue ref: SP 16/420/45)

What is this source?

This is an extract from a letter by Edward Norgate to a friend back in London called Robert Read. Norgate was part of Charles's army against Scotland when he wrote this letter.

Norgate was also a close friend of Charles I.

What's the background to this source?

In 1639 Charles was facing a major rebellion in Scotland. The rebels had signed a Covenant (an agreement) banning the new prayer book brought in by William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury. Charles could not put up with this challenge to his authority and had tried to crush the rebellion in 1638, but had failed.

Charles was obsessed by the idea of order and unity. He wanted England and Scotland to be ruled under the same laws. He wanted the English and Scottish churches to be organised the same way and worship the same way. The Scots were not pleased. In 1637 they rejected the new prayer book that Archbishop Laud and Charles wanted them to use. Rebel leaders formed a Scottish National Assembly and signed a Covenant banning Laud's prayer book. Charles first tried to crush the Covenanters. However, by May 1639 he was trying to reach a deal with them.

It's worth knowing that ...

Religion was very important to everyone in the 1600s. The church was a big employer. It was also the centre of social life. Above all, most people wanted to please God and go to Heaven, so they had strong views on how they should worship God.

Both England and Scotland broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and became Protestant in the 1500s. Throughout Europe in the 1600 there were still bloody wars taking place between Catholics and Protestants. Religion was seen as something worth fighting for.

There were also different types of Protestants. Many of the Covenanters were Presbyterians (who were similar to English Puritans).

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

- 1. What does this source tell us about the relationship between Charles and the Scots in 1639?
- 2. What did Norgate think of the Scots?
- 3. According to this letter, which side was being more reasonable?
- 4. Do you accept this viewpoint?
- 5. Does this source tell you whether the majority of people in England supported Charles against the Scots?
- 6. Does this source give us any clues about why the kingdom went to war in 1642?



Source 5

