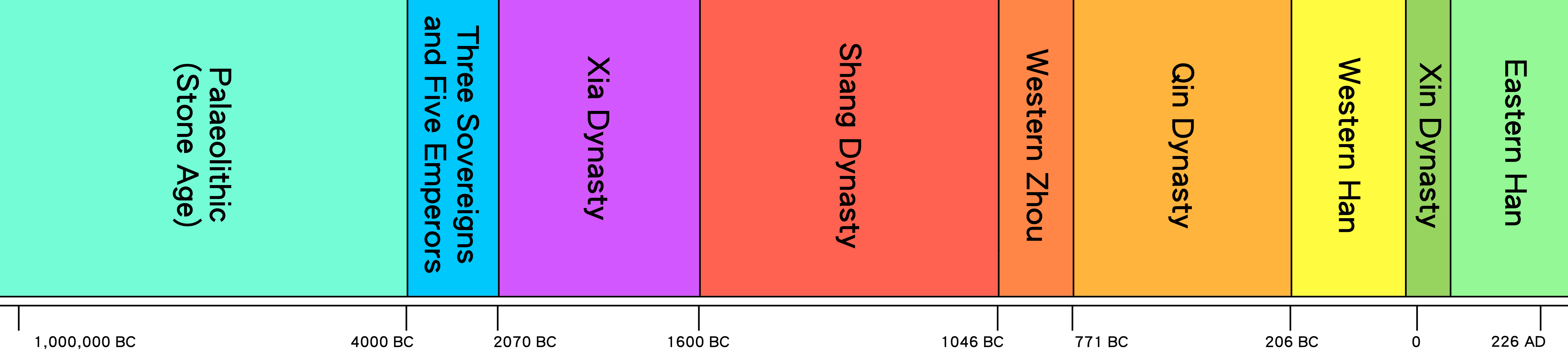


# The Shang Dynasty

Learning Objective:

To find out why the Shang Dynasty ended.





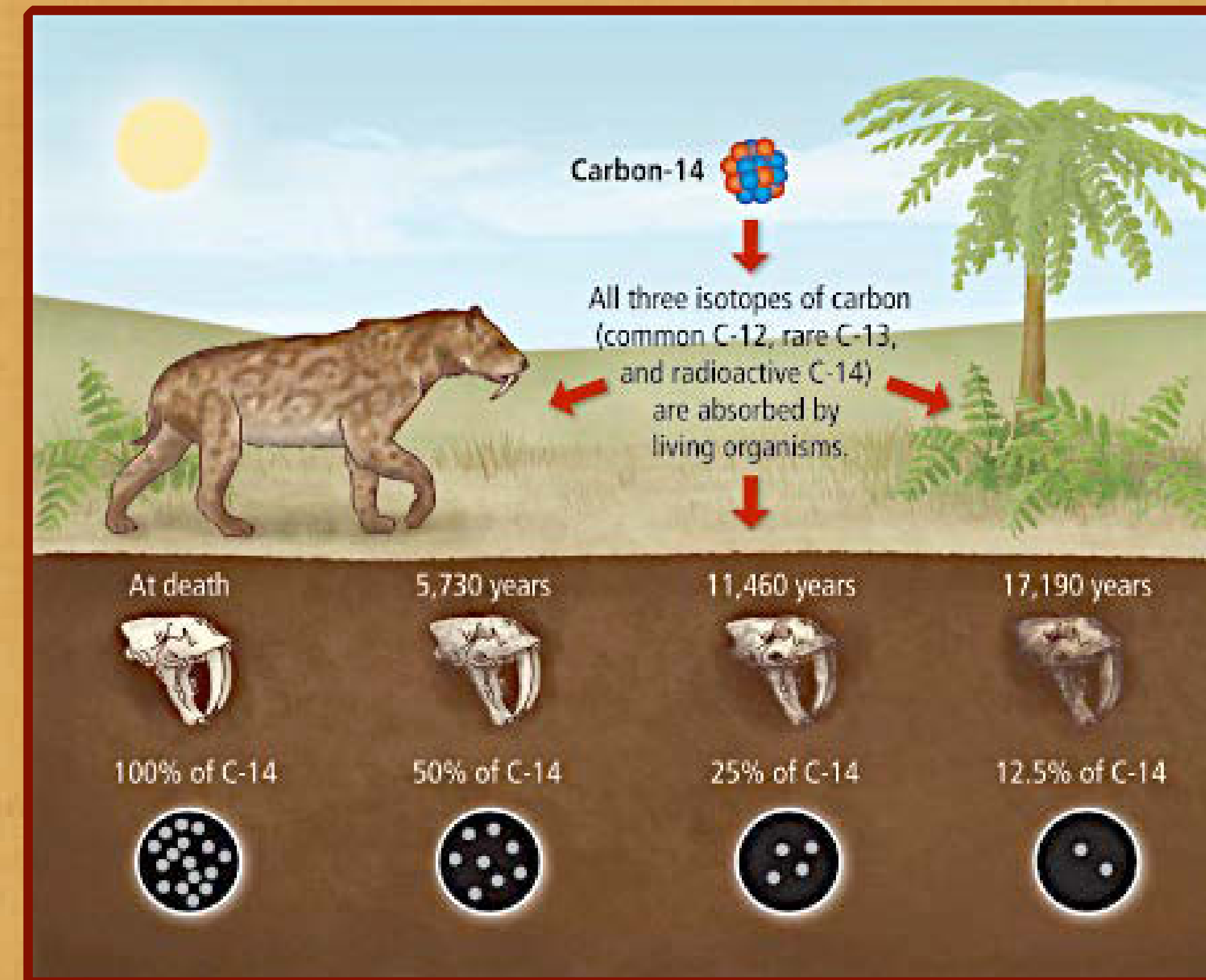
When did the Shang Dynasty end?



What came after the Shang Dynasty?

According to the history books, there were 44 possible end dates for the Shang Dynasty from 1130 BC to 1018 BC.

According to radiocarbon dates from excavations, linked with astronomical observations recorded in the history books, a group of scientists decided the end of the Shang Dynasty was 1046 BC.



This diagram shows how scientists use radiocarbon dating to show how old something is.



What reasons do you think there could be for why one dynasty ends and another begins?

Natural disaster

Food runs out

Disease

The king has no heir

Being conquered

Did you think of these things?



The legend from the history books says that the Zhou Duke Wen's son, Wu, and his ally Jiang Ziya led an army of 45,000 men and 300 chariots across the Yellow River and defeated King Di Xin of Shang at the Battle of Muye. Both sides would have had chariots with horses, as well as foot soldiers.

The Zhou conquerors claimed to overthrow the Shang Dynasty for moral reasons. They said that the Shang king was evil and that heaven no longer wanted him to reign. They blamed the Shang's downfall on its king's excessive drinking, indulgent lifestyle and immoral behaviour.



Di Xin, the last Shang king, is said to have committed suicide after his army was defeated. Legends say that his army and slaves betrayed him by joining the Zhou rebels. After the Shang were defeated, King Wu allowed Di Xins son, Wu Geng, to rule the Shang as a puppet king.



The story of the Shang defeat is recorded in the Shijing, the oldest known collection of Chinese poetry. We are going to read five verses. See if you can understand what each verse is saying!

When king Wen would wive,  
There was the lady in a large State...  
The lady-successor was from Xin,  
Its eldest daughter, who came to marry him.  
She was blessed to give birth to king Wu,  
Who was preserved, and helped, and received also the appointment,  
And in accordance with it smote the great Shang.

What is this verse saying?



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King Wen of the Zhou married a princess from  
Xin and they had a son called Wu who was  
destined to defeat the Shang.



The troops of Yin-shang,  
Were collected like a forest,  
And marshalled in the wilderness of Mu.  
We rose [to the crisis];—  
'God is with you,' [said Shang-fu to the king],  
'Have no doubts in your heart.'



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The Zhou called the Shang Yin. There were lots of Shang soldiers, most of whom were slaves, at the Battle of Mu. Shang-Fu was King Wus priest.

The wilderness of Mu spread out extensive;  
Bright shone the chariots of sandal;  
The teams of bays, black-maned and white-bellied, galloped along;  
The grand-master Shang-Fu,  
Was like an eagle on the wing,  
Assisting king Wu,  
Who at one onset smote the great Shang.  
That morning's encounter was followed by a clear bright [day].

What is this verse saying?



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The Zhou army had chariots pulled by horses. Shang-Fu helped Wu lead the troops to defeat the Shang.



The descendants of the sovereigns of Shang,  
Were in number more than hundreds of thousands;  
But when God gave the command,  
They became subject to Zhou.  
They became subject to Zhou.  
The appointment of Heaven is not constant.  
The officers of Yin, admirable and alert,  
Assist at the libations in [our] capital...



What is this verse saying?

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There were many descendants of the Shang kings but God decided he wanted the Zhou to rule instead of the Shang. Libations are religious ceremonies.

Before Yin lost the multitudes,  
[Its kings] were the assessors for God.  
Look to Yin as a beacon;  
The great appointment is not easily [preserved].  
The appointment is not easily [preserved],  
Do not cause your own extinction.  
Display and make bright your righteousness and name,  
And look at [the fate of] Yin in the light of Heaven.

What is this verse saying?



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[Its kings] were the assessors for God.  
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The poem ends by warning others to remember the fate of the Shang (Yin) and not to cross the Zhou.





Do you think this is how the Shang Dynasty ended?

How accurate do you think this story is? Why?