

### ***The Passion of Maryam***

Loren Woodson

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Reviewed by Olivera Baumgartner-Jackson for Reader Views (3/07)

Loren Woodson's "The Passion of Maryam" is not an easy book. I am not saying this in a derogatory way. It is not an easy book in several ways; first is the subject – Woodson deals with the life of Mary, mother of Jesus – or Maryam and Yeshua, as they are referred to in the book. While the gospels revealed a tiny art of her life and her story, Woodson tries to make us reconsider her entire story – or her story as he reconstructed it. It is not an easy story or a happy one.

Second is the language. While undoubtedly beautiful and probably suitable for the period described in the book, I found it sometimes hard to follow. It was impossible to finish this book quickly – at most I managed to read a couple of dozen pages a day. The inclusion of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic words slowed down my reading even further. While there is a glossary included at the end of the book it still takes time to check the words again and again to insure one is reading them correctly. The writing style is elaborate and sometimes slightly convoluted. "While she had not retched her already empty belly, there was utterly no mortal way Maryam could tolerate looking at her son without going into paroxysms of shrieking and sobbing. And in fully encountering the miserable form of her firstborn before her, the deepest, most jagged shards of grief about the rape were being exclaimed, some having lain loculated I her soul. In spewing such renewed pain, as much as she wanted to disappear, melt into the hard limestone beneath her, she could not leave, she was absolutely clear about that."

It is also hard to cast aside the teachings one has been lead to believe one's entire life. Woodson's rendition of Mary's story is plausible and very intriguing, yet quite far from what I was taught. While I am not dismissing it, I'll probably need to read the book again and reflect on it some more.

If you are looking for a quick, easy and amusing read – stay clear of Loren Woodson's "The Passion of Maryam." It is none of these. But if you are willing to open your mind to some new ideas and do some serious reading, by all means invest in this book. It is one of those that one needs to be read more than once.