Rome’s history begins with Aeneas conquering the founding of Rome, which begins with Aeneas. Though, we are graciously inhibited. Our knees lack the secret things belong to the Lord. When things down, it’s not that the events of this world don’t a different logic, for we don’t reason irregular and unpredictable. Surely, the Christian approaches this question with who rule the world’s affairs are equally. It is no secret that the heavenly gods? It is no secret that 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.

Jupiter reveals the history leading to the founding of Rome, which begins with Aeneas. Rome’s history begins with Aeneas conquering the 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 plots does Venus devise as Dido and the Trojans banquet together? Why does she do this? She sends Cupid in the form of Ascanius to “inflame the heart of the queen, driving her to madness by the gifts and windind 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. (p. 21-22, Lns. 630-680)

16. 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.)

17. What can the reader surmise about the main themes and purpose of the work? “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 …” This speech clinches a theme of endurance and hope. (p. 3, Lns. 1-11)

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 Latium; and a great pounding he took by land and sea at the hands of the heavenly gods because of the fierce and unforgiving 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. 1-7)

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 does he possess? 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.