Who May Rule?

Trace how the Mandate of Heaven explained a dynasty's rise and fall.

MWH.C.3.1.B "Examine the Dynastic Cycle (Chinese Mandate of Heaven) by explaining its principle that virtuous rulers are bestowed power from a heavenly mandate, yet subject to rebellion if abusive."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline examples of virtuous rule and circle examples of abuse. In the imagined case, write 1, 2, and 3 beside the abuse, the rebellion, and the new claim to rule.

A Mandate That Could Be Lost

1. Around 1046 BCE, the Zhou defeated the Shang and took control of much of northern China. Zhou leaders did not say that victory alone gave them the right to rule. They claimed that Heaven had withdrawn its mandate, or permission to govern, from the last Shang king because he had ruled cruelly. In this political belief, Heaven was a moral authority, not a god who signed a written order. Zhou leaders presented their own rule as a duty to govern with virtue and care for the people. Their claim also warned them: the same mandate could be lost.

2. The Mandate of Heaven was not a permanent gift to one family. A dynasty could keep its claim to rule by governing justly, maintaining order, and responding to people's needs. If rulers became oppressive, people might interpret unrest, famine, or other disasters as signs that Heaven no longer favored the dynasty. Disasters did not prove what Heaven wanted, and a drought alone did not make rebellion just. The idea linked political authority to conduct: a ruler who harmed the people could lose legitimacy, and a successful challenger could claim a new mandate.

3. Imagine a later dynasty whose officials seize grain during a poor harvest and punish villagers who complain. The court still calls its emperor the Son of Heaven, but the title does not guarantee rightful rule. When a rebellion begins, its leaders say that the court's abuses show it has lost the mandate. If they win, they may claim that Heaven has chosen them to restore order and protect the people. Such a claim is a way to justify a transfer of power, not evidence that every rebel group rules wisely. The cycle can begin again if the new rulers become abusive.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Zhou leaders argue that the last Shang king had lost the right to rule, rather than saying victory was enough?

2. What conduct could help a dynasty keep the mandate, and what conduct could put it at risk?

3. In the imagined grain crisis, why might villagers see rebellion as justified despite the emperor's title?

4. Why would winning a rebellion not guarantee that the new rulers would keep the mandate?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence account of a fictional dynasty's rise and possible fall. Show how virtuous rule could support its claim to the mandate, how later abuse could support rebellion, and why new rulers would also need to govern well.

ANSWER KEY

Who May Rule?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline examples of virtuous rule and circle examples of abuse. In the imagined case, write 1, 2, and 3 beside the abuse, the rebellion, and the new claim to rule. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Zhou leaders argue that the last Shang king had lost the right to rule, rather than saying victory was enough?	**They claimed that the king's cruel rule had caused Heaven to withdraw its mandate.**
2	What conduct could help a dynasty keep the mandate, and what conduct could put it at risk?	**Just rule, order, and care for people's needs could support its claim. Oppression or harm to the people could put it at risk.**
3	In the imagined grain crisis, why might villagers see rebellion as justified despite the emperor's title?	**Officials seized needed grain and punished complaints, so villagers might see the court as abusive and no longer worthy of the mandate.**
4	Why would winning a rebellion not guarantee that the new rulers would keep the mandate?	**They would still need to govern justly. If they became abusive, they too could lose their claim to rule.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After ending a civil war, the Lian dynasty repaired roads and protected farmers, so its leaders claimed Heaven had granted them the mandate. Generations later, a Lian ruler forced families to work without pay and jailed people who protested. Rebels argued that this abuse showed the dynasty had lost Heaven's favor. After taking power, the rebels claimed a new mandate to rule. Their claim would depend on whether they governed justly rather than repeating the Lian ruler's abuses.

Accept varied fictional details if the account links authority to virtuous rule, abuse to a possible loss of legitimacy, and rebellion to a new claim. A disaster or military victory alone should not be treated as proof of Heaven's will.