Interpreting the Source

Czar Nicholas II of Russia (1868–1917) was Russia's last emperor. It is said that he was intelligent but not very self-confident. Although Nicholas had a great personal love of the country and its people, he was not the best leader and made mistakes. As a result of poor decisions and protests by Russian citizens and other government officials, Nicholas delivered the following speech as he gave up the position of emperor.

Reader's Dictionary

abdication: to formally give up a powerful position
enslave: to make a slave or servant
gallant: spirited and brave
facilitate: to help something happen
renounce: to give up
transmit: to hand down or give
inviolable: secure or unbreakable

Guided Reading

In this English translation of the abdication speech made by Nicholas II, we recognize his great love of Russia and his desire for Russia to remain a powerful world force.

The Abdication Speech of Czar Nicholas II of Russia, March 2, 1917

In the days of the great struggle against the foreign enemies, who for nearly three years have tried to enslave our fatherland, the Lord God has been pleased to send down on Russia a new heavy trial.

Internal popular disturbances threaten to have a disastrous effect on the future conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honour of our heroic army, the welfare of the people and the whole future of our dear fatherland demand that the war should be brought to a victorious conclusion whatever the cost.

The cruel enemy is making his last efforts, and already the hour approaches when our glorious army together with our gallant allies will crush him. In these decisive days in the life of Russia, We thought it Our duty of conscience to facilitate for Our people the closest union possible and a consolidation of all national forces for the speedy attainment of victory.

In agreement with the Imperial Duma We have thought it well to renounce the Throne of the Russian Empire and to lay down the supreme power. As We do not wish to part from Our beloved son, We transmit the succession to Our brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and give Him Our blessing to mount the Throne of the Russian Empire.

We direct Our brother to conduct the affairs of state in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative bodies on those principles which will be established by them, and on which He will take an inviolable oath.
In the name of Our Dearly beloved homeland, We call on Our faithful sons of the fatherland to fulfill their sacred duty to the fatherland, to obey the Tsar in the heavy moment of national trials, and to help Him, together with the representatives of the people, to guide the Russian Empire on the road to victory, welfare, and glory.

May the Lord God help Russia!


Document-Based Questions

Directions: Use information from the primary source to answer the questions below.

1. Naming In the speech, what word does Nicholas use when he talks about Russia?

2. Identifying Who was Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and what was to be his new position?

3. Explaining Why was Nicholas giving the throne to Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich?

4. Describing After reading this selection, how would you describe Czar Nicholas's feelings about Russia?