



★ **The Samaritan Woman's Story: Reconsidering John 4 After #ChurchToo**

Caryn A. Reeder

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A fierce and luminous interpretation of an iconic biblical story, Caryn A. Reeder's book challenges historical views and reimagines the role of women in the church.

The featured story, from the gospel of John, describes a dialogue near a well between Jesus and a Samaritan woman about her people's history and Jesus's role as a savior. Afterward, the woman returns to her village, spreads the word, and helps bring many others to faith.

Reeder notes that, in a gospel where Jesus's conversations often turn into monologues about his identity, the Samaritan woman's story represents an unusually long exchange. Over the centuries, however, theologians and church leaders glossed over the details of the conversation to focus on the woman's marital history, and her need for repentance and forgiveness. Reeder argues that even the most progressive interpretations marginalize the woman as either "a seductive sinner or a victim of abuse."

Marshaling commanding evidence on several fronts, this thought-provoking study suggests that the story of the Samaritan woman is not about a sexually promiscuous sinner receiving forgiveness, but instead about a "knowledgeable, thoughtful" woman who holds her own in a robust theological discussion with Jesus, and who then evangelizes with authority. Arguing that traditional interpretations misconstrue the historical and narrative context, it includes a fascinating review of first-century Roman, Jewish, and Samaritan records describing the complex lives of women within their households, society, politics, and religious lives. Reducing the Samaritan woman to a judgement about her sexuality misses the point and reflects, as this book contends, "the history of the minimization, sexualization, and silencing of women in the church."

Citing the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements, this brilliant, groundbreaking study urges readers to reconsider the Samaritan woman's story, and to elevate and celebrate women of faith.

KRISTEN RABE (March / April 2022)

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