

# 3 VIOLENCE IMploRED

## This study expands some of the themes of chapter 5

*The psalms of imprecation* are psalms which call upon God to inflict vengeance – usually expressed in violent terms – upon the psalmist’s enemies... We tend not to use them in church, or else we skip over the offending sections... But are these psalms really evil? Is it always inappropriate to say such things to God?

From chapter 5, ‘Violence implored’, pp. 76–77

### Opening question

What are your initial responses to the questions I pose above?

### Case study

Read Psalm 3. What emotions do you think are being expressed in the following sections?

- vv. 1–2
- vv. 3–4
- vv. 5–6
- v. 7
- v. 8

How well do you feel that this mirrors the sort of conflicted emotions that we experience in times of crisis?

### Digging deeper

This psalm is a helpful one to study because at the top we are given its setting. ‘A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom’ (NIV). Absalom was one of David’s sons, perhaps his favourite. Does this surprise you?

What made David write such a psalm about Absalom? Read 2 Samuel 15:10–16, 30.

Take a few minutes to try to inhabit the story. Imagine what emotions David might have been feeling as he left Jerusalem that day. Are any of these feelings invalid? Do any of them shock God?

Does this change the way you read verse 7 of the psalm?

It is also helpful to consider the metaphors being used. Here are some other places where a wicked person’s teeth are described: Job 29:17; Psalm 57:4; Proverbs 30:14. What do you think ‘breaking the teeth of the wicked’ implies?

I would suggest that the prayer to ‘break the teeth’ is not the equivalent of a voodoo curse to cause toothache, but rather a specific request that the weapons of the enemy be ineffective.

Finally, we can glean some more insight into the motivations that do and do not lie behind the psalm by reading of David’s response to Absalom’s death. Read 2 Samuel 18:5, 24–33.

Can you reconcile the psalm with David's reaction?

**For further study**

Is a prayer like Psalm 3 inconsistent with loving one's enemies? Why or why not?

On pages 83–85 of the book I suggest some ways that we can use the psalms of imprecation today. Do you find these helpful? For what situations in the news today might they be appropriate?