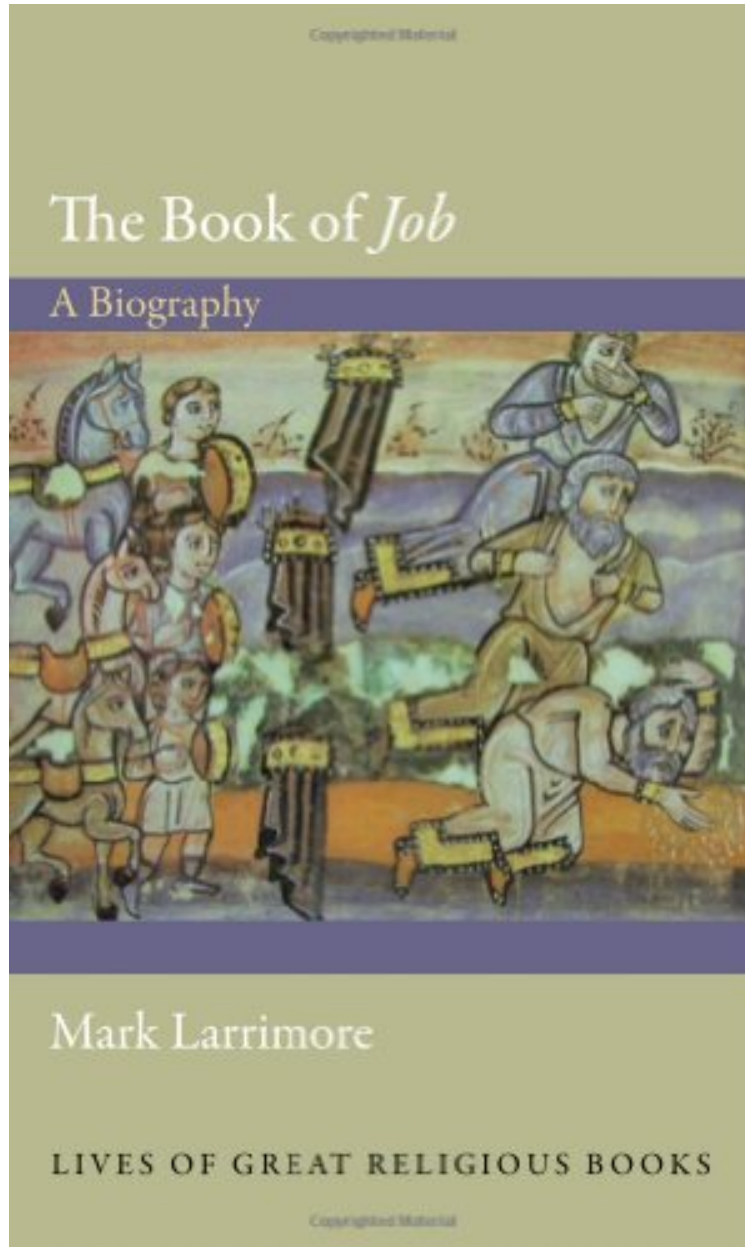


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## The Book of "Job": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books)

*Mark Larrimore*

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**Mark Larrimore : The Book of "Job": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Book of "Job": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The book assumes in-depth knowledge of historical uses and interpretations ...By CarolThe book assumes in-depth knowledge of historical uses and interpretations of The Book of Job. I found it a little difficult but interesting.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Worth the EffortBy Jerry L. MarshallThe chronological approach of the book provides essential context for how we view "Job". The dense but lucid writing is worth the effort.19 of 19 people found the following review helpful. A Common Lesson for Those Who ListenBy Nowhere Tribune"Keeping company with Job, as friend or interpreter, is a worthy activity," says Mark Larrimore. In his *Book of Job: a Biography*, Larrimore traces the history of thought surrounding Job from ancient to modern times. Larrimore's intention is to show why and how we should learn "to listen to every part of the text, and perhaps also to every serious past attempt to enter the argument" of this "unfinalizable" book. Why does Larrimore call Job "unfinalizable?" Because, as even scholars admit, it is difficult, having "more puzzles than any other book of the Bible." Larrimore shows that the dialogue and narrative recorded in Job, if taken out of context, can be used to support any theology or idea: "Job legitimated critics of religion as well as its defenders." But, when taken as a whole, interpreters have more difficulty. "The book of Job would never allow itself to be fit into a larger interpretive claim for long; eventually some part of it always pushed against the proffered reading." That we should approach the text with humility is what I take from this book. "We would do well to assume that all interpreters of Job come to the story as Job's friends do. We are not Job, and we do not know the mind of God or what goes on in his court." And we should approach the application of the text with equal humility. John Calvin believed that the friends of Job were right in what they said about God, but their "mechanical application of general biblical truth to the case of Job is misguided." Even though their doctrine was true, their use of it was evil in that they drove their friend closer to despair. We should learn from them how not to help our friends. Larrimore is thorough in his research and, at least to the lay reader, in his arguments and examples. But he does not exhaust the reader; every example or quote serves a purpose. And while the book has plenty to interest scholars and philosophers, it can be read and enjoyed by anyone with an interest in the subjects of interpretation, God, providence, and the "problem of evil." Though the book of Job is understood in countless ways depending upon one's theology, context, and culture, it reaches through ages and cultures and "speaks to and for the broken...it speaks of hope even in the depths of despair...it offers a shared project for sufferers and witnesses, and an outline of a community of care....It is a call to self-vigilance and attention to the experiences of others, even when they call our fondest beliefs into question."

The Book of Job raises stark questions about the nature and meaning of innocent suffering and the relationship of the human to the divine, yet it is also one of the Bible's most obscure and paradoxical books, one that defies interpretation even today. Mark Larrimore provides a panoramic history of this remarkable book, traversing centuries and traditions to examine how Job's trials and his challenge to God have been used and understood in diverse contexts, from commentary and liturgy to philosophy and art. Larrimore traces Job's obscure origins and his reception and use in the Midrash, burial liturgies, and folklore, and by figures such as Gregory the Great, Maimonides, John Calvin, Immanuel Kant, William Blake, Margarete Susman, and Elie Wiesel. He chronicles the many ways the Book of Job's interpreters have linked it to other biblical texts; to legends, allegory, and negative and positive theologies; as well as to their own individual and collective experiences. Larrimore revives old questions and provides illuminating new contexts for contemporary ones. Was Job a Jew or a gentile? Was his story history or fable? What is meant by the "patience of Job," and does Job exhibit it? Why does God speak yet not engage Job's questions? Offering rare insights into this iconic and enduring book, Larrimore reveals how Job has come to be viewed as the Bible's answer to the problem of evil and the perennial question of why a God who supposedly loves justice permits bad things to happen to good people.

"Is there such a thing as disinterested faith? Will people go on believing in God if they are not rewarded--indeed, if they are unjustly punished? And why should they be faithful to a God who allows the wicked to triumph and the innocent to suffer? Mark Larrimore . . . chronicle[s] the answers given to that riddle by commentators from the midrash--the rabbinical meditations that were first compiled in the third century--down to Elie Wiesel."--Joan Acocella, *New Yorker*"Larrimore gets a lot into a comparatively small space. He examines the retellings of the Job story in the Testament of Job and the Talmud, summarizes Gregory's massively important Christian typology of Job, the *Moralia*, and discusses how medieval writers from Maimonides to Thomas view the book as a philosophical disputation on providence."--Peter J. Leithart, *First Things*"Larrimore is particularly good at helping us understand ancient and medieval readings of Job."--David Wolf, *Prospect*"This is an excellent resource for those interested in digging deeper into biblical sources, the Book of Job itself, or the history of biblical interpretation."--John Jaeger, *Library Journal*"Princeton University's excellent series on the lives--meaning the changing interpretations--of great religious books continues with this study of the knottiest of all Biblical texts, a key work in Western culture's eternal debate over why bad things happen to good people. . . . [Larrimore] is subtle and superbly thorough as he navigates his way not just through Jewish, Christian and secular readings but also the uncertainties about the text and the misconceptions that have grown up around it."--Brian Bethune, *Maclean's Magazine*"Manage[s] to condense a vast

amount of material into [a] handy-sized compendium."--Gareth J. Medway, Magonia Blog"Ever since the tale was told, writers and painters and poets and thinkers have tried to make sense of it. Scholar Mark Larrimore tells that tale--of the rolling interpretations--with such verve in *The Book of Job: A Biography*. It's a theology course, a philosophy course, a cultural history course and a very relevant meditation on life's trials all rolled into one. Incredible rate of ideas per inch."--Tom Ashbrook, WBUR "On Point""The Book of Job:A Biography is highly recommended."--Carole McDonnell, Compulsive Reader"One of Larrimore's most interesting chapters discusses the liturgical use of Job in the medieval Office of the Dead, where quite long excerpts from Job's speeches appear as readings, interspersed with psalms of lamentation. . . . The Book of Job is . . . still a live issue, and certainly appropriate for treatment in a series such as this."--John Barton, Times Literary Supplement"This book helps the readers in their struggle to articulate the meaning of the story while at the same time providing both comfort and provocation as it speaks to and for broken people who have suffered loss. A worthwhile addition to all synagogue and Hebrew School libraries."--Nathan Rosen, Association of Jewish Libraries"This beautifully written and presented book should be compulsory reading for anyone concerned with the irrationality of life, atheist and believer alike. . . . Superb."--Canon Anthony Phillips, Church Times"[A]n excellent summary of the historical and spiritual impact of this most controversial of biblical books."--Charles H. Middleburgh, Charles Middleburgh Blog"This is a fascinating book, ideal for undergraduates, and one that for biblical scholars (Job scholars in particular) ought to be required reading."--Michael S. Moore, Society for Biblical Literature"He perspicuously illuminates the philosophical and theological as well as spiritual backgrounds of the different works. Larrimore's . . . survey delivers insight into the long and sophisticated reception history of the suffering and rebellious Job and the disturbing biblical book carrying his name. This comprehensible presentation is in any case worth reading and a fine piece of writing on the reception history of a biblical book."--Agneth Siquans, Society for Biblical Literature"[A] remarkable book. . . . As captivating an introduction to Job as it is to the Bible's reception history and Western intellectual history. No small triumph for a handsome little book of less than 300 pages."--Davis Hankins, Theology TodayFrom the Back Cover"As eloquent and engaging as it is carefully researched and richly insightful, Larrimore's biography of the Book of Job delves deeply into the staying power of this wonderfully disturbing story. An outstanding book from a gifted scholar and teacher."--Timothy Beal, author of *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book*"Larrimore provides an elegant and insightful survey of the ways that the Book of Job was transmitted and understood in writing, art, and interpretation. Written in a remarkably engaging style, this short book offers a broad view of how Job has been read and used by Jews, Christians, and secularists, from ancient to modern times. There is no more economical way of getting a sophisticated sense of the theological issues at stake in the Book of Job than in reading Larrimore's book."--Edward L. Greenstein, Bar-Ilan University"In the brief compass of this well-researched, well-written, and well-illustrated book, Mark Larrimore has brilliantly captured the most salient aspects of the rich afterlife of the Book of Job, including the interpretations evident in translations and theological and philosophical writings, as well as in the literary, visual, and performing arts. This handsome and accessible volume tells the fascinating story of the reception of the biblical book through the centuries and across cultures."--C. L. Seow, Princeton Theological Seminary"Larrimore gives Job a new lease on life with a deft and sometimes surprising selection of landmarks and defining moments. As with all great biographies, we feel he knows his subjects intimately, though he presents them to us with an admirable lightness of touch."--Yvonne Sherwood, University of Kent"A most useful and enjoyable addition to the Joban literature."--Bruce Zuckerman, author of *Job the Silent*"A superb general survey of the multiple uses of this remarkable book. The very multiplicity of those readings and performative uses, which could make work difficult for conventional biblical scholars, becomes grist for Larrimore's mill, and offers windows on Job's broader impact."--David B. Burrell, author of *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job Has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering*About the AuthorMark Larrimore directs the Religious Studies Program at Eugene Lang College The New School for Liberal Arts. He is the editor of *The Problem of Evil: A Reader* and the coeditor of *The German Invention of Race*.