

Daily Reflections



Center for Spiritual Development

JOB AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD

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An Excerpt from Today's First Reading

Why did I not perish at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Or why was I not buried away like an untimely birth, like babes that have never seen the light? Wherefore did the knees receive me? Or why did I suck at the breasts? For then I should have lain down and been tranquil. Why is light given to the toilers, and life to the bitter in spirit? They wait for death and it comes not; they search for it rather than for hidden treasures, rejoice in it exultingly, and are glad when they reach the grave: Those whose path is hidden from them, and whom God has hemmed in!

JOB 3:11-13, 20-23

Reflection

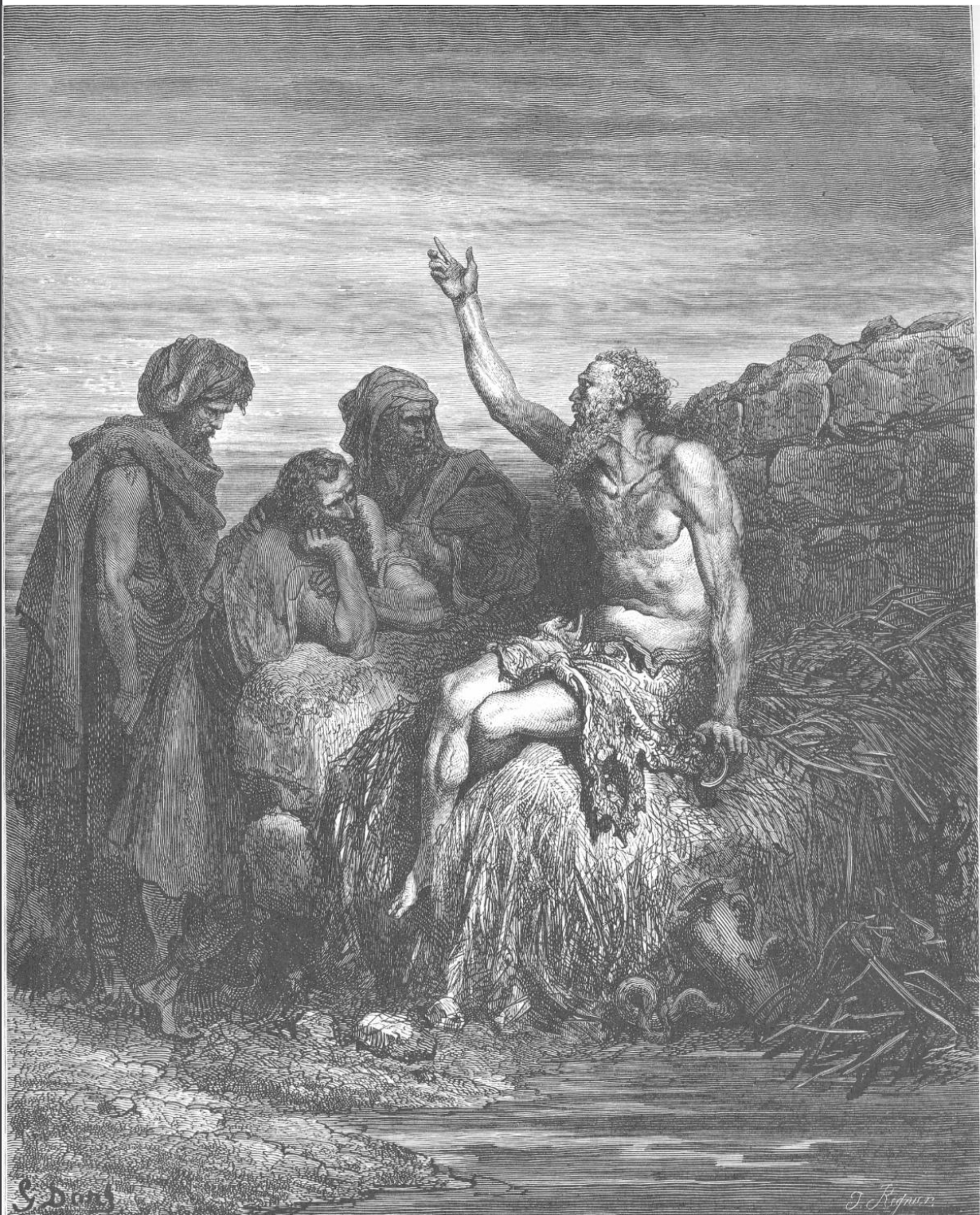
There are few stories in the Old Testament better known than that of Job. He is a man gifted in every dimension of his life, with wealth, property, children and

family, etc., and considers himself to be truly blessed by God. Then, in what seems like a personal cataclysm of disaster, in short order he loses all that constituted his 'wealth': possessions, family, and even physical well-being. This is the reality of many in the world throughout history—a seemingly perfect life ripped away by circumstances, without reason or justification. This is the perennial conundrum for humanity—what we feel is ours by right or luck can be snatched away, and we have no recompense or consolation. Then, like Job, we must discover anew the true roots of our identity and our worth.

In Job's story, the tragedy is precipitated by *Satan*, who, in Hebrew tradition, is not the horns-and-pitchfork demon of our mythology, but, rather, the great adversary of God, who seeks to undermine the divine initiative in creation. He argues that Job's devotion and fidelity are fueled by the profusion of benefits showered on him by God. He receives permission to torment Job, but not to the point of death. When he stands bereft, Job initially continues to praise God for the life of plenty he had known. But, as so many of us might, he begins to question why God suddenly punished him so gravely, seemingly without cause. Surrender turns to anguish and resentment. Lengthy dialogue ensues with friends and colleagues, who attempt to discern how Job had sinned so as to bring down such destruction, but this brings no moral solution.

Elihu, a young acquaintance of Job, turns from the theological rationales of his elders, and brings Job up short, as he admonishes him about the foolishness of presuming to judge God's actions, as if from a superior vantage point. God then speaks out of the midst of a storm, chastising him with the words: "Were you there, when I laid the foundations of the world?" (38:4) Job crashes back to earth, recognizing his futile arrogance in the face of the divine, finally professing, "I repent in dust and ashes." (42:6) With this final surrender, Job frees himself to receive God's new abundance for him, without pretext or presumption. All is gift—in every time and place.

Each of us, in our walk of maturing in Spirit, and flourishing in faithful trust, has experienced some form of this conversion narrative. We may receive the fruitfulness of God's gifts in our lives, perhaps with an indulgent gratitude that is shaded by a sense that we deserve such blessings. Sudden and perhaps tragic losses may lead us to resort to self-victimization, pitying our reality as an undeserved abandonment by the one who provided all we had cherished about living. Then, like Job, in the midst of our emotional turmoil, we are silenced by the stunning awareness that our blessedness is not merely circumstantial, but is rather the fundamental state of our being God's chosen, God's beloved. The fullness of grace is not measured by the qualities of our pleasures, but by the boundless wonder that we could be the family of such an endlessly nurturing Creator.



Job Speaks with His Friends by Gustave Doré
Via Wikimedia Commons

For Pondering

- When have you felt yourself to be richly blessed by God in the loving situations in your daily life?
- Have you experienced moments in your life when it seemed that you had been abandoned by the One to whom you had committed your soul?

- How did you re-discover the authentic foundations of your connection, and intimate closeness to, the God who had been present to you all along?
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