

# BOOK I

## Discussion Question Helps

① You can find much of this information in the introduction at the beginning of the guide, where I discuss the themes of the work. There are, however, many other insights to share. The reader will notice how the prologue immediately attributes Aeneas' suffering to the anger of the gods: "and a great pounding he took ... at the hands of the heavenly gods"; "How did [Aeneas] violate the will of the queen of the gods?"; "Can there be so much anger in the hearts of the heavenly gods?" It is no secret that the divine beings of classical literature are just as petty and capricious as humans: they hold grudges, they play favorites, they do things for no reason. One should not be shocked that the gods are understood this way. We look outside and see a general order, but are often surprised at the world's irregularities. The great Christian thinker and writer G. K. Chesterton made a similar observation: "The commonest kind of trouble is that [the world] is nearly reasonable, but not quite." If the world, then, is irregular, it is understandable to say that those who rule the world's affairs are equally irregular and unpredictable. Surely, the Christian approaches this question with a different logic, for we don't reason from the bottom up, but from the top down. It's not that the events of this world don't make sense; we just don't have all the information. The secret things belong to the Lord. When things don't make sense, we are taught to have faith in the One who makes sense of everything and who will one day reveal the sense behind all things. For now, though, we are graciously inhibited. Our knees lack the strength to bear such truths. To the Christian, therefore, the irregularities are signs pointing to a greater coherence. God's truth is like a giant: we only see a part of the giant, for the giant is so large that much of him is covered by the clouds.

② Jupiter reveals the history leading to the founding of Rome, which begins with Aeneas. Rome's history begins with Aeneas conquering the

9. Summarize the story of Dido conveyed to Aeneas by the goddess. Answering Aeneas' request to share "what sky this is we find ourselves at last beneath," Venus responds that this land is ruled by queen Dido. Originally from Tyre, Dido fled to Carthage in order to escape her brother, Pygmalion, who killed her husband, Sychaeus, for his wealth. This act was kept a secret from Dido until Sychaeus' ghost revealed the crime to her. Dido then gathered a remnant of faithful men, "driven by savage hatred or lively fear of the Tyrant." Dido and her followers then gathered a great wealth of gold and sailed out for a new home. Now arriving at the place which would be called Carthage, Dido purchased a piece of land large enough to be covered by an animal skin. But Dido would gain more land because the skin was cut into a large strip to cover a large piece of land. (Last paragraph on p. 12 to the middle of p. 13)  
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10. What is Aeneas' reaction when he finds the Spartan woman to be his mother? Aeneas is clearly upset, supposing his mother deceived him when he needed help. "Why do you so often mock your son by taking on these disguises?" Aeneas says, "... You are too cruel." (p. 14, Lns. 400-410)  
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11. What image does Virgil use to describe Carthage as Aeneas sees it? The image is of busy bees. Virgil says, "They were like bees at the beginning of summer, busy in the sunshine all through the flowery meadows, bringing out the young of the race, just come of age ... The hive seethes with activity and the fragrance of honey flavoured with thyme is everywhere." (p. 15, between Lns. 430 and 440)  
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12. What does Aeneas see that both allays his fears and causes him much grief? While exploring the city of Carthage inside the mist cloud, he gazes upon the newly built temple of Juno, which contains elaborate depictions of the Trojan war, seemingly carved into the temple's walls. (pp. 15-16, Lns. 450-460)  
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13. What is Ilioneus' request of queen Dido? How does Dido respond to this request? Ilioneus requests that Dido take mercy on him and his men by letting them take port and restore their ships on her shores, so they can make their way to Italy "with joy in our hearts." Dido responds with grace and kindness, saying, "The city which I am founding is yours. Trojan and Tyrian will be as one ..." (p. 19, Lns. 570-580)  
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14. Upon meeting Aeneas, what does Dido do for the Trojans? In admiration for the resolve of Aeneas and his men amidst great trials, Dido makes sacrifices to the gods, likely petitioning them for the Trojans' safe travels. She then prepares a royal banquet for the men in her palace. (p. 21, Lns. 630-650)  
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fierce tribes of Italy, which we will see in the later books. He will then establish his people for three more years until his son Ascanius will move the people to the city of Alba Longa (a city near where Rome would stand). Ascanius will then rule for thirty years, but the people will remain for three hundred years until the birth of Romulus and Remus. Referring to Romulus, then, "The walls he builds will be the walls of Mars and he shall give his own name to his people, the Romans." On these people, Jupiter adds, "I impose no limits of time or place. I have given them an empire that will know no end." Rome, thus, is destined to rule. Ruling does not come easy, though. Rule comes through war and struggle, innovation and perseverance. And these things are what define the Roman people. But how is Aeneas the "father"

15. What plot does Venus devise as Dido and the Trojans banquet together? Why does she do this? She sends Cupid in the form of Ascanius to “inflamm[e] the heart of the queen, driving her to madness by the gifts and wounding the fire of passion in her bones.” She does this because she feared “the double-tongued people of Tyre,” and the possibility of Juno’s hospitality keeping Aeneas in Carthage instead of fulfilling his fate as founder of the people of Rome. The text also suggests that Venus’ hatred for Dido motivated her actions as well. (pp. 21-22, Lns. 650-680)
16. Now caught in a stupor of love, what does Dido request of Aeneas? Falling over herself in infatuation for Aeneas, Dido requests to hear of his journeys that led him to Carthage, “the sufferings of your people and your own wanderings.” This request provides a springboard into Book II. (p. 24, Lns. 750 ff.)
17. How long have the Trojans been at sea since the fall of Troy? Within Dido’s request, we read, “for this is now the seventh summer that has carried you ...”—about seven years. (p. 24, Lns. 750 ff.)

**Quotations:** Read over the quotes below carefully. Make sure you can identify the context of each quote.

*\*I sing of arms and of the man, fated to be an exile, who long since left the land of Troy and came to Italy to the shores of Lavinium; and a great pounding he took by land and sea at the hands of the heavenly gods because of the fierce and unforgetting anger of Juno. Great too were his sufferings in war before he could found his city and carry his gods into Latium. This was the beginning of the Latin race, the Alban fathers and the high walls of Rome. Tell me, Muse, the causes of her anger. How did he violate the will of the Queen of the Gods? What was his offence? Why did she drive a man famous for his piety to such endless hardships and such suffering? Can there be so much anger in the hearts of the heavenly gods? - Virgil’s poetic summary of the work and invocation of the Muse (p. 3, Lns. 1-11)*

*“My friends, this is not the first trouble we have known. We have suffered worse before, and this too will pass. God will see to it. ... So summon up your courage once again. This is no time for gloom or fear. The day will come, perhaps, when it will give you pleasure to remember even this. Whatever chance may bring, however many hardships we suffer, we are making for Latium, where the Fates show us our place of rest. There it is the will of God that the kingdom of Troy shall rise again. Your task is to endure and save yourselves for better days.” These were his words, but he was sick with all his cares. He showed them the face of hope and kept his misery deep in his heart. - Aeneas encouraging his men, and Virgil commenting on his courage (pp. 8-9, Lns. 200-208)*

**Discussion Questions:** Discuss in class and/or respond in essay form on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What can the reader surmise about the *Aeneid*’s main themes from the first paragraph?
2. According to Jupiter, as he reveals the content of the scroll of the Fates, how is Rome founded? What will the Romans be like? How is Aeneas the “father” of Rome?
3. Describe Aeneas as a leader from the opening book of this epic. What predominant characteristic describes him? Where do we see this characteristic? What does the personality of Aeneas tell us about the main themes and purpose of the work?

of these people? First, literally, he is the founder of the Roman people. He is the leader of the people who would become the Romans. Aeneas, additionally, is the father of the Romans by being himself the prototypical Roman. In Aeneas lies all that the Romans are and wish to be. Aeneas himself is a man of war, struggle, innovation, and perseverance. Therefore, Aeneas is the father of Rome by founding a people who would become like him; like father, like son. (Quotes may be found on pages 10 and 11 in the text.)

③ The *Aeneid* introduces the reader to a weary leader who has learned to persevere. He is not as eloquent and cunning as Odysseus, nor as bellicose and bombastic as Achilles. In fact, the reader encounters a strange paradox in the *Aeneid*: though

Aeneas is the central hero, he possesses a mystique and elusiveness. He is an “off-center” hero. Though the spotlight is on him, we still see shadows. Why do we encounter this mystique? Aeneas never stays long at the center because Aeneas is a hero always moving forward with head and shoulders down, moving through his trials as we move against storm winds. Fame and glory is not as central with Aeneas and the *Aeneid* as it is with Achilles and the *Iliad*. Aeneas does not seek after glory anymore; he is only trying to survive. Glory is now only a hope for the future, a hope which can be ensured through his perseverance. For this reason, the *Aeneid* may be considered the most Christian of the three great epics. Glory is not a present reality, but a future hope that is given after perseverance and suffering. The author of Hebrews conveys a similar point, using the example of Christ, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2) Christians have held true that glory comes after struggle, and it appears that Virgil held the same. Let the Christian, however, not forget the important difference. Because of our hope, Christians may endure struggles with joy. We read in James 1:2, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials

of various kinds.” Christians are a people who have joy as the primary tune in life’s symphony; joy is more fundamental to the Christian than sorrow and struggle. This is not true with Aeneas. Why, then, must Christians struggle? Because God is gracious. Chesterton eloquently and wisely said, “We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We can take our own tears more lightly than we can take the levities of the angels.” To Aeneas, life is tragedy, and comedy is a merciful respite. To the Christian, the paradigm is flipped: life is a great comedy with tragedy as a merciful respite from the daunting weight of heaven’s glory. ■