

**SELECTION FROM THE CLASSIC OF ODES:
KING WEN (ODE 235)**

Introduction

The *Classic of Odes* (also known as the “Book of Songs”) was compiled around 600 BCE from an oral tradition going back perhaps as long as four centuries earlier. The *Odes* include court poetry and popular songs and poems. The Ode entitled “King Wen” celebrates the founding king of the Zhou dynasty and the Zhou’s subsequent conquest of the territory of the Shang dynasty in about 1045/40 BCE. The poem refers to a Zhou deity (*tian*, translated here as “Heaven”) and a Shang deity (*di* or *Shangdi*, translated here as “God”).

Selected Document Excerpts with Questions

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*Selection from the Classic of Odes:
King Wen (Ode 235)*

1

King Wen is on high,
Oh, he shines in Heaven!
Zhou is an old people,
but its Mandate is new.
The leaders of Zhou became illustrious,
was not God’s Mandate timely given?
King Wen ascends and descends
on the left and right of God.

4

August was King Wen,
continuously bright and reverent.
Great, indeed, was the Mandate of Heaven.
There were Shang’s grandsons and sons,
Shang’s grandsons and sons.
Was their number not a hundred thousand?

**Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQs) on
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But the High God gave his Mandate,
and they bowed down to Zhou.

7

The Mandate is not easy to keep;
may it not end in your persons.
Display and make bright your good fame,
and consider what Yin had received from Heaven.
The doings of high Heaven
have no sound, no smell.
Make King Wen your pattern,
and all the states will trust in you.

Questions:

1. Whom is the poet speaking to, and why?
2. According to the poet, why were the Zhou able to take over from the Shang as rulers?
3. What implications does the idea of the "Mandate" expressed here have for future rulers?
4. What implications does the idea of the "Mandate" have for future rebels?