

How did the Stuart kings govern?

Reading



Set a Purpose

As you read, take note of how James I and Charles I ruled England. How did parliament and the people react to these kings?

absolute monarch a king, queen, emperor, or empress with unlimited power

The Stuart dynasty was Scottish. Elizabeth I had never married, and had no children. James VI, who was king of Scotland, was also the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, who was Elizabeth's cousin. This made him Elizabeth's closest male (and Protestant) relative. On Elizabeth's death in 1603, he became James I of England and Ireland.

The Stuarts and Divine Right

The Stuarts believed in the divine right of kings. The word *divine* means, in this case, "coming from God." Stuart kings believed their power as rulers came directly from God. They were God's representatives on Earth, and they could not be questioned by ordinary people. This was very different from how Elizabeth I had ruled. While she had maintained her power as a monarch, she had also known the value of working with parliament, not against it.

Absolute Monarchy

James I and the Stuart kings who followed him admired the kings of France and Spain, who were **absolute monarchs**. They were irritated by English ideas about ruling within the law and consulting parliament, which had been set down in Magna Carta. They particularly hated the idea that only parliament held the right to set taxes, and that the monarch was left asking for money.

The people of England had moved away from the old feudal system, where kings and lords had absolute rule. The growing—and wealthy—middle class had its own ideas about how government should be run. Stuart stubbornness and their attitudes toward both religion and parliament would create problems in a fiercely Protestant, rapidly changing, England.



FIGURE 4-12 The artist focuses attention on James I in this 1621 portrait by making the foreground of the painting brighter and more detailed than the background. In reality, James was very untidy and rough around the edges. Why would his portrait not show him as he really was?

James I

James was an intelligent man, but he also had a talent for doing the wrong thing. James had been king of Scotland for 20 years before he became king of England and Ireland, and he did not make a good first impression on his new subjects. For example, his idea to unite England and Scotland under one parliament was quickly rejected. These countries had been at war with each other far too often, and uniting them would not be easy. Always short of money, James tried to find new sources of income without consulting parliament. When he did call parliament, it promised him money only if he agreed to give up more power.

James did accomplish peace between England and Spain, at least for a time. The English colonization of North America quickly expanded under his reign. A poet himself, he promoted the literature of Scotland, and his King James Version of the Bible is considered a great work of English literature. He was one of the first antismoking advocates, and published a pamphlet to try to convince people not to smoke.

However, James believed too strongly in divine right to learn how to work with parliament. He also had a habit of appointing his **favourites** in positions of power. This did not earn him the love of his subjects, and it set a bad precedent for the reign of his son, Charles.

Did You Know?

James I was the target of a failed assassination attempt called the Gunpowder Plot. Conspirators placed barrels of gunpowder beneath the parliament building, intending to blow up the king. One of the conspirators was a man named Guy Fawkes. Today, a stylized mask of Guy Fawkes is often used by protestors. The mask has become a symbol of defiance against governments and other organizations.

favourite a person given special treatment

EXPLORING SOURCES

Divine Right

Although James I knew that he ought to rule according to the laws of England, he did not think he had to. This speech to parliament shows his views on divine right.

Thinking IT THROUGH

1. Identify James I's point of view or main idea.
2. What analogy, or comparison, did he use to express his point of view? What specific details did he use to support his idea?
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of his argument. Did he prove his point?

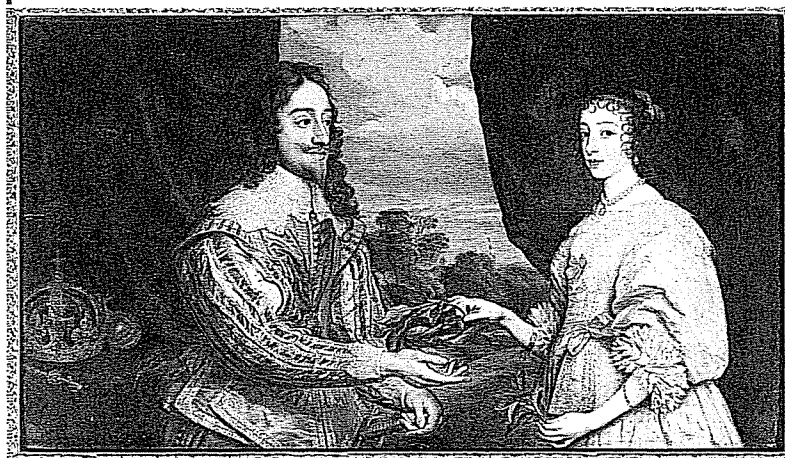
Kings are justly called Gods, for they exercise... a power similar to God's power upon Earth. For if you will consider the attributes of God, you will see how they agree in the person of a king. God has power to create or destroy, to make and unmake, at His pleasure; to give life or send death, to judge all, and not to be judged or accountable to any one; to raise low things high, and to make high things low at His pleasure. Kings have the same power. They make and unmake their subjects; they have the power of raising and casting down, of life and death; judge over all their subjects, yet accountable to none but God. They have the power to exalt [raise high] low things and debase [make low] high things, and make of their subjects like men of chess... therefore, kings have absolute power.

compromise to settle a dispute, with both sides giving up a part of what they demand

tyrant a ruler who uses power oppressively or unjustly

extravagance careless and lavish spending, wastefulness

FIGURE 4-13 Charles I and his queen, Henrietta Maria of France. Henrietta is handing Charles a laurel wreath. What might this symbolize? What other objects are included in the painting to proclaim their royal status?



Charles I

Charles I had overcome serious physical problems in his childhood. He also suffered from a lack of affection from his parents. He was shy, spoke with a stammer, and often had fits of temper. When his father became king of England and the family moved to London, Charles was left behind. He was James's second son, but became the heir when his older brother died.

Like his father, Charles I believed in the divine right of kings. He was even less willing to **compromise** with parliament than his father had been. He truly believed that the king had to answer to no one but God. As far as ruling went, he was willing to be a **tyrant**.

Although he was very dignified and could be charming, Charles tended to keep apart from other people. He loved art and enjoyed owning fine possessions. This made others complain about his **extravagance**.

Charles relied on his father's favourite, the despised Duke of Buckingham, for advice. Buckingham led the king into one disaster after another, including wars with France and Spain. Charles was

also in constant conflict with the Puritans. They, along with other Protestants in England, worried that Charles was not doing enough to support Protestantism.

Within a few short years of becoming king, Charles had alienated many people who might otherwise have supported him, and he was badly in need of money. He felt he had no choice but to try to make parliament agree with him.

What main factors led to the English Civil War?

Civil war breaks families and communities apart. Close friends, neighbours, and even siblings may end up fighting on opposite sides. Civil war uses up the resources of a country, and it creates great hardship and serious economic problems. It can take decades to recover from such a war. No one wants a civil war. How did one happen in 17th-century England?

Setting the Stage for Civil War

The main cause of the English Civil War was Charles I's struggle with parliament. Each side believed that it had the right to more control. Compromise was almost impossible due to four main factors: the growing powers of parliament, money, religion, and the behaviour of the king.

England's Parliament

England's parliament dated from Anglo-Saxon times. Its original purpose was to advise the king, and it had little official power. In 1215, however, nobles used Magna Carta to change parliament's role. Magna Carta stated that the king could not rule simply by his own will—he had to obey the laws of the land, like everyone else. People accused of crimes had the right to trial by jury. Most importantly, the king could not introduce new taxes without the consent of parliament.

Parliament in 17th-century England had two parts, or "houses," the same as today. Both houses had to approve new laws. The House of Lords included bishops and other high officials of the Church of England in addition to the nobility. The House of Commons was made up of wealthy landowners and townspeople. During the time of Charles I, the monarch held the right to call or dismiss a parliament.

This was not democracy as we know it today. Most people in Britain did not have the right to sit in either house of parliament, or even to vote for its members. These rights would take years to win. However, this was a stage of development for parliamentary government.

Members of the English parliament in the 17th century were very aware of their rights and powers—and they were prepared to defend them.

Reading

Set a Purpose

As you read, notice how Charles I attempted to maintain power over parliament.

civil war when two or more groups in a country fight each other for control of that country

WEB LINK

To learn more about the parliament of England, past and present, visit our website.

Thinking IT THROUGH

Summarize What's Important

1. Create a graphic organizer to show how their belief in divine right influenced the actions and behaviour James I and Charles I.

Compare and Contrast

2. Use a Venn diagram to compare the qualities of James I and Charles I.

Analyze Critically

3. **Perspectives** Describe the qualities and characteristics of the king from the point of view of a common person and of a noble, such as the Duke of Buckingham. Include their opinion of the divine right of kings in the response.

Synthesize and Evaluate

4. Write a paragraph to answer the section question: *How did the Stuart kings govern?* Set aside your paragraph to help you answer the Chapter Focus Question at the end of the chapter.