

This book discusses the Synoptic Gospels within their first century historical context, and in relation to the religious organization founded by Prophet William Saunders Crowdy.

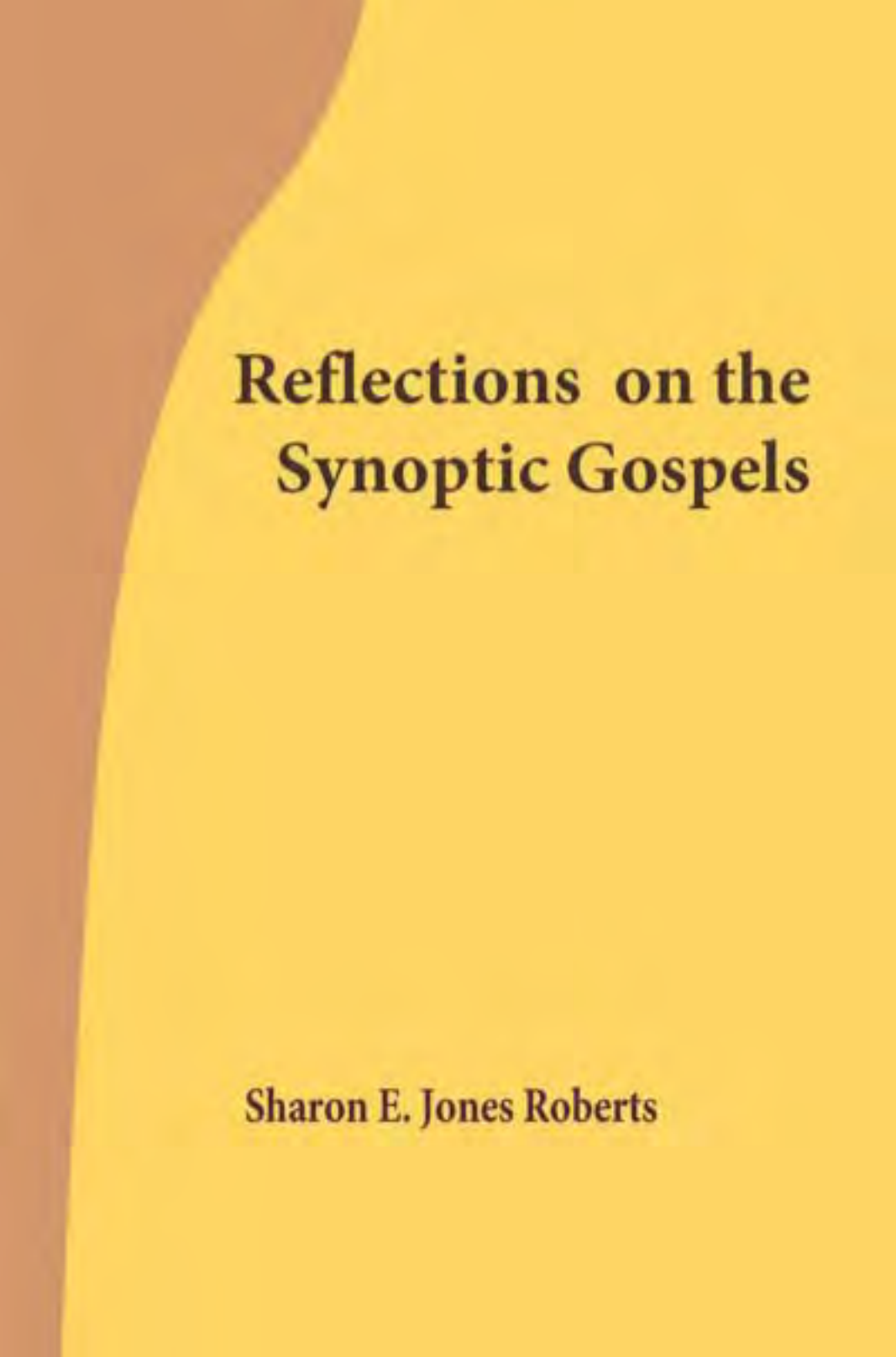
Reflections on the Synoptic Gospels

by Sharon E. Jones Roberts

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Sharon E. Jones Roberts

Lovingly dedicated to Prophet William Saunders Crowdy

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Preface

The information in this publication was used to facilitate a course on the Synoptic Gospels for ministerial recruits and recently ordained ministers. For that privilege and this, I give thanks, praise, and all glory to God. The purpose of the course was to introduce the participants to the Synoptic Gospels as first century literary and historical writings. The course lectures largely were derived from Bart Ehrman's New Testament textbooks: *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* and *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*. The course was offered by the William H. Plummer Seminary of Church of God and Saints of Christ, Temple Beth El, Suffolk, Va, International Headquarters. Nevertheless, the material and views presented in these pages do not represent the official doctrine or theology of the seminary or the religious organization.

Introduction

Even though the Christian religion did not exist when the texts of the New Testament were written, New Testament scholars identify the authors of the New Testament writings as early Christians. At the same time, they generally acknowledge that the New Testament authors and the communities for whom they composed their writings were actually first century Jews. Scholars often state this nonchalantly without emphases or elaboration. One scholar who does expound on this point is Julie Galambush in her book, *The Reluctant Parting: How the New Testament Jewish Writers Created A Christian Book*.¹ That the Synoptic Gospels and other books of the New Testament originated within the historical context of Second Temple Judaism is far from trivial. Indeed, the fact that the New Testament texts *were* written by first century adherents of Second Temple Judaism for their respective first century Jewish communities is the central premise of this work.

The Jewish origin of the New Testament is particularly significant to Church of God and Saints of Christ, Temple Beth El which observes the ancient Israelite tradition of prophetic Judaism. The seven founding principles that Prophet William Saunders Crowdy received in the vision that eventually led to the establishment of the congregation includes scriptures from the Old and New testaments. These seven principles, that we call the Seven Keys, were Divinely revealed to Prophet Crowdy in the literal shape of seven keys. Each key contained a statement and biblical reference. The keys Divinely connected the Judaic tradition of

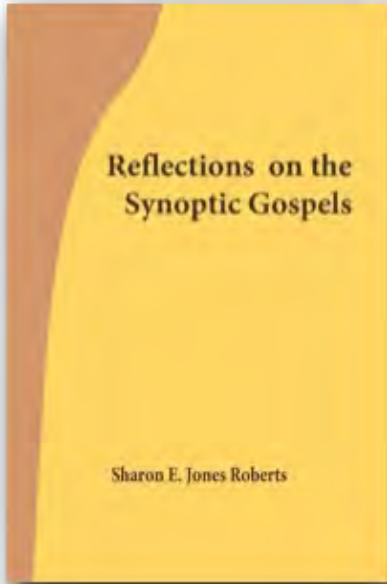
ancient Israel in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) to the Second Temple Judaism in the New Testament. Moreover, the keys are the key to the distinct prophetic Judaism of Church of God and Saints of Christ, Temple Beth El.

The recognition of the New Testament writings as first century Jewish writings also confirms that Prophet Crowdy reestablished a Judaic and not Christian way of life. As reported in *The Truth He Brought: William S. Crowdy a Prophet of God*, during the twelve years that Prophet Crowdy served as the congregation's initial executive leader he did not require the observance of Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter.² Instead, in 1899, the congregation began observing the festival of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread as described in Exodus 12.³ In 1901, the observance of the Israelite New Year based on Exodus 12:2, and in 1904 the Fast of Tebeth found in Zechariah 8:19. During this formative period, Prophet Crowdy also taught the congregation to use the Hebrew names for the months of the year. Hence, it is more than fitting for his corporate and theological descendants to seek to understand the New Testament writings in their original historical context of Second Temple first century Judaism before the texts were appropriated and interpreted by Christian theologians of later centuries.

We began this endeavor with a brief explanation of how the New Testament came to exist. We then discussed the historical contexts of

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Second Temple Judaism and the Greco- Roman world, before examining the main themes and features of each Synoptic Gospel.



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