

# Lamentations

## IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

### Welcome

*“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, . . . the Word of God has been approaching you.”*

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Reading the Prophets*—especially the section on Lamentations—will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don’t miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church’s criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



### Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God’s unified plan.



### Read Scripture in light of the Church’s living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you’ll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



### Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,\* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,<sup>†</sup> taking the form of a servant,<sup>‡</sup> being born in the likeness of men.<sup>§</sup> And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.<sup>¶</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,<sup>||</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>|||</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Shinin**  
12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.  
14 Do all th tioning,<sup>15</sup> that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

**2:7 emptied himself:** The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

**2:8 death on a cross:** The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

**2:9 exalted him:** By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

**2:10 every knee should bow:** An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

**2:11 confess:** I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God’s g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

*A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi (1) Some, like “something sel*

## **Prepare**

Read the Introduction to Lamentations, paying particular attention to the *Content and Themes* of the book and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Lamentations to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

## **Pray**

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Lamentations, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

*Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.*

## **Read and Reflect**

Read and reflect on Lamentations as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

## Chapter 1

### *For understanding*

1. **1:1.** As a distraught cry of emotion that appears elsewhere in funeral laments, what other poems in Lamentations does this initial word “How” introduce? In the Greek LXX, what short prescript, not present in the Hebrew text, precedes this opening word? What conditions have greatly reduced Jerusalem’s population? To what is the city likened? As a conquered territory subject to Babylonian rule, what is Judah forced to do?
2. **1:5.** With Babylon as the master and overlord, who is “the tail”? What prophetic insight into the fall of Jerusalem has the poet made? As stated multiple times in the book, who is behind the catastrophe? How is Jerusalem pictured?
3. **Word Study: The Daughter of Zion (1:6).** As a personification of Jerusalem and its people, how often does the expression *bat šyyôn*, which can also be translated “Daughter Zion”, appear in OT poetry? Why are cities oftentimes viewed in the Bible as female figures? How does the significance of the epithet Daughter Zion seem to vary according to the context? Either way, as the object of the Lord’s affection and care, what is Jerusalem sometimes called to do and sometimes brought to endure? In which of these cases does Lamentations address Daughter Zion?
4. **1:12.** To what is “the day” a reference? How did the prophets announce this day? Theologically, of what does every “day of the Lord” throughout history offer a glimpse?

### *For application*

1. **1:1.** Have you ever visited a true ghost town? How does a city with a booming economy suddenly become so depopulated as to consist of abandoned buildings? On a spiritual level, how might the Church, once resembling a boom town in the culture of our country, come to resemble a ghost town?
2. **1:7.** What is the worst calamity or personal disaster you can imagine happening to you? How would it change your relationships with relatives, friends, and neighbors? What questions would it raise for your faith in God’s providential care for you?
3. **1:11.** What are the homeless persons foraging through waste bins and dumpsters looking for? What is your attitude toward them? If you have ever wanted to help them, what have you done about it?
4. **1:12.** How do you think the homeless view you? What would they like you to know about them? How do you think their perception of you might change your view of them?

## Chapter 2

### *For understanding*

1. **2:1.** Of what does this chapter speak? Historically, how is divine anger manifested? Theologically, however, what does it mean that God is eternal and unchanging, and so how is the language of wrath to be understood? According to St. Thomas Aquinas, if God’s anger is not a passion of the soul, what is it? What was the splendor of Israel, now destroyed? What was God’s footstool?
2. **2:9.** What does the poet mean by saying that the law is no more? In the immediate aftermath of Jerusalem’s desolation, what is not given to it?
3. **2:17.** Despite the Lord’s forewarnings of disaster on the nation and its sanctuary, of what is the suffering imposed on Israel *not* a sign? Why does God’s plan of salvation include times of judgment and woe?
4. **2:19.** In ancient Israel, what are the watches? How does one pour out his heart like water? Of what is the lifting up of hands a posture?

### *For application*

1. **2:4–5.** When, in reality, would the Lord behave like an “enemy” to the human soul? Even for one in the state of grace, how can the Lord sometimes come across as indifferent, if not seemingly hostile? What virtues are needed for one experiencing extreme suffering in order to maintain hope?
2. **2:9.** Read the note for this verse. If all the churches in the country were either forbidden to Christians or destroyed, what aspects of worship would be unavailable to them? If all the priests were exiled or killed, what additional means of worship would be denied? Without access to the Eucharist, how would Christian faith survive?

3. **2:13.** This verse is sometimes adapted and applied to Mary at the foot of the Cross. If you had been there with her, how would you have comforted her? Why is it hard to find words to comfort someone in the extremes of grief?
4. **2:18.** The note for this verse refers to “godly grief”. What is that? Has the awareness of your own sin ever led to a grief so deep that tears could not be stopped? Why should you thank the Lord for such an experience?

### Chapter 3

#### *For understanding*

1. **3:2.** What is happening in the kind of darkness the poet is experiencing? Of what is darkness without light also a sign?
2. **3:22–26.** What surges up from the depths of the poet’s personal agony? Despite his feeling that the Lord has subjected him to unusually rough treatment, what has he not relinquished?
3. **3:25.** Who are those who wait for the Lord? According to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, what is the motive for loving God?
4. **3:31–33.** Of what three things is the poet reassured regarding God’s judgments in history? Rather, as signs of God’s love, what is their aim?

#### *For application*

1. **3:2.** Have you ever had experiences of spiritual darkness? If so, how intense were these experiences? What occasioned them? What spiritual tools did you use to deal with them?
2. **3:24.** What does it mean for you to have the Lord as your “portion”? How central is the Lord in your life? How might reminding yourself of his centrality help you in times of spiritual darkness?
3. **3:27.** To what yoke does this verse refer? Why is it good for one to bear that yoke in one’s youth? How does that help one bear the same yoke when one is older and more experienced with suffering?
4. **3:31–33.** According to St. Ignatius’ rules for the discernment of spirits, periods of consolation (the highs) and desolation (the lows) commonly succeed one another. How should one conduct himself during the low periods of desolation? During consolation, how should one prepare for the desolation that will eventually come?

### Chapter 4

#### *For understanding*

1. **4:1.** What gold has grown dim? What are the holy stones that lie scattered? Of what do others read this as a reference?
2. **4:17.** For what does Jerusalem wait in vain during the Babylonian siege? Although initially this appears to be a hopeful prospect, what does Jeremiah learn from the Lord?
3. **4:20.** What is “the breath of our nostrils”? How does the Greek LXX translate it? According to St. Basil of Caesarea, how is it possible to some extent to reach an intelligent understanding of the sublime nature and unapproachable power of the Spirit? Who is the Lord’s anointed? Though the people of Judah rely on him as their life-breath and protection, what happens to him? According to St. Irenaeus, in what way is Christ the Savior, and how is he saving? What does the image of being under the king’s shadow suggest?
4. **4:21.** Where do the Edomites live? Why is Edom a target of the Lord’s judgment? What cup is referred to here?

#### *For application*

1. **4:4.** Whenever you view scenes on news media of children starving, what is your emotional response? What responsibility have you felt for coming to their aid? How have such scenes influenced your prayer life?
2. **4:6.** King David was once given three options as punishment for a particular sin: three years of famine, three months of fleeing from pursuit by enemies, or three days of deadly plague (2 Sam 24:13). What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? If you were in David’s position, which would you choose? As a measure of the benefits one receives from punishment, from which would you learn the most about the gravity of your offense?
3. **4:9.** Which kind of death would you prefer, quick but painful or slow but relatively painless? Again, what are the advantages and disadvantages of each? How prepared are you for either?
4. **4:16.** What honor do Catholics usually accord priests and members of the hierarchy? If a priest with whom you are on friendly terms were accused of sexual misconduct, how would your relationship with him change? How does the disgrace of the guilty affect those who are innocent?

## Chapter 5

### *For understanding*

1. **5:7.** In what place do the victims of the Babylonian conquest stand? What made the Babylonian conquest a catastrophe multiple decades in the making?
2. **5:8.** By saying that “slaves rule over us”, to what does the poet probably refer? How can the Hebrew term translated “officials” in the passage also be translated?
3. **5:16.** In addition to the humiliation of God’s people, what does the community lament?
4. **5:22.** How does the Book of Lamentations end? While faith knows that the Lord’s mercy never runs out, how can intense and prolonged suffering make one feel?

### *For application*

1. **5:4.** In most modern societies, utility companies provide water, fuel, and electricity for a price. Which of them could most people do without? Who in our society is most likely to suffer because of the cost of these necessities? While paying for them is common for most of us, what makes it so burdensome for the author of Lamentations?
2. **5:7.** Read the note for this verse. For what sins of our forebears do we as a nation bear the consequences? From what social ills do we suffer as a result? How can living a committed Christian life ameliorate or even resolve some of these ills?
3. **5:14.** How does music reflect the state of a society? According to the popular music with which you are familiar, what are some of the concerns, problems, and issues of our society? How does popular music deal with personal relationships, especially between the sexes? What sense of optimism does it either reflect or reject?