

[Readings](#)

**Focus:** John's encounter stories: this week - Samaritan woman

Like I said last week, the series of encounter stories including Nicodemus, the Samaritan, and the man born blind move from confusion into clarity. The person doesn't understand what Jesus is driving at, but sooner or later they move to connection and insight.

I really, really like the story of the unnamed Samaritan woman. The story paints an image of radical, transformational acceptance. It is a story of new life and new beginnings. Jesus walks through cultural boundaries to have a personal conversation with the woman at the well and Jesus has zero problem breaking cultural conventions. He did this because he knew her life, her fully expressed life, depended on it. During the sermon, I want to accomplish several things.

- Connect this one story all the way back to the book of Genesis and also to Jacob's well. There will be two short video clips during the sermon (both about 90 seconds long)
- Invite us all to model Jesus through lifting up people we have been conditioned to reject.
- Place Samaria and Samaritan people in historical context (this will be the rest of the sermon notes below).

**Samaritan History** It is so easy to forget why the Samaritans get such a bad rap in the Bible. The only reason the Good Samaritan is called good, is because it is such a shocking idea. Nothing good can come from Samaria, the wisdom of the day concludes. So, Jesus talking to a woman alone by Jacob's well is meant to be doubly shocking because she is "one of those" degraded, debased Samaritans.

**A Brief History of the Samaritans (and Jews)** extended citation

<https://margmowczko.com/a-brief-history-of-the-samaritans/>

*The only things I have changed from this link above were that I removed scripture citations, shortened some sections, and changed the British spelling of words to their American counterpart.*

**The Fall of Israel** The northern kingdom of Israel was overpowered by the Assyrians in around 724 BCE. Many of the Israelites who had survived the attack were taken to foreign lands where they were assimilated into the native populations. These northern tribes are referred to as the "lost tribes of Israel".

The Assyrians sent five eastern tribes to live in Northern Israel. These five tribes brought with them their own foreign religions and customs. The

tribes were sent with the purpose of diminishing the Israelite identity and culture. The eastern foreigners intermarried with the remaining, much depleted Israelite population. This was the beginning of the Samaritans. The Assyrian Empire fell to the Egyptians in 612 BCE. The Egyptians were subsequently defeated by the Babylonians, and Samaria became a minor capital city of the Babylonian empire from 605 to 562 BCE.

***The Fall of Judah*** In 586 BCE, the southern kingdom of Judah was also conquered by the Babylonians. Many Jewish people were exiled from their homeland and taken captive into Babylon for seventy years. The Jewish population was taken in several stages to Babylon. It seems that only the poorest, sickest, and least skilled were ultimately left behind. These remaining people intermarried with their northern neighbors.

***The Returning Jews*** While some Jewish people lamented their captivity in a foreign land and longed to return to Judah, others became established in their new communities. When the Persian King Cyrus allowed the Jewish people to return seventy years later, only the most devout returned to Jerusalem with the purpose of rebuilding the city and its temple.

The returning Jews were keen to rebuild the Jerusalem temple so that they could worship God in the way he had prescribed. The Samaritans offered to help the Jewish people to rebuild the temple, but this offer was scornfully rejected.

The Jews of the post-exilic period were also zealous for the scriptures. Scribes copied them, and synagogues and schools were established to teach from them. This real repentance over past idolatry, combined with their fervor for scripture, would result in sometimes over-scrupulous interpretations of scripture and detailed religious observances by various Jewish sects such as the Pharisees and the Qumran community.

***The Samaritans*** Meanwhile, the Samaritans had developed their own version of Judaism. The Samaritans still believed in the God of Israel, but they worshiped at Mount Gerizim (instead of Jerusalem) with their own adapted worship practices. This caused tension and hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans. Most first-century Jews regarded the Samaritans as ignorant, superstitious, and outside of God's favor and mercy.

I hope you end up cherishing the story of the woman of Samaria as I do. It is clearly about love and acceptance, but it is also rooted in so much history and metaphorical power too!

**Todd**