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The Role of the Birkath Haminim *in Early Jewish-Christian Relations: A Reexamination of the Evidence*

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The publication of the Genizah version of the Birkath Haminim *a century ago ignited renewed interest in the impact of this Jewish "blessing" on early Jewish-Christian relations. Several scholars have seen in this text evidence for an early and decisive event in the separation of Jews and Christians. Recent scholarship, however, has retreated from this conclusion, questioning the impact of the benediction. A reexamination of the evidence will help shed some light on this debate.*

Key Words: Jewish-Christian relations, Birkath Haminim, minim, *Nazoreans, curse,* Shemoneh Esreh, *Eighteen Benedictions*

> And for apostates let there be no hope; and may the insolent kingdom be quickly uprooted, in our days. And may the *notsrim* and the *minim* perish quickly; and may they be erased from the Book of Life and may they not be inscribed with the righteous. Blessed art thou, Lord, who humblest the insolent. (Palestinian recension)[1]

A discussion of the state of Jewish-Christian relations between 70 and 150 C.E. is not complete without a careful treatment of the Jewish *Birkath Haminim* (BH) or the "blessing against heretics." Evidence of the Jewish attitude toward Christians during this period is meager and difficult to interpret. Much of the evidence, in fact, comes from beyond this time period and requires a certain amount of conjecture, using Christian sources as a confirming backdrop. The existence of the BH, the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions (*Shemoneh Esreh*) of the Jewish *Tefillah*[2] recited three times

1. This text is taken from Peter van der Horst, "The Birkat Ha-minim in Recent Research," in *Hellenism-Judaism-Christianity: Essays on Their Interaction* (CBET 8; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 99. The original Hebrew text was first published by Solomon Schechter, "Genizah Specimens," *JQR* 1 (1898): 657.

2. For a history of the *Tefillah* (or *Amidah*) and its canonization, see Solomon Zeitlin, "The Tefillah, the Shemoneh Esreh: An Historical Study of the First Canonization of the Hebrew Liturgy," *JQR* 54 (1964): 208–49. For a presentation of the various versions of the *Tefillah* and its early compositions, see Louis Finkelstein, "The Development of the Amidah," *JQR* 16 (1925): 1–43, 127–70.

daily by devout Jews,[3] is perhaps the most substantial but controversial evidence to date that may shed some light on the post-70 Jewish stance toward Christians.

The Babylonian Talmud (*b. Ber.* 28b–29a; cf. *y. Ber.* 4.3) attributes the origin of this "benediction" on heretics to Samuel the Small who constructed it at Yavneh upon the request of Gamaliel II, who was head of the Academy in Yavneh from 80 to 110 C.E. The BH, therefore, would have been composed sometime during this time period. Most scholars date its composition more narrowly to between 85 and 95 C.E., although there is little firm evidence for this date.[4]

The publication in 1898 by Solomon Schechter of the Cairo Genizah version of the BH (cited above) stimulated renewed discussion of the role of the BH in the separation between Jews and Christians. The Genizah version, believed to be of Palestinian origin, is of particular interest because it incorporates the *notsrim* in its curse against the *minim*. The term *notsrim* has been traditionally understood to be a Jewish designation for Christians, being transliterated from the Greek text as *Nazoreans* (Ναζωραίων, Acts 24:5; cf. *b. Taʿan.* 27b). Whether the term *Nazoreans* incorporates all Christians or merely Jewish Christians is a topic of debate (to be discussed below).

A number of scholars have seen in this Genizah text of the BH Jewish evidence for the early separation of Judaism and Christianity and, more specifically, a cause for this separation.[5] Its Palestinian origin and its apparent antiquity lend credence to the possibility that it is representative of the original BH first constructed at Yavneh. First-century references to synagogue expulsion in the Fourth Gospel (John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2), Justin's mid-second-century references (*Dial.* 16.4; 47.4; 96.2; 137.2; cf. 93.4; 95.4; 133.6) to synagogue cursing and the fourth-century testimony of Jerome (*Comm. Am.* 1.11–12; *Comm. Isa.* 5.18–19; 49.7; 52.4–6) and Epiphanius (*Pan.*

3. *M. Ber.* 3:3. Although exempted from the obligatory recitation of certain prayers (for example, the *Shemaʿ*), women, slaves, and children were required to recite the Eighteen Benedictions along with all Jewish males.

4. S. J. Joubert, "A Bone of Contention in Recent Scholarship: The 'Birkat ha-Minim' and the Separation of Church and Synagogue in the First Century A.D.," *Neot* 27 (1993): 351. Cf. Steven T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984): 43–76; R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (Clifton, NJ: Reference Book, 1965), 125–37. Herford argues for a date shortly after 80 C.E. His conjecture is based on a lengthy discussion of evidence from Jewish sources and tradition that suggests that Samuel the Small was an elderly man near the end of his life when he composed the benediction. Herford argues that there is evidence to suggest that, while Samuel served under Gamaliel II, he was also a contemporary of pre-70 rabbis. Daniel Boyarin ("Justin Martyr Invents Judaism," *CH* 70 [2001]: 431–37) questions whether the BH was formulated under Gamaliel II or even before the end of the second century.

5. See W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 275–76; R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 85–86; J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3rd ed.; NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 62–65; John T. Townsend, "The Gospel of John and the Jews: The Story of a Religious Divorce," in *AntiSemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (ed. Alan T. Davies; New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 85, esp. n. 89.

29.9.2) all seem to form an unbroken line of evidence for the cursing of Christians since the late first century. This evidence, however, is not without its ambiguity and its critics.

Much of recent scholarship has retreated from the suggestion that the BH represents a watershed in the separation of Jews and Christians and has taken a more critical view of the evidence.[6] The discussion seems to center on one primary question. How concerned was post-70 Judaism with the presence of Christianity, particularly Jewish Christianity? This question, of course, addresses the issue of the original intent of the BH. Was the BH formulated with Christians primarily in view? The Genizah version might imply this to be the case, because the presence of *notsrim* strongly suggests an anti-Christian intent. If the Genizah text represents the original, then this conclusion is nearly certain. However, if one can demonstrate that the Genizah version, though early, is not likely representative of the original Yavnean benediction, then it is doubtful that the BH was primarily anti-Christian.

EARLY CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

Early Christian sources contain the primary evidence for discerning the existence, use, and wording of the BH in the first four centuries C.E. This statement, however, does not intend to imply that this evidence is easy to interpret or leads to any absolute conclusions. The greatest difficulty in determining the original purpose and form of the BH is the lack of evidence either Christian or Jewish. Constructing a composite picture of the BH from the earliest centuries is much like trying to assemble a jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing. It is an impossible task that yields only an obscure image, leaving one's imagination to fill in the gaps.

The best Christian evidence for the use of the BH comes from the fourth- and early-fifth-century testimonies of Epiphanius and Jerome. It is their testimony that provides the earliest and clearest evidence for the regular use of the BH in a form that is likely represented by the Genizah text. Both Epiphanius and Jerome write that the Nazoreans were cursed regularly by the Jews in their synagogues. What is so important about their testimony is its specificity. Both record that the Jews curse the Nazoreans thrice daily in their synagogues (*Comm. Am.* 1.11–12; *Comm. Isa.* 5.18–19; 49.7; 52.4–6; *Pan*. 29.9.2). This seems to be an unmistakable reference to the Eighteen Benedictions and more specifically to a form of the BH containing *notsrim*. Of further import is the testimony of Jerome, who states four times that this curse of the Nazoreans is actually a curse on all Christians. He writes, "Until to-day in their synagogues they blaspheme the christian [*sic*] people under the name Nazoreans" (*Comm. Am.* 1.11–12).[7]

6. For an overview of recent scholarship, see van der Horst, "Birkat Ha-minim in Recent Research," 99–111. Cf. Joubert, "Bone of Contention," 351–63.

7. A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (NovTSup 34; Leiden: Brill, 1973).

Jerome and Epiphanius, therefore, provide a fixed historical point at which it is reasonable to assume that the BH was in regular use and that the form of it likely contained the term *notsrim*, a form perhaps representative of the Genizah text. This evidence suggests, therefore, that the Genizah version of the BH was in existence at least as early as the fourth century. The question still remains, however, as to what evidence exists that might indicate that this version of the BH was in use much earlier or that it represents the original, first-century benediction.

The third-century writings of Origen provide some vague references to Jewish anti-Christian rhetoric but are not much help in determining with any reliability the use and wording of the BH. Origen does state that the Jews curse Christ and blaspheme him in their synagogues (*Hom. Ps. 37* 2.8; *Hom. Jer.* 10.8.1; 19.12.3), but he makes no reference to a regular cursing of Christians during prayer.

Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, which dates to the middle of the second century, provides some more specific evidence. Justin states in several instances that the Jews curse Christians (16.4; 47.4; 93.4; 95.4; 96.2; 108.3; 123.6; 133.6; 137.2; cf. 17.1; 35.8; 117.3) and in three instances specifically states that this is done in the synagogues (16.4; 47.4; 96.2; possibly 137.2). However, there is considerable debate over whether these references demonstrate that Justin was aware of the regular use of the BH and, in particular, that it was used against Christians.

The evidence from Justin is compelling yet ambiguous enough to leave an area of doubt. Scholars have argued that Justin confirms the anti-Christian intention of the BH and, more specifically, that he confirms the possibility that the early form of the BH contained a curse against the *notsrim* or all Christians.[8] Justin certainly does seem to be aware that Jews regularly curse Christians and that this cursing takes place in the synagogue. However, he makes no specific reference, as do Jerome and Epiphanius, to a thrice daily cursing, and he makes no use of the term *Nazoreans*. Furthermore, there is one reference to the cursing of Christians that is particularly puzzling. In *Dial*. 137.2, Justin states, "Agree with us therefore and do not revile the Son of God . . . as the rulers of your synagogues teach you, *after the prayer*" (emphasis mine).[9] Here Justin makes no specific reference to the cursing of Christians but rather to a denigration of the Son of God (that is, Jesus Christ). What is particularly peculiar in relation to the present discussion is his comment that the synagogue rulers teach the Jews to do this *after the prayer*. This remark seems to contradict the understood use of the BH *during* Jewish prayer.

Kimelman makes much of this particular reference in his argument that all of Justin's remarks have no necessary connection to the BH. He argues that, of the nine references in Justin to the cursing of Christians, five make no mention of the synagogue; of the four remaining that do mention

8. For example, Davies, *Sermon on the Mount*, 278–79.

9. A. Lukyn Williams, *Justin Martyr, The Dialogue with Trypho* (London: S.P.C.K., 1930).

the synagogue, only one refers to prayer and the reference is to a moment after the prayer. Because the BH is the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions, it seems illogical to Kimelman that Justin is referring to the BH specifically. He further points out that Justin uses here not *curse* (καταράομαι) or anathematize (καταναθεματίζω) but *scoff* (ἐπισκώψητε ποτε). Kimelman concludes, therefore, that Justin is "clearly inadequate" for proving the existence of a Jewish synagogue prayer that targeted Christians.[10]

Kimelman raises some valid objections to accepting a priori Justin's remarks as clear evidence of the existence of an anti-Christian BH in the second century, but he overstates his case when he pronounces Justin inadequate as evidence for the existence of an anti-Christian prayer.[11] If one discounts Justin's remarks in *Dial*. 137.2, there are still eight remaining references to the cursing of Christians, three of which specifically reference the synagogue. Justin clearly seems to be aware of some kind of regular and intended Jewish practice that he understands to be anti-Christian. While he does not make any mention of a thrice daily cursing or the Nazoreans, his testimony does seem to show an awareness of the cursing of Christians in the synagogue. Even if one accepts Justin's testimony as secondary or even biased, one need not reject it outright as invalid or ahistorical. Given the probable evidence that the BH was constructed at the end of the first century, it is not unreasonable to assume it was in full use by the mid-second century.[12] It is not, however, overstating the case to say that Justin is inadequate for proving the existence of a BH in the form of the Genizah text (that is, containing *notsrim*) or that the original intent of the BH was anti-Christian. Justin's remarks do not necessarily imply that he is aware of a benediction that contains the term *notsrim*, even if he does perceive the benediction as targeting Christians. The BH was targeted at the *minim* (heretics), as the name implies, but Justin's remarks may represent a general perception among Christians of his day that they were among this group.

There is another early Christian text, the testimony of which must be considered in a discussion of the BH, and this is the Gospel of John. The Fourth Gospel, which was likely written in the late first century, makes three references to synagogue expulsion (John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2). J. L. Martyn argues that these texts probably represent a reference to the BH, which was constructed around the same time period. Although many scholars are more cautious about drawing such a clear connection between John

10. Reuven Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. E. P. Sanders with A. I. Baumgarten and Alan Mendelson; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980–81), 2:235–36.

11. Kimelman, ibid., 236.

12. This statement is valid even if one allows for, as is suggested by Horbury, a gradual development of the regular use of the BH and the establishment of its place as part of the twelfth benediction. William Horbury, "The Benediction of the *Minim* and Jewish-Christian Controversy," *JTS* 33 (1982): 46–47.

and the BH,[13] Martyn argues that the "formal nature of the language" in 9:22 and the "remarkable degree of correspondence between the *two* elements" in John 16:2 (expulsion and execution) and Justin (*Dial.* 16.4, 95.4, 110; "1. curse = cast out and 2. kill") suggest a strong possibility that John 9:22 and so forth and the account of the writing of the BH in *b. Ber.* 28b–29a are linked.[14]

It is certainly tempting to see some correspondence between John's remarks and the BH. If the historicity of both the Johannine testimony and the Babylonian Talmud's account of the origin of the BH are reliable, then their relative historical proximity might suggest a connection. There are some difficulties, however, in drawing such a conclusion. At issue is not so much the historicity of these accounts. The Fourth Gospel references may indicate that the Johannine community was dealing with some kind of local Jewish opposition at the end of the first century, which is consistent with the testimony of other NT texts.[15] Kimelman's outright dismissal of the Johannine references as "concocted" to discourage Christians from attending synagogue is unnecessary. His objection that no other Christian writing testifies to a situation of synagogue expulsion is merely an argument from silence.[16]

Kimelman is correct, however, when he states that, even if John were responding to a situation induced by the BH, he is still little help in determining its early form,[17] and one might add, even its existence. The Johannine references make no mention of cursing, prayer, or any other element that might suggest that the BH was at issue. Martyn's contention that John's synagogue expulsion is equal to Justin's cursing is pure supposition. Drawing an unbroken line between expulsion and cursing is simply a leap in the dark, as is drawing the same line between John and Justin. Furthermore, the relative dating of both the Gospel of John and the writing of the BH make any strong connection difficult to assume.

13. Dunn shows a bit more caution than Martyn in his belief that John refers to "something like the BH" even if it was "only a local equivalent." Overman places more distance between John and the BH when he postulates that John 9:22 and so on refer to "an initial stage of banning" but does not agree with J. L. Martyn that there is any formal link with the BH. Kimelman questions even the historicity of John's remarks and sees no connection between John and the BH. James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), 222; J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 54; Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 234–35.

14. Martyn, *History and Theology*, 60 n. 69 (emphasis his). See the full discussion, pp. 56–66.

15. There are a number of NT texts from the latter half of the first century that demonstrate a consistent pattern of primarily intramural conflict between Jews and Christians (1 Thess 2:14–16; 2 Cor 11:24–26; Acts 4:21; 5:40; martyrdom of Stephen, Acts 7; execution of James, Acts 12; 13:49; 14:4–5, 19; 17:5–9, 13; 18:6, 12–17; Rev 2:9; 3:9). Horbury ("Benediction," 51–52), citing Lindars, argues that the Johannine references are consistent with later Jewish prohibitions against conversing with Christians (for example, *t. Qod*. 2.20–24). The comparison, however, seems weak.

16. Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 234–35.

17. Ibid., 235.

Certain preliminary conclusions can now be drawn from the discussion of evidence thus far. The strongest evidence for the existence of a form of the BH as represented in the Genizah version seems to come from Jerome and Epiphanius in the late fourth century. Both refer specifically to the cursing of the Nazoreans three times a day in the Jewish synagogues. This implies that they were aware of a version of the BH that contained a curse against the *notsrim* as well as the *minim*. Although the reliability and veracity of their testimony have been challenged,[18] Jerome and Epiphanius remain the strongest historical anchor for understanding the early use of the BH.

The earlier testimonies of Justin and John are more difficult to interpret. John's remarks, as has been shown, are too ambiguous to be of much help in determining the presence, use, or (even less) the wording of the original BH. Justin's testimony is more to the point but is also ambiguous. He certainly is aware that Christians are being cursed in Jewish synagogues; however, his testimony is not specific enough to draw any reliable conclusions. He does not indicate that the cursing was done thrice daily or that it was done during the prayer. One cannot be absolutely certain that Justin is referring to the BH, although a strong possibility exists. However, he offers little certainty as to the form that may have been in use.

The difficulty with Justin's testimony lies in two main areas. First, there is no clear certainty as to how reliable or objective Justin's comments are, or if he even has the BH in mind. Second, there is the more complicated issue of perception. Does Justin's perception that Christians are being cursed necessarily imply that this was the Jewish perspective? This question, of course, addresses the original intent of the BH. Was the BH formulated or used primarily by Jews to target Christians? Justin's multiple accusations of the cursing of Christians coupled with the apparent antiquity of the Genizah version might suggest that at least by the second century the BH had taken on an anti-Christian tone. It is difficult, however, to draw a one-to-one correspondence. It may be that the Jewish leadership did not intend to aim the BH specifically at Christians but rather at all heretics or heterodoxical movements. The Jewish Christians, however, may have perceived it as directed against them and, thus, Justin adopts a similar view. Justin's response, then, to the BH would be more an issue of perception than a confirmation of its wording or Jewish intent.[19]

18. T. C. G. Thornton particularly challenges Jerome's testimony. See "Christian Understanding of the *Birkath ha-Minim* in the Eastern Roman Empire," *JTS* 38 (1987): 419–31.

19. Katz and de Boer make similar observations. See Katz, "Issues in the Separation," 73–74; Martinus C. de Boer, "The Nazoreans: Living at the Boundary of Judaism and Christianity," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 250–51.

Who Are the *Notsrim*?

The ambiguity of the evidence gleaned from Christian sources forces the discussion to move to other areas in order to find an answer to the question of the BH's role in the Jewish-Christian schism. As has already been indicated, the focus of the debate over the anti-Christian nature of the BH centers on the presence of *notsrim* in the Genizah text. Because *notsrim* has been generally understood as a Jewish designation for Christians, the Genizah text has been seen as anti-Christian. The Genizah version's Palestinian origin and antiquity coupled with Justin's testimony and John's references to synagogue expulsion make it tempting to conclude that the Genizah text represents the original Yavnean benediction and, therefore, that the BH must have been originally anti-Christian. This temptation, however, must be avoided. As has been already shown, a conclusion of this sort based on Justin and John would be tenuous at best.

The discussion, therefore, must look more closely at the terms *notsrim* and *minim* and try to achieve some understanding as to what group or groups these terms refer. Is it correct to assume that *notsrim* is a Jewish designation for all Christians, or did it have a more specialized meaning? Did it maintain a consistent definition over the centuries? What is the likelihood that *notsrim* was an original part of the BH? Who were the *minim*, and did this term include Christians? Finally, the historical situation of post-70 Judaism must be understood before we can discern the original purpose of the BH. Only when these issues are addressed can one draw some tentative conclusions about the role of the BH in the Jewish-Christian schism.

A discussion of the meaning of *notsrim* centers on the question of whether or not this designation referred generally to all Christians or more specifically to Jewish Christians. The best way to identify the Jewish understanding of the term *notsrim* would be, of course, to consider its use in Jewish literature, particularly literature within the time period under consideration. However, herein lies the difficulty. The term *notsrim* does not appear at all in Tannaitic literature and appears only a few times in Amoraic literature. As Kimelman points out, the first mention of the *notsrim* in rabbinic sources is attributed to R. Johanan (*b. Taʿan.* 27b; cf. *b. ʿAbod. Zar.* 6a), who lived in the third century C.E.[20] This is a reference to the Nazorean day or Sabbath.[21] Another possible reference to the *notsrim* is found in *b. Giṭ.* 57a, where the rabbis remark concerning Kefar Sekania of Egypt (מִצְרַיִם). The word מִצְרַיִם here may be a defective writing of נוֹצְרִים. Kefar Sekania would then refer to the town in Galilee with Nazorean associations.[22]

In order to widen the scope of the investigation, one might consider a number of passages in talmudic literature that refer to Jesus the *notsri*

20. Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 238.

21. See Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, 171–73.

22. See Maurice Simon, trans., *Giṭṭin*, in *The Babylonian Talmud* (ed. Isidore Epstein; 35 vols.; London: Soncino, 1936), 263 n. 4.

(*b. ʿAbod. Zar.* 16b; *b. Sanh.* 43a; 107b; *b. Ber.* 17b; *b. Soṭah* 47a), many of which were censored by Christian or Jewish scribes (the latter out of fear of the Christians) but a few of which can be reconstructed.[23] These passages suggest an origin for the name *notsrim* but are little help in determining its scope. Were the *notsrim* just Jewish Christians, or did they include Gentile followers of Jesus? The aforementioned passages in the talmudic literature that contain the term *notsrim* are more to the point but do not provide much clarity either. However, one might speculate that the sages of Yavneh understood the *notsrim* to be Jewish Christians, because these were likely the Christians with whom they had contact in Palestine (for example, *b. ʿAbod. Zar.* 16b–17a; *t. Ḥul.* 2.22–24).[24] Kimelman argues that *b. Taʿan.* 27b is an example of *notsrim* being used as a reference to Jewish Christians. He uses Syriac Christian literary parallels that speak of a group of Jewish Christians who kept a Sunday fast as evidence that R. Johanan, through his ruling, was trying to make a distinction between the Nazoreans and the Jews.[25] Horbury, however, counters by saying that, even if this were true, there are post-talmudic references that indicate *notsrim* refers to Christians in general.[26]

The evidence from Christian literature is not a great deal more helpful. The earliest and only NT reference to the term *Nazarenes* is recorded in Acts 24:5, where the Jewish attorney Tertullus on behalf of Ananias, the high priest, and the Jewish elders accuses Paul of being a "leader of the Nazarene sect" (τῶν Ναζωραίων αἱρέσεως). Here the Nazarenes are referred to as a Jewish sect (αἵρεσις), a term used also of the Pharisees and Sadducees in Acts 5:17 and 15:5. The use of αἵρεσις may suggest that, at this time, the Jews still considered the believers to be a sect within Judaism.[27] Paul, however, in Acts 24:14 does not adopt the title but speaks of himself as being a follower of the 'Way' (τὴν ὁδόν).

The term *Nazoreans* does not appear again in Christian literature until the third-century writings of Tertullian. He writes that the Jews call "us" (that is, Christians) Nazoreans because Jesus was called the Nazarene (*Marc.* 4.8).[28] Tertullian's remark provides some continuity with the earlier

23. Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (StPB 37; Leiden: Brill, 1988), 95.

24. Lawrence Schiffman believes that Christianity was simply seen as another Jewish sect in the first century and that, after 70 C.E., the rabbis had their greatest contact with Palestinian Christianity, which was still mostly Jewish (Lawrence H. Schiffman, "At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* [ed. E. P. Sanders with A. I. Baumgarten and Alan Mendelson; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980–81], 2:147–49).

25. Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 242–43.

26. Horbury, "Benediction," 27–28. Horbury cites Schaeder, who demonstrates that *Nazoreans* became the general term for Christians among the Syrian Christians and was later adopted by the Armenians, Persians, and Arabs. However, Schaeder is careful to point out that *Nazoreans* became restricted to Jewish Christians after the rest of the church adopted Χριστιανοί as their general name.

27. De Boer, "The Nazoreans," 244. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.171; 20.199; *Life* 10; 12; 191.

28. Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*.

testimony of the NT (Acts 24:5; cf. Matt 2:23, Luke 18:37) and is also in keeping with the subsequent testimony of Epiphanius that the early believers were for this same reason called Nazoreans (*Pan.* 29.1.3; 6.2, 5, 7–8).

By the fourth century, *Nazoreans* had become the name of choice for a Palestinian Jewish Christian sect. Epiphanius attempts to trace the origin of both the name and the group but his testimony is convoluted and perhaps secondary.[29] He acknowledges on several occasions that all Christians were at one time called Nazoreans, even citing the aforementioned Acts 24:5 passage; however, the Nazoreans of his day he understands to be a heretical group outside of the church. What is unusual about Epiphanius's testimony is that he seems to acknowledge on the one hand that this group had its origin in the original followers of the Jerusalem apostles (29.5.4). Yet on the other hand he states that the Nazorean "heresy" had a post-70 beginning in Perea, an area near Pella, where they sought safety from the Roman siege of Jerusalem (29.7.7). Epiphanius identifies the Nazoreans as Jews (29.5.4) but states that they believe in Christ (29.7.3, 5). He seems, however, unwilling to accept this group as Christian, even noting that they passed over the name *Christian* for *Nazoreans* (29.7.1). Instead he treats them as a heretical sect similar to the Cerinthians, Merinthians, and Ebionites (29.1.1; 7.6; 30.1.1).

Again, Epiphanius's testimony takes an odd turn. Although he suggests that they are heretical, his own review of their beliefs turns up no unorthodox doctrine except that they still keep the Jewish Law.[30] His description of them suggests that they are merely Jewish Christians rather than a heretical sect. The only doctrinal question he raises concerns their Christology, and he admits he has no firm knowledge of that (29.7.6). Epiphanius's negative treatment of the Nazoreans likely results from two biases on his part, his heresiological agenda, and his general distaste for believers who held to their Jewish past.[31] As Jewish believers, their main difficulty is that they have found no home among either Jews or Gentile Christians. The former rejects them because they proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, and the latter rejects them because they still observe the Mosaic Law (29.7.5).

Epiphanius's younger contemporary, Jerome, also writes about the Nazoreans, but the reliability of his information has also been questioned.[32] It is certain, however, that Jerome, like Epiphanius, spent some

29. Pritz suggests that Apollinaris may have particularly influenced Epiphanius knowledge of the Nazoreans (Pritz, *Nazarene*, 51).

30. As Pritz points out (ibid., 44–45).

31. David Flusser writes that, "from the second century on, it was forbidden to fulfill the commandments of the Law of Moses. . . . Already then the majority of Christians thought that the Jewish way of life was forbidden even to those Jews who had embraced Christianity, an attitude which later became the official position of the Church" (David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988], 617).

32. See Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 237–38; Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 47, 52; Thornton, "Christian Understanding," 419–31.

time in Palestine. Jerome lived for awhile in the vicinity of Beroea, one of the Nazorean towns. It is not impossible that he had some firsthand contact with the group.[33] The evidence that can be gleaned from Jerome's writings concerning the Nazoreans agrees generally with Epiphanius. They are clearly Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. They continue to keep the Jewish Law and for this are rejected by Jerome as well. He writes, "But since they want to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians" (*Epist*. 112.13).[34] They accept the virgin birth, they accept Paul's apostleship, and they use a Semitic Gospel.[35] As with Epiphanius, it seems Jerome's only objection to the Nazoreans is their continued regard for the Jewish Law. He sees this as a grave danger to the church and, like Epiphanius, places them in the same category with Cerinthus and Ebion (*Epist*. 112.13).

Jerome, like Epiphanius, appears to identify the Nazoreans as a Palestinian Jewish-Christian sect outside of mainstream Christianity. However, a closer examination of Jerome's testimony reveals an even greater contradiction than does Epiphanius's testimony. While Jerome's epistle to Augustine, like Epiphanius, identifies the Nazoreans as a Jewish Christian sect, a group he states is cursed by the Pharisees (*Epist*. 112.13; *Pan*. 29.9.2), his comments in his commentaries on Amos and Isaiah are contradictory. He writes in these commentaries on four occasions that the Jews curse the Christians "under the name Nazoreans" (*Comm. Am.* 1.11–12;[36] cf. *Comm. Isa.* 5.18–19; 49.7; 52.4–6). In these passages, Jerome identifies the term *Nazoreans* as a general Jewish designation for all Christians rather than a term limited to a Palestinian Jewish Christian sect. At this point Jerome has parted company with Epiphanius and provides the only Christian evidence of his day for a Jewish anti-Christian curse. The uniqueness and contradictory nature of his testimony may provide good reason to dismiss Jerome's comments as inaccurate or ahistorical. His comments, however, are in line with Tertullian's understanding of the term *Nazoreans* more than a century earlier.

It is difficult to correlate Jerome's contradictory remarks. His testimony to the use and wording of the BH is valuable, but his testimony to its scope leaves grave uncertainties. Thornton and Kimelman have both discounted Jerome's testimony to the scope of the BH due to their appraisal of Jerome's general anti-Jewish bias.[37] Thornton is particularly

33. See the discussion of the evidence in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 47; Pritz, *Nazarene*, 51.

34. Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*.

35. Pritz suggests a Hebrew Gospel as is mentioned by Jerome. Klijn and Reinink suggest an Aramaic or Syriac Gospel. For a summary of all the Nazorean evidence that can be gleaned from Jerome and Epiphanius, see Pritz, *Nazarene*, 70; Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 50.

36. Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*.

37. Thornton, "Christian Understanding," 424–26; Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 237. For Kimelman, Jerome's anti-Jewish bias is only one of two reasons to disregard Jerome's testimony to the scope of the BH. He also cites Jerome's remarks in his

hard on Jerome. Jerome's bias against the Jews and the fact that he is the first and only clear testimony to a thrice daily cursing of Christians in the synagogues suggests to Thornton that Jerome is not telling the truth. Thornton writes, "No other Christian Father who wrote or spoke against the Jews during this period mentions such cursing." He further exclaims, "Jerome hated Jews."[38]

While Thornton's appraisal of Jerome seems unduly harsh, Horbury has offered a possible solution to the apparent contradiction in Jerome's writings.[39] He builds on Schmidtke's argument that neither Jerome nor Epiphanius had firsthand knowledge of the Nazoreans.[40] According to Horbury, Schmidtke argues that both were likely dependent on Apollinarius and that Jerome was dependent to some degree on Epiphanius. Jerome's comments in his epistle to Augustine reflect knowledge gleaned from both Epiphanius and another source or sources.[41] As Schmidtke points out, Jerome has information that Epiphanius does not; he mentions the *Minaeans*. Horbury postulates that Jerome's association of the term *Nazoreans* with both the synagogue and Jewish condemnation indicates that he had some knowledge of a curse on the *minim*. Epiphanius, who knew of a synagogue curse on the Nazoreans, perhaps derived some of his understanding from the converted Jew, Joseph of Tiberias, and other Jews. Horbury then suggests that Jerome and Epiphanius interpreted the names in the curse according to their immediate need. Epiphanius, as a heresiologist and influenced by Joseph, describes this group as a Jewish Christian sect whom the Jews curse. Jerome follows him in his own refutation of Jewish Christian practices, identifying the Nazoreans as a Jewish Christian sect. However, Jerome elsewhere also identifies *Nazoreans* as a name for all Christians, reflecting his other source(s) and in keeping with what he knew from Tertullian and Acts 24:5.

Horbury's source-critical solution may be a viable answer to this difficult problem. It does not seem reasonable completely to discount Jerome's testimony to the Jewish cursing of Christians as being due to anti-Jewish tendencies or mere fabrication. From Justin to Jerome there seems to be a reasonably consistent understanding among the Church Fathers that Christians were being cursed in the synagogues. Tertullian's testimony in the third century to *Nazoreans* as a Jewish name for all Christians lends further support. Without a doubt this combined testimony must be studied critically, but some credit should be given to its historicity.

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epistle to Augustine as evidence that Nazoreans consistently referred to a Jewish Christian group.

38. Thornton, "Christian Understanding," 425.

39. Horbury, "Benediction," 25–26.

40. A. Schmidtke, *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen au den judenschristlichen Evanglien* (TU 37/1; Leipzig, 1911), 64–65, 71–75, 105–8, 249–51; cf. Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 47, 52.

41. Horbury suggests that it was possibly Apollinarius's work on Isaiah, which Jerome specifically mentions (Horbury, "Benediction," 26).

It seems reasonable to assume that the term *Nazoreans* evolved as a Jewish designation for all Christians. While it may have begun as a designation for Jewish Christians, this assumption does not require that it retained this meaning in the second-century western Diaspora. The limited evidence drawn from talmudic literature is inconclusive. While it is true that the rabbis' limited contact with Christianity was likely primarily with Jewish Christians, this does not necessarily imply that the term *Nazoreans* did not attain a wider scope. By the time Jerome was writing his commentaries on Amos and Isaiah, the Christian Roman government had been in power for a century and had created considerable hardship for the Jews. A general curse on Christians may have provided a psychological outlet for the Jews. In addition, the Jewish Patriarch (*nasi*), who became the de facto post-70 leader of Palestine, was given jurisdiction in the fourth century by the Christian Roman emperors of all imperial synagogues.[42] This recognition of his authority began the dominance of rabbinic Judaism throughout the Empire that would not be fully achieved until some centuries later.[43] While it is difficult to say how long it took the rabbis to gain widespread influence over the synagogues, it is not unreasonable to suggest that their increasing influence combined with the political dominance of Christianity brought a confrontation with Christianity on a larger scale and broadened the definition of the Nazoreans.

While one might argue that the term *Nazoreans* attained a meaning (at a minimum by the fourth century) that encompassed all of Christianity, the question still remains as to how early this term found its way into the BH. Is it possible that it was an original part of the BH? This seems an unlikely possibility. There is no firm evidence of the term in the BH until the fourth century, as has been noted in the writings of both Jerome and Epiphanius. Justin's comments in the second century may suggest its presence, but his testimony is too general to draw any specific conclusions. Even if Justin is speaking of the cursing of Christians in the context of the BH, one could only speculate that his comments are being generated by a form of the BH containing Nazoreans and that Nazoreans had by that time become a general designation for all Christians. Speculation of this sort is neither impossible nor improbable, particularly in light of Jerome's comments later, but nevertheless it would be a conjecture based on very little evidence. One might just as easily argue that Justin is merely reacting to a curse on the *minim* that he has perceived refers to Christians.

42. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (LEC; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 222.

43. See ibid., 221; Philip S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (WUNT 66; ed. James D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 21. Alexander sees the triumph of rabbinic Judaism perhaps beginning in the third century in Palestine and then gradually spreading first to Babylonia and then throughout the Dispersion. See Dunn, *Partings*, 232.

Based on this very limited evidence, it is probably safe to conclude that the term *Nazoreans* found its way into the BH certainly by the fourth century and probably not earlier than the second century. It was not likely part of the original curse constructed at Yavneh in the late first century. W. D. Davies' argument that *notsrim* is an integral part of the text is not persuasive.[44] Kimelman offers a sound but simple argument against this conclusion. He remarks that, in all versions of the BH that contain the term *notsrim*, it always precedes *minim*. Therefore, he argues that, if *notsrim* were part of the original text, it would have likely become known as the "*birkath ha-notsrim*."[45] As many scholars have suggested, it is more likely that *notsrim* was added to the BH sometime between the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 C.E.) and the fourth century.[46] The Bar Kokhba revolt seems to have marked a significant downturn in Jewish-Christian relations and, therefore, certainly could be a point after which the BH took a more anti-Christian tone. It is difficult to be any more precise, especially since Justin does not mention *notsrim*, and the term is not present in Tannaitic literature.[47]

Who Are the *Minim*?

The absence of *notsrim* in the original BH does not completely rule out the possibility that the BH had anti-Christian overtones. For example, Lawrence Schiffman believes that even without *notsrim* the benediction was anti-Christian from the start. He argues that the original purpose of the benediction was to prevent the *minim* from being precentors in the synagogue and that this would naturally only affect Jewish Christians.[48] However, if one believes that *notsrim* was not an original part of the text, then it becomes more difficult to argue that the original purpose of the BH was primarily anti-Christian unless, of course, one believes that *minim* is a precise reference to Jewish Christians. The discussion as to the early intent of the BH, therefore, must now turn to the meaning of *minim* in Jewish literature. As a general term for heretics, could *minim* have adopted a more specialized meaning and, in particular, is it a specific reference to Jewish Christians?

Discerning the use of *minim* in rabbinic literature is not as straightforward as one would like. Philip Alexander says that the use of the term may be distinctively rabbinic. It does not appear outside rabbinic literature, which adds to the difficulty in precisely determining its meaning.[49]

44. Davies, *Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 276.

45. Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 233.

46. See Dunn, *Partings*, 222; Horbury, "Benediction," 47–48; Katz, "Issues in the Separation," 72; Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 238–39; Schiffman, "At the Crossroads," 152; Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 183.

47. Katz, "Issues in the Separation," 72.

48. Schiffman, "At the Crossroads," 152.

49. Alexander, "Parting of the Ways," 8–9.

Part of the difficulty also lies in the casual use of *minim* in both Tannaitic and Amoraic literature and the fact that the rabbis never offer a definition of the term. R. T. Herford has done an extensive study of the appearances of the terms *min*, *minim*, and *minuth* in rabbinic literature and draws the guarded conclusion that *minim* is a rabbinic term for Jewish Christians.[50] Indeed, in a number of instances one could argue that *minim* is being used as a reference to Jewish Christianity; however, the danger lies in declaring this the exclusive meaning of the term.

In the Tosefta, for example, there are three references (*t. Yad.* 2.13; *t. Šabb.* 13.5; *t. Ḥul.* 2.20–21) that suggest that the *minim* are Jewish Christians.[51] The first two passages are brief references to the books of the *minim* and are rulings that declare these books unholy[52] and unfit, respectively, to be saved even from the fire. In both passages, a special mention is made of the "Gospels" or the "Evangelists"[53] as works in the same category as the books of the *minim*. Although there is some debate over the interpretation of these passages, they are likely references to the Christian Gospels and perhaps other NT texts.[54]

The most telling of these passages for an identification of the *minim* as Jewish Christians is *t. Ḥul.* 2.20–21, which calls for complete dissociation from and utter disdain for the *minim*, suggesting them to be even worse than the Gentiles. Following this passage are two accounts (*t. Ḥul.* 2.22–24) of encounters with followers of "Jesus son of Pantera," a reference to Jesus of Nazareth. In one of these subsequent accounts, R. Eliezer is arrested "on account of *minut*" (*t. Ḥul.* 2.24). After being exonerated, he is perplexed by the experience, but he is unable to understand the reason for his arrest. One of his students, in an attempt to comfort him, prompts him to recall a casual meeting with Jacob of Kefar Sikhnin in Sepphoris in which he was told "a teaching of *minut* in the name of Jesus ben Pantiri." As a result, R. Eliezer declares that "one should always flee from what is disreputable"

50. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, 380–81.

51. Dunn cites these passages as proof for his conjecture that the *minim* "clearly refer to Jewish Christians." See Dunn, *Partings*, 235–36; Schiffman, "At the Crossroads," 149.

52. Specifically, the books of the *minim* are said not to "defile the hands." Sacred texts defiled the hands due to their sanctity.

53. All quotations from the Tosefta are taken from Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta* (New York: Ktav, 1977–81).

54. There is some controversy over the translation of *gilyonim* as 'Gospels' in *t. Yad.* 2.13, because other meanings can be suggested for the term. For example, in *m. Yad* 3:4 גִּלְיוֹן is clearly used as a reference to the margins of the scroll. W. D. Davies cites Kuhn in rejecting the argument that *gylywn* is a reference to Christian literature but stating that it is, rather, a reference to the margins of the scroll. He believes that the concern at Yavneh was with defining the Jewish canon. Katz also calls for caution when he points out that there is enough variety in the use of this term in other sources to leave a certain amount of ambiguity in its translation. However, he does acknowledge that "'Gospels' is the probable rendering in several passages," including the two cited above. Context is important in determining the use of a term. While the Mishnaic reference does appear to be a reference to the margins of the scroll, the contexts of *t. Yad.* 2.13 and *t. Šabb.* 13.5, particularly the latter, strongly suggest that the Christian Gospels are in view. See Davies, *Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 274; Katz, "Issues in the Separation," 59.

(*t. Ḥul.* 2.24). These passages certainly suggest that Jewish Christians were considered to be *minim*, but what they do not prove is that the *minim* were exclusively Jewish Christians.

Katz argues for a broader definition of *minim*, believing that the term was used for all types of Jewish heretics and, perhaps, as a reference to Gentiles by the end of the second century. He writes, "The terms *min*, *minim*, and *minuth* are undoubtedly used in certain Tannaitic instances to refer to groups other than Jewish (or Gentile) Christians."[55] He cites *y. Sanh.* 10:5 as an example of *minim*'s being used to refer to multiple heresies rather than just Jewish Christianity. Katz's argument agrees with Kimelman's more precise discussion of the identity of the *minim* in Tannaitic literature and in the Amoraic literature of both Palestine and Babylon. Kimelman argues against the assumption that *minim* maintained a consistent meaning throughout Jewish literature. He cites differences between the ways *minim* is used in Palestine and Babylon but argues that Palestinian usage should take precedence. He demonstrates that *min* in Palestinian literature has a more sectarian connotation than in Babylonian literature due to the predominant presence of sectarian Judaism in Palestine. While Kimelman believes that *min* was used to refer to a variety of sects outside rabbinic Judaism (citing *y. Sanh.* 10:6), he does believe that Jewish Christians were clearly included in this group (citing *t. Ḥull.* 2.22–24).[56] Therefore, he concludes from the evidence with regard to the BH that "the Palestinian prayer against the *minim* was aimed at Jewish sectarians among whom Jewish Christians figured prominently."[57]

It seems from a consideration of the evidence that at a minimum Kimelman's conclusion must be accepted. It would be hasty to say without qualification that in rabbinic literature *minim* refers only to Jewish Christians. Even Herford, who wishes to draw this conclusion, must in the end qualify his remarks. He writes,

> I answer the question, then, 'Who were the Minim?' by adopting the common view that they were Jewish Christians, and add only these two qualifications—*first, that the name may occasionally denote other heretics*, but most often refers to Jewish Christians; second, that the Jewish Christians designated by the name Minim held a Christology similar to that of the Epistle to the Hebrews. [emphasis mine][58]

The presence of Christians in the synagogue even as late as the fourth century provides further evidence for a broader understanding of *minim*.[59] The continued fraternization of Jews and Christians, although perhaps to a lesser degree than centuries earlier, might propose that Jewish Chris-

55. Ibid., 72–73.

56. Kimelman, "*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence," 231–32.

57. Ibid., 232.

58. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, 380.

59. John Chrysostom's *Homilies against the Jews* are evidence of an abiding concern with Christians who continued to frequent synagogue worship.

tians did not perceive the benediction as solely directed toward them. This is not to imply, however, that the BH did not have some impact on Jewish-Christian relations. Justin's and Jerome's testimonies certainly suggest otherwise. Although Jewish Christianity may not have been the sole target of the prayer, they likely felt its sting as it was implemented in synagogue worship at the end of the first and into the second centuries. As the centuries passed, its implications began to be felt in the Gentile church, particularly with the addition of the term *notsrim*.

THE PURPOSE OF THE *BIRKATH HAMINIM*

The evidence discussed thus far presents a composite picture of a benediction that did not originally contain the term *notsrim* and that was likely first used against the *minim*, a term that referred to Jewish sects outside the rabbinic movement. Although *minim* must be ruled out as an exclusive term for Jewish Christians, references in rabbinic literature indicate that Jewish Christians were among this group. The rabbis were certainly aware of Jewish Christians and Jewish believers who would not have perceived the BH as a welcoming gesture. Only later did the BH begin to impact Jewish-Christian relations on a broader scale.

What must be avoided here is to overstate anachronistically the historical situation. The traditional view that the first-century benediction was originally directed against Christians is based primarily on two historically unsupportable assumptions. It has been assumed that rabbinic Judaism had a greater influence over post-70 Judaism than it likely had and that post-70 Christianity posed a more serious threat to rabbinic Judaism than was likely the case. The latter assumption might be conversely stated as an assumption that rabbinic Judaism was disproportionately concerned with post-70 Christianity. Given the inadequacies of these assumptions, a consideration of the purpose of the BH must be undertaken within the historical context of post-70 Palestinian Judaism.

Rabbinic Judaism was not de facto the dominant movement in Judaism after 70 C.E. The rabbis did not likely begin to gain widespread control over Judaism until the third century and then perhaps only initially in Palestine.[60] Cohen suggests that the rabbis did not gain ultimate control of all of Judaism until the seventh century. The destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. created a void in what had been formally a very sectarian Judaism.[61] The virtual disappearance of the Sadducees and the Essenes[62] created a political opportunity for the rabbis, but this does not imply that their dominance came without a struggle. Most Jews were probably indifferent to the rabbis and did not see them as an authority. Philip Alexander believes

60. Alexander, "Parting of the Ways," 21. See also the discussion above, p. 337.

61. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 221.

62. Although not likely a major factor, Dunn suggests that the Sadducees and Essenes were still present after 70 C.E. taking into account Josephus' present tense remarks about them. See Dunn, *Partings*, 232.

that the Tannaitic literature shows a struggle with the people of the land that did not dissipate until the third century.[63] At the sectarian level, the Samaritans and Jewish Christians also remained as religious rivals, and the surviving priests likely still felt they were the leaders of the people.[64]

Gamaliel's call for a benediction against the *minim* in the 80s C.E. may have been less an attempt to target Christianity and more an attempt to thrust rabbinic Judaism forward as the only orthodox and legitimate form of Judaism. Alexander proposes that the purpose of the BH was "to establish Rabbinism as orthodoxy within the synagogue."[65] Self-definition necessarily encompasses exclusion.[66] The rabbis wanted to define and unify post-70 Judaism according to their own definition. The BH was a first step in this process, which undoubtedly took centuries to complete.[67] After the destruction of the temple, a unified Judaism became paramount to its survival.[68]

Jewish Christianity, as a surviving rival of rabbinic Judaism, felt the impact of this move toward consolidation and definition. The addition of the BH to the Eighteen Benedictions likely limited their official involvement in synagogue worship. Post-70 Jewish Christianity began to sense itself standing increasingly on the outside of mainstream Judaism due to the rise of rabbinic Judaism. Although Judaism and Christianity were growing apart due to a number of factors, a significant rupture between them may not have come until after the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 C.E.[69] This time period certainly marked the demise of Jewish Christianity in Palestine, with the expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem after the revolt and the ascendancy of the first Gentile leadership within the Palestinian church.[70] The increasing hostility of the Gentile church and its dominance in the fourth century probably resulted in the church's eventually viewing the BH as a direct threat, an attitude that was only encouraged by the Jewish addition of *notsrim* to the text.

Conclusion

Upon examining the available evidence, the discussion must now turn to drawing some conclusions concerning the effect of the BH on the devel-

63. Alexander, "Parting of the Ways," 19–25.

64. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 221, 224–26.

65. Alexander, "Parting of the Ways," 9.

66. Overman makes this point in his discussion of post-70 Judaism. See Overman, *Formative Judaism*, 48–56; cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation" in *Christians among Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg with George W. MacRae; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 308–20. Yarbro Collins makes a similar argument with regard to emerging Christianity.

67. See Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 51; Joubert, "Bone of Contention," 355–56.

68. Schiffman, "At the Crossroads," 147–48.

69. See Dunn, *Partings*, 238; Schiffman, "At the Crossroads," 155–56; Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 183.

70. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 4.5.

oping Jewish-Christian schism between 70 and 150 C.E. The scattered and perplexing nature of the evidence presented makes it impossible to draw any unqualified conclusions. Nevertheless, the preceding discussion recommends the following summary:

- The Genizah version of the BH is likely an early version of the text but not representative of the original benediction first constructed at Yavneh.
- The term *notsrim*, found in the Genizah text, was probably a later addition, the precise dating of which is difficult to surmise. It was added sometime between 135 C.E. and the end of the fourth century.
- Although *notsrim* may have been an early term used to refer to Jewish Christians, it probably eventually came to be a reference to all Christians, as is indicated by Jerome and possibly Justin.
- The original benediction targeted the *minim*, a term used to refer to all sects outside the rabbinic movement. Although Jewish Christians may have figured prominently in this group, they were not the sole target of the curse.
- The benediction's primary purpose was to serve as a rabbinic tool for Jewish unification and self-definition following the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.

In light of these conclusions, it seems that the movement in recent scholarship away from the traditional view that the BH was a watershed event in the early development of the Jewish-Christian schism is a prudent one. The historical situation in post-70 Palestine calls for caution in assessing the influence of rabbinic Judaism and its concern over Jewish Christianity. It seems that the evidence suggests that the BH was more likely a tool for shaping Judaism into a rabbinic image. This broader purpose may at first appear to imply that the BH had little or no impact on the developing Jewish-Christian schism between 70 and 150 C.E. It would, however, be imprudent to move too far in the opposite direction. While the BH may not have been originally constructed as an anti-Christian benediction, its sting was certainly felt by Christians in the synagogue, who were perceived as *minim*. The result was not an immediate rupture between Judaism and Christianity, particularly Jewish Christianity.[71] The impact of the benediction, however, seems to have increased with the passage of time and the addition of *notsrim*, which is perhaps evidenced by the testimonies of Justin and, later, Jerome. One may say, therefore, that the *Birkath Haminim* was certainly *a* factor in the early separation of Judaism and Christianity, but it was not *the* factor. It became one among many factors that contributed to the eventual separation that would establish these two religions as separate for centuries to come.

71. Dunn suggests that Christianity could in some sense still be called Jewish Christianity even into the second century, as may be illustrated by the number of Jewish texts preserved and used by Christians (for example, *Psalms of Solomon*, *Sybilline Oracles*, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*). See Dunn, *Partings*, 234–35.