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The Birkat Ha-Minim and its Relationship to the Johannine Situation in the First Century

Matthew C. Versdahl

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE *BIRKAT HA-MINIM* AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO THE JOHANNINE SITUATION
IN THE FIRST CENTURY

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BY
MATTHEW C. VERSDAHL

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Title: THE *BIRKAT HA-MINIM* AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE
JOHANNINE SITUATION IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Presented by: MATTHEW C. VERSDAHL

Date: April 17, 2006

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.

(Paul Anderson)

(Kent L. Yinger)

To Kate

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Abstract

In the discussion of Christian origins, Judaism, and their relationship to the gospel of John, the *Birkat ha-minim* remains an important element; particularly as it pertains to the occurrence of ἀποσυνάγωγος in John 9:22; 12:42; and 16:2 and John's pejorative presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι. Some have contended that it explains why, in these verses, Jewish followers of Jesus were ostracized from the synagogue which resulted in John's animosity in the use of Ἰουδαῖοι. In other words, they hold that the *Birkat ha-minim* functioned as a means of programmatic expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue in John. Conversely, some have argued that Jewish and Christian relations remained peaceful in the early years of Christianity. In other words, no conflict existed around Jewish Christian participation in the synagogue; the *Birkat ha-minim* had no adverse effect on Jewish-Christian relations in John and certainly did not isolate Jewish Christians in order to force them out of the synagogue—they left on their own volition. In this thesis I argue that the issue warrants a more middle-of-the-road approach. That is, conflict certainly existed between Jewish Christians and their Jewish counterparts surrounding eligibility for participation in synagogue life, but was not necessarily the result of the *Birkat ha-minim* because the expulsion in John was not programmatic. Moreover, synagogue expulsion was not necessarily limited to a single community, more plausibly it occurred sporadically confronting many confessors of Jesus. The *Birkat ha-minim*, then, was a later formalization of these efforts.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Why the *Birkat ha-minim*?

Conflict between the Jews and Jesus and his adherents initiated during the ministry of Jesus. As it developed through the first few centuries of the common era, the conflict culminated in an irreparable schism in which Christianity was no longer identifiable within Judaism—it had become its own entity. Several factors contributed to the separation including (to name a few) anti-Semitism, the development of a distinctively Christian theology, the reaction of Judaism to the destruction of its temple, and the burgeoning importance of synagogue life.

The development of synagogue life most likely played an important role in their separation. Both Judaism and Christianity provide evidence a synagogue conflict. From Judaism one discovers that the development of synagogue liturgy may have contributed to the separation, especially in the development of its *Shemoneh Esreh*, or eighteen benedictions. The twelfth benediction known as the *Birkat ha-minim* suggests a programmatic or systematic expulsion of heretics, most likely including Jewish followers of Jesus.

Likewise, John provides vital information pertaining to a synagogue conflict (John 8:44; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).¹ What caused the synagogue situation recorded in John?

One theory that has gained popularity is the implementation of the *Birkat ha-minim*.² It holds that the gospel reflects a historical conflict with the Jewish synagogues

¹ Irvin J Borowsky, "Foreword," in *Jews and Christians*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 82.

during the second and third generations of Christianity—around the traditional dating for the emergence of the *Birkat ha-minim* as a benediction; hence, a direct relationship is plausible and was at least partially responsible for the break up of Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews. Its proponents argue that this would have occurred during an epoch when Judaism struggled for life following the destruction of its temple and its pivotal cultic institution, not to mention the deterioration of Jewish sectarianism.³ Accordingly, this relationship could have existed no earlier than 70 C.E., therefore, the gospel narrates the situation of generations subsequent to Jesus and would have initiated following the influx of Gentiles into the Church.

Conversely, the other position that has gained popularity is that conflict between Jewish Christians and their Jewish counterparts did not exist. Relations between them in the first century were largely peaceful.⁴

In order for the first theory to be possible, however, the *Birkat ha-minim* must be indicative of the Johannine situation. In other words, John must demonstrate a programmatic expulsion of Jewish followers of Jesus from the synagogue. In my opinion, the synagogue conflict in John does not necessarily demonstrate a direct relationship with the *Birkat ha-minim*. What the Fourth Gospel demonstrates, is the crisis that eventually led to a programmatic expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue in subsequent

² Popularized by J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed., New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

³ For a full discussion on the issue of the significance of the destruction of the Temple see Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 160-162.

⁴ Reuven Kimelman, "The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E. P. Sanders, Jewish and Christian Self-Definition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 226-244.

generations. On the other hand, for the second theory to be possible one must ignore both Jewish and Christian evidence of conflict.

The significance of this thesis is that it demonstrates that the separation of Judaism and Jewish Christianity developed from within its own ranks. In other words, it demonstrates that the initial separation of Judaism and Christianity was an intra-Jewish conflict. Moreover, it establishes the fact that John is writing about events that occurred during Jesus day, and not importing the agenda of a later generation. Therefore, the text is about Jesus and his theology.

Accordingly, if the synagogue situation played a role in John's pejorative presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι it reveals that it emerged from an intra-Jewish conflict, because John narrates a situation that was, for the most part, limited to Jews. I believe misinterpretation of this situation in Johannine history has led to a substantial amount of discrimination against Jews, since it has often been interpreted as justification for anti-Semitic attitudes.⁵ This investigation will argue that the conflict between Johannine Jews (including Jesus) and their Jewish opponents was theological, particularly christological—Jesus equated himself with the Father and he claimed to be the Son of God.⁶

The *Birkat ha-minim* most likely emerged during the development of rabbinic Judaism and a later period in early Christianity; a period that the conflict in John, would

⁵ James D. G. Dunn, "The Question of Anti-Semitism in the New Testament," in *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1991), 177-179.

⁶ Raymond Edward Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 87-91, 93; James D. G. Dunn, "Let John Be John," in *Das Evangelium Und Die Evangelien: Vorträge Vom Tübinger Symposium 1982*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 321; Urban C. Von Wahlde, "Community in Conflict: The History and Social Context of the Johannine Community," *Interpretation* 49 (1995): 385.

have led to. That is, a period where Judaism and Christianity aimed to liquidate heterodoxy in order to survive.⁷ But this does not necessarily warrant that the conflict in John is indicative of the *Birkat ha-minim* and reflects a direct relationship to the benediction. By positing a direct relationship, it becomes necessary that John presents a conflict in the period following the destruction of the temple and limits the conflict to the so-called “Johannine community.”

On the contrary, since the *Birkat ha-minim* emerged during a later period, it does not relegate any conflict between Jewish Christians and their Jewish counterparts in the gospel of John. In other words, it is untenable to argue that synagogue relations between Jews and Christians were peaceful in the first century because John does not demonstrate a direct relationship to the benediction. While the evidence for a synagogue conflict is sparse, there were plenty of reasons for the Jewish religious leaders to have a vendetta towards Jesus and his followers and make every effort to expel them from synagogues. John demonstrates a sporadic and unsystematic effort, several decades later these efforts were formalized in the *Birkat ha-minim*.

In sum, the questions I am dealing with in this thesis are, does the *Birkat ha-minim* provide a viable explanation for the synagogue expulsion in John 9, 12, and 16? And if it doesn't how should one explain this conflict?

Issues Surrounding this Study

Several issues are necessary to establish a direct relationship between the *Birkat ha-minim* and the Johannine situation. First, one must provide extant evidence that suggests a benediction isolated Jewish synagogue participants that confessed Christ; also

⁷ Von Wahlde: 385.

it would have needed enough authority to systematically expel them.⁸ Second, the extant versions of the twelfth benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh* must utilize language inclusive of Jewish Christians.⁹ In proceeding with this investigation I will examine two particular terms found in versions of the benediction, *notsrim* (typically translated Nazarenes) and *minim* (typically translated heretics).¹⁰

In order to demonstrate a direct relationship, one must also establish the date of the benediction and its versions, since only a version around the early to mid-first century could have affected the evidence in John. Internal evidence of the benediction will also be important to establish if a version was contemporaneous to John. This text critical exercise is necessary to determine if the Johannine situation was influenced by the *Birkat ha-minim*, since if the benediction did not include *notsrim* it is possible that a formal means of expulsion from the synagogue had not developed during the period that John describes, since Jewish Christianity had not become a formidable opponent.¹¹

At this point, one must ask that even if evidence suggests that the *Birkat ha-minim* was directed toward Christians or more specifically Jewish Christians, what in John indicates a direct correlation with the benediction. Therefore, I will seek to determine if

⁸ The details of the implications will be discussed in details as I cover the position of Martyn, in chapter 1.

⁹ Ben-zion Binyamin, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Ein Gedi Inscription," *Immanuel* 21 (1987): 72.

¹⁰ Kimelman, 228, 232.

¹¹ For instance, Kimelman, in his article argues that no extant evidence is conclusive to support a direct reference to the Christians, moreover, *notsrim* was not included in the early versions. See also Lawrence Schiffman, "At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E. P. Sanders et al. (London: SCM Press, 1980), 145-150. Here he argues that although *notsrim* was not included in the original version it was added perhaps 50 years after when the schism between Jews and Christians was sealed, but the original included Jewish Christians in its target.

the benediction is a viable explanation for John's record of the synagogue conflict and if it affected his presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι.

The most relevant evidence for connecting the benediction to John is the ἀποσυνάγωγος (put out of the synagogue) passages (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). This word only appears three times in the entire NT (New Testament), all in John's gospel. This word is the most compelling evidence in John for expulsion from the synagogue, but it must be indicative of the *Birkat ha-minim* to determine a direct relationship.

The issue must also be considered in light of recent gospel scholarship, particularly the work of Richard Bauckham and his colleagues who argue that the gospels were not limited to one audience.¹² In the case of the synagogue situation in John, Bauckham argues that synagogue expulsion could not have been limited to the Johannine community.¹³

These scholars also raise the issue of genre. Burridge argues that the nature of gospel genre does not correlate with the notion that the gospels were written about communities, rather they reflect "the author's own interest and understanding of Christ."¹⁴ In light of the proposals of these scholars, it is important to examine the literary elements of the passages in John's gospel that suggest a direct relationship between the benediction and the Johannine situation; this includes genre, purpose, and implied audience.

¹² Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 17.

¹³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴ Richard A. Burridge, "About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 126.

Finally, patristic sources may reflect a situation induced by the implication of the *Birkat ha-minim*. However, the amount of authority these sources hold is limited since they reflect a period following the Johannine situation. The benefit is that it will illustrate how the chasm between Jewish Christians and their Jewish counterparts grew.

What Was the *Birkat ha-minim*?

If one were to imagine a catch phrase for the traditional approach to the origin of the *Birkat ha-minim* “all roads lead to Jamnia” would be the most appropriate. The traditional history relates directly to the reformation of Judaism after 70 C.E. at Jamnia. After the Romans destroyed Judaism’s central component—the temple—it nullified the need for the priesthood whose power resided in the cultic sacrifices, hence the Pharisees rose to power.¹⁵ The reformation took place under Johanan ben Zakkai.¹⁶ His successor, who came to power around 80 C.E., Rabban Gamaliel gathered scholars who survived the war and pressed for an orthodox liturgy in the synagogues in hope of linking it with the temple liturgy.¹⁷ Subsequently, Rabban Gamaliel sanctioned his colleagues to reformulate the twelfth benediction.¹⁸

“Said Rabban Gamaliel to the Sages: Can any one among you frame a benediction relating to the *Minim*?”¹⁹ A certain Samuel the Little responded.

¹⁵ W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, Brown Judaic Studies; No. 186 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989), 256.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Martyn, 59.; Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 269.

¹⁸ Martyn, 59.

¹⁹ Isidore Epstein, *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1960), 57.

Samuel the Lesser arose and composed it. The next year he forgot it and he tried for two or three hours to recall it, and they did not remove him. Why did they not remove him seeing that Rab Judah has said in the name of Rab: If a reader made a mistake in any of the other benedictions they did not remove him, but if in the benediction of the *Minim*, he is removed, because we suspect him of being a *Min*?-Samuel the lesser is different, because he composed it (*Berakoth* 28b).

This *Gemara* records the traditional approach to the origin of the benediction and simultaneously demonstrates its importance. If one is unable to recite it, they were removed. What is interesting is that this is the only benediction that is a disciplinary procedure.

In sum, the *Birkat ha-minim* is the twelfth of eighteen benedictions, in what is known as the *Amidah* or *Tefilah*.²⁰ The details of its precise targets and function is somewhat debated. However, since it functioned in the synagogue it is safe to assume that it at least isolated those it targeted and made them feel unwelcome in the synagogue.²¹ As a result, it would have made participation in the synagogue difficult for those who were “heretics” according to the benediction.

The Position I Take

As I mentioned above, the purpose of this thesis is to determine if the *Birkat ha-minim* demonstrates a direct relationship to John 9, 12, and 16. My position is that it does not. The benediction and these passages do not necessarily demonstrate a causative link. The break between Christianity and Judaism, in regard to the synagogue, was the result of theological differences—particularly christology—and resulted in a rash unsystematic

²⁰ Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 275.

²¹ Schiffman, 151.

effort.²² This debate ultimately led to the separation of Judaism and Christianity. After these initial informal efforts to purge the synagogue, the *Birkat ha-minim* was employed, as Anderson notes, as “formalization” of the Jewish opinion that Jewish adherents to Jesus must be excluded.²³

As I noted above, two major camps of opinions have emerged: first, the *Birkat ha-minim* was indicative of John, therefore, conflict is limited to John’s community and reflects the issues of the second generation of Johannine Christianity; second, since the benediction is not specific to Jewish Christians, and the evidence is limited to John the conflict did not occur. In my opinion, the evidence warrants a more balanced view. The conflict with the synagogue was not necessarily limited to the Johannine tradition; it is possible that it was a condition experienced wherever people encountered Jesus.²⁴

Moreover, it represents issues and struggles existing within many Christian communities that the Fourth Evangelist was familiar with. It represents not the struggle of a single community per se, but the dilemma that Christianity, in different regions faced. In short, I will argue that the *Birkat ha-minim* represents a period following the expulsion from the synagogue and was not a factor in the period of John’s narrative. Nevertheless synagogue conflict was not foreign to John and he probably addressed the issue since it was a challenge Jesus’ followers faced since the time he became a public figure.

²² John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 137.

²³ Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 1st U.S. ed. (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 233.

²⁴ Bauckham, “For Whom Were the Gospels Written?” 23.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The issue of the *Birkat ha-minim* and its relationship to the Johannine situation has produced a plethora of scholarly positions. Chapter 2 will discuss, what I see, as the two primary stances (and their nuances) pertaining to this issue. The first section presents scholars who posit a direct relationship between the benediction and the Johannine situation. The next presents scholars who argue against any direct correlation between the benediction and the gospel. This section also notes the work of Richard Bauckham and his five colleagues on the issue of gospel audiences which may help determine if a direct relationship existed between the benediction and the John.

Part 1: Scholars Arguing for a Direct Relationship Between the Benediction and the Johannine Situation

In 1958 C. K. Barrett, in his celebrated commentary on John, argues that the Fourth Gospel predicts circumstances where Jewish Christians were put out of the synagogue, however, he is somewhat hesitant to place full responsibility on the *Birkat ha-minim*, since the exact date of the benediction is somewhat elusive (9:22; 16:2).¹

Nevertheless, he still believes that the benediction, at some point, initiated exclusion of heretics from participation in the synagogue, including Jewish Christians. His primary issue is with ἀποσυμβάγωγος; he argues that this word indicates no ordinary punishment, but designates excommunication.² He points out a difference between the

¹ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 108.

²Ibid., 299.

punishment, but designates excommunication.² He points out a difference between the normal synagogue punishment and excommunication. Under normal circumstances one was sentenced to a “light informal punishment (*n’zippah*).”³ There were also more severe punishments (*nidduy* and *herem*). The more severe punishment entailed thirty day suspensions from the synagogue as well as restricted contact from Jews except for his wife and children. He argues that these are unlikely reflected in John’s gospel since they do not denote synagogue expulsion.⁴ Notwithstanding, his understanding that the evidence for the dating of the benediction is inconclusive, he believes that the benediction parallels closer to the Johannine situation than other known punishments suggests.

The purpose of the benediction, Barrett argues, was to isolate Jewish Christians with the intention of excluding them from the synagogue. He estimates this explanation works well since John’s audience were Christians.⁵

Raymond Brown also holds that the *Birkat ha-minim* played a role in the Johannine situation, particularly in the synagogue affair.⁶ However, unlike Martyn, Brown argues that the expulsion from the synagogue took place sometime before the gospel was written.⁷ His reconstruction is as follows. After 70 C.E. Judaism viewed

²Ibid., 299.

³ Ibid., 299-300.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 300.

⁶ Brown basically holds to the position taken in Raymond Edward Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966); Raymond Edward Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); Brown and Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*.

⁷Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 59-61.

Christ believing Jews as dissidents as a result of their view of the Law.⁸ The expulsion of the Jewish adherents of Jesus took place during the 80's in what Brown calls an "organized attempt."⁹ Although Brown sees the expulsion as organized he does not argue that the benediction universally affected all of the synagogues, rather, local synagogues sporadically refused to endure the company of Jewish adherents to Jesus; hence the universality of the benediction did not appear until later; this is contra to Martyn who argues that the benediction specifically targeted Jewish Christians.¹⁰ Brown holds that the "Eighteen Benedictions" were reformulated after 70 at Jamnia and the "chief benediction" was utilized to force *minim* to curse themselves by reciting the benediction; the alternative was to publicly confess Christ.¹¹

He explains that synagogue officials utilized excommunication more frequently following 90 C.E. under the leadership of Rabbi Gamaliel II. Unlike Martyn, Brown does not make a full connection between the practice of excommunication and the *Birkat ha-minim*. This is indicated by the fact that he dates the reformation of the *Shemoneh Esreh* during the 70's and the full-fledged practice of excommunication 20 years later. For Brown, the benediction reflects the conflict, but is not the means of excommunication. Martyn, however, holds the benediction responsible for the parting of the ways between Jewish Christians and the synagogue.¹²

⁸ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, LXXIV.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Brown and Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 213.

¹¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, LXXIV-LXXV.

¹² Martyn, 60.

J. Louis Martyn, in his influential *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, troubled the waters of Johannine scholarship by introducing the two-level reading theory.¹³ His theory rests on an acceptance of form and redaction criticism.¹⁴ He argues that there are some elements of the narrative which are traditional and others which are constructed by the Fourth Evangelist.¹⁵ Those elements constructed by the evangelist are not mere literary creation per se, he argues that the Johannine community would not see Jesus as absent from their midst. In other words, the evangelist did not limit the gospel to Jesus earthly ministry.¹⁶

According to Martyn, the traditional and constructed elements constitute two levels of reading presented in the text. The first level, which he terms *einmalig*, represents an “event during Jesus’ earthly lifetime.”¹⁷ The second level of the text refers to Jesus presence in the experiences of the Johannine community.¹⁸ The experience of the man-born-blind in John 9 (9:1-41) is Martyn’s textbook example of how this theory operates. In what he calls “scene 1” (9:1-7) Jesus heals the man-born-blind, but, Martyn argues this is actually a scene where Jesus heals the man through a “faithful witness in the Johannine Church.”¹⁹ Scene 2 (9:8-12) is driven by skepticism, the crowd is divided over the man’s experience with Jesus. Scene 3 (9:13-17) is the interrogation of the man

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 35 n. 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

by the Pharisees. Scene 4 (9:18-23) arrives and the parents are asked if the man was born with his condition, however they vehemently deny any knowledge of how he was healed and relinquish responsibility by adding, “ask him; he is of age... he will speak for himself” to their answer (v. 21). In scenes 5-7 the man questions the authority of the Pharisees and eventually he is booted from the synagogue, Jesus steps back on the scene to conclude with a sermon.²⁰

The immediacy of the preceding seven scenes suggests that these are the experiences of the Johannine community, precisely the experiences between the community and the synagogue. This is indicated by the peculiar ἀποσυνάγωγος occurring in verse 22.²¹ Martyn argues that this indicates a formal separation from the synagogue. He also indicates the *Birkat ha-minim* influenced the separation of the Johannine church and the synagogue.²²

Martyn notes how he believes the synagogue employed the *Birkat ha-minim*. First, one must create suspicion as he reads the liturgy (John 3:2; 7:52). Second, he is appointed by the synagogue leadership to lead in the recitation of the Eighteen Benedictions. Third, he would be responsible for reciting the benedictions and halt momentarily as the congregation responds with Amen. When he approaches the twelfth the congregation listens carefully. Fourth, if he stumbles as he approaches number twelve, he is put out of the synagogue.²³ In Martyn’s opinion this reconstruction explains

²⁰ Ibid., 42-44. Martyn believes that the sermon at the end of chapter 9 is actually from the so-called “Christian Preacher.”

²¹ Ibid., 46.

²² Ibid., 59-65.

²³ Ibid., 64. (See also note 21).

how the Johannine Community developed such an indifferent attitude toward the Jews and also explains the situation with the synagogue in 9:22 (also cf. 12:42; 16:2).

Jewish scholar Lawrence Schiffman argues that Jews who adopted Christianity were still considered Jews by *halakic* standards. However, the Tannaim forced restrictions on the Jewish Christians, they were considered sinners yet they were still Jews.²⁴ Further he argues that the schism between Jews and Christians developed and did not happen instantly. The cause of the parting of the ways was directly related to the *halakah*. Moreover, they would have considered the Jewish adherents to Jesus to have alleviated their right to the world to come; nevertheless they were still considered Jews.²⁵

Concerning the *Birkat ha-minim*, then, it was never intended to force one out of their Jewish status. It was an instrument of the sanctions imposed on the Jewish Christians. It specifically functioned to prevent Jewish Christians from acting as preceptors in the synagogues. It was used to make them feel unwelcome.²⁶ He states that the benediction was possibly responsible for the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages.

Rudolf Schnackenburg in his influential commentary first notes the importance of the “special shade of meaning” surrounding Ἰουδαῖοι.²⁷ Moreover, one must note the exhaustive use of this word which appears 71 times in John. He notes that there is nothing unusual about John’s use of the word since in the time of Jesus it was common

²⁴ Schiffman.; he takes the same position in Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Pub. House, 1985).

²⁵ Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism*, 140-141.

²⁶ Ibid., 150.

²⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 165.

not to distinguish between the different groups of Jews; however, it is unusual to speak of the Jewish leadership with such a general term.²⁸ This is markedly dissimilar from the synoptic occurrences which frequently point out the various groups they wish to isolate. The rationale, he argues, is not John's lack of knowledge as to the identity of the leaders, but is employed as a result of a previous opinion formulated against Judaism.

"Historically speaking, the leaders are made responsible for the unbelief of the Jewish people and Jesus' failure among them (cf. 11:47-53); but at the same time this circle is to appear, theologically, as the representatives of the unbelief and hatred of the 'world' hostile to God (cf. 12:42)."²⁹ Furthermore, they continue to live in the day of the evangelist and persecute the disciples of Jesus (16:1-4). The Jews are led by the Pharisees in the evangelist's day; this is evinced by the prominence given to them during Jesus day and even more so in the time of composition.³⁰

The cause of John's opinion correlates with the term ἀποσυνάγωγος occurring in 9:22; 12:42; 16:2. Prior to 90 C.E. only temporary bans from the synagogue existed, but the formation of the *Birkat ha-minim* introduced this more severe punishment. Hence, the benediction excluded Christians from the synagogues; this is clearly the practice envisaged in the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages.³¹

A final proponent of this theory is J. T. Sanders. In *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants*, Sanders argues that the gospel echoes the earliest stages of the schism between Judaism and Christianity. The *Birkat ha-minim* was probably not

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 166.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

responsible for the expulsion from the synagogue but was at least instrumental in the separation of Jewish Christianity and Judaism reflected in John's gospel.³² That is, the period when the Jewish Christians still considered themselves Jews.³³ This early period is not necessarily during the lifetime of Jesus but in later times when there were debates about the identity of Jesus (cf. 7:12ff; 7: 40-43). More specifically, they debated over which "divine or heroic figure of Jewish belief Jesus was (cf. 1:20-21; 5:45-46; 7:12, 47).³⁴ These debates eventually resulted in the separation of the Jewish Christians from the synagogue.³⁵ Chapter 9 he argues provides evidence that even those who "secretly" believed in Christ were expelled if they openly confessed Christ, evinced by ἀποσυνάγωγος.³⁶ This passage combined with 12:42 and 16:2 Sanders calls abundant evidence that the Johannine tradition was familiar with expulsion.³⁷

Following the expulsion the two groups continued to debate over Jesus claim that he has "come down from heaven" (6:38 NRSV). He challenges the idea of Martyn and others that this is a direct result of the implication of the benediction. The benediction was limited he argues to hindering heretics of any brand from serving as precentor in the synagogue.³⁸ Perhaps it would have forced them to feel excluded since the decision to

³²Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 60.

³³ Ibid., 40.

³⁴ Ibid., 41.

³⁵ Ibid., 42. He states that by the end of chapter 8 this a full schism had occurred.

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ Ibid.

remove one as precentor rested with the majority of the congregation. As a result they were compelled to form a separate group outside of the synagogue. The benediction, however, resulted in “social ostracism,” which the Johannine community experienced simultaneously with expulsion. He maintains a distinction between this phenomenon and the expulsion from the synagogue.³⁹

Part 2: Scholars Arguing for No Direct Relationship Between the Benediction and Johannine Situation

Paul Anderson notes that the *Birkat ha-minim*, in the latter part of the first century, represents a “formalization” of an opinion held by “some rigorourist Jews” for at least two generations. That is, they must cut off Christians if they expect to receive the full potential of God’s blessings.⁴⁰ Anderson argues strongly that this is evinced by the fact, contra to the common notion that conflict between Jesus adherents and Jews began at Jamnia during the reformation of Judaism, conflict began during the life of Jesus; he was executed as a blasphemer. Moreover, the persecution continued as recorded in Acts when Stephen is stoned (cf. Acts 7-8).⁴¹ The gospel of John (particularly the dispute in John 6), then, represents a period of a “cooled” debate with the synagogue as opposed to the seemingly “heated” perceived at first blush.⁴² By this period in the Johannine

³⁸ Ibid., 58-59. He takes the position that the benediction did not originally isolate Jewish Christians by the use of the term *notsrim*. They may have been the principal target, but the benediction encompassed more than just this one group.

³⁹ Ibid., 60-61.

⁴⁰ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

⁴¹ Ibid., 232. See also Paul N. Anderson, “A Historical Outline of Johannine Christianity—a Longitudinal Consideration of the Dialectical Johannine Situation,” (George Fox University, 2005), 15-16.

⁴² Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

situation (i.e., that portrayed in John according to the two-level reading theory) many had already absconded from the synagogue. In other words, the debate with the synagogue was not in its nascent stage, but it had ensued for quite some time.

The *Birkat ha-minim* most likely affected the Johannine situation, but was not the vehicle that initiated the fundamental separation between these two groups; again this began during the ministry of Jesus. There was perhaps a catalog of procedures used to expel Jewish adherents to Jesus from the synagogue, but the *Birkat ha-minim* merely “codified” these practices⁴³ He purports it probably functioned as “a means of leverage” to decelerate the number of defectors to the Jesus movement. One must take into account, however, the limited power such a benediction enjoys, since it would be so difficult to consistently and successfully employ this edict. Finally, its execution did not require violence; the implication of the curse alone would have sufficed to persuade defectors.⁴⁴

George R. Beasley-Murray is hesitant to blame the synagogue expulsion in John on the *Birkat ha-minim*.⁴⁵ He states that it represents the tensions between the two groups. For Beasley-Murray the tensions between the two groups was a long-standing issue, the benediction implies an instantaneous expulsion which seems implausible, considering the evidence in John. The benediction is perhaps the result or even “culmination” of the progressing tension between them, but it is too difficult to place too much emphasis on it.⁴⁶

⁴³ Anderson, "A Historical Outline of Johannine Christianity-a Longitudinal Consideration of the Dialectical Johannine Situation," 15-16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁵ George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary; V. 36 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), lxxvii.

William Horbury argues that the Fourth Gospel most likely represents a situation where Jewish Christians were forcefully separated from the synagogue in locations known to the writer.⁴⁷ It also evidences signs of the imposed enforcement of an organized policy; however, such a strategy is lacking in rabbinic sources.⁴⁸ In light of this lack of evidence the *Birkat ha-minim* becomes enticing since such a benediction would suggest the results John records. Notwithstanding, the grievance in the Fourth Gospel is over *expulsion*. He argues that as appealing as the theory that the benediction could enforce expulsion is, it could not have delivered the results that John records. He argues forcibly that the benediction hardly functioned as an instrument of expulsion; rather it functioned as a curse.⁴⁹ If the authors of the benediction intended it to exclude heretical prayer leaders from functioning as precentors, this hardly equates to what the Fourth Gospel records. In other words, it would have hardly been sufficient to excommunicate someone from the synagogue. He offers two possible alternatives. Either the benediction was implicated to “reinforce” earlier sanctions, or it was contemporaneous with the expulsion policy.⁵⁰

In 1994 Pieter W. van der Horst wrote a brief survey on research conducted on the *Birkat ha-minim*, in which, after summarizing the positions of other scholars, he delivers

⁴⁶ Ibid., lxxviii-lxxix.

⁴⁷ William Horbury, "The Benediction of the Minim and Early Jewish-Christian Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982): 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 52.

his own spin on the issue.⁵¹ Concerning the wording of the benediction, specifically the *minim*, he argues they are always certainly Jews. The *notsrim* is a later addition.⁵² This is evinced by the increasing tension that developed between Jews and Jewish Christians; in other words the separation of Jews and Christians did not happen instantly, but was the result of two centuries of increasing animosity. The catalyst for the tension was precisely the events of 70 C.E. which makes the function of the benediction likely to be reinforcement for the unity of Judaism, since the goal of the rabbis was to bring Judaism under one umbrella. That is, the goal was to exclude those who did not accept the rabbis' brand of Judaism. In light of this, it is likely that it applied to the Jewish Christians—among other heretics—and not Christians in general.⁵³ For van der Horst the *Birkat ha-minim* could not be viewed as responsible for the situation presented in the Fourth Gospel. He posits the implication of the benediction as a direct attack against Christians well into the fourth century when the Roman Empire became a Christian state, at this point a complete divergence between them would have been unavoidable. Moreover, until then the doors of the synagogue always remained open for Jewish Christians to return.⁵⁴

While most literature on the *Birkat ha-minim* focuses on its implications following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C. E., David Instone-Brewer tackles the issue of the

⁵¹ Pieter W van der Horst, "The Birkat Ha-Minim in Recent Research," *The Expository Times* 105 (1994): 363-368. See also 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," *Neotestamentica* 27, no. 2 (1993): 351-363.

⁵² van der Horst: 367.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.: 368.

benediction before 70 C.E. Most scholars posit that the benediction was added to the *Shemoneh Esreh* at Jamnia under Rabbi Gamaliel II; Instone-Brewer contends that there is evidence suggesting the benediction and its wording originated during the Second Temple period (cf. Ben Sira 36:1-17, 51: 21-35; 2 Maccabees. 1:24-29).⁵⁵ He does not cover the Johannine situation in his article, but the implications of his theory would alter the possibility of the *Birkat ha-minim* manipulating Johannine Christians to leave the synagogue, since he claims that the benediction was aimed at the Sadducean priesthood.⁵⁶ His observations are as follows.

The source and the initial wording by its author are impossible to reconstruct. However, he argues, that does not indicate that anyone could take the liberty to change it as they desired. There was a “semi-fixed” version and the elements that could be altered were very limited.⁵⁷ He questions the tradition of a revised version composed by Samuel the Little at Jamnia on the basis that it is difficult to date, these type of stories, he argues, are generally “later inventions.”⁵⁸ This is not to say that Samuel did not compose it, but that he composed it at Jamnia is difficult to maintain.

⁵⁵ David Instone-Brewer, "The Eighteen Benedictions and the *Minim* before 70 C. E.," *Journal of Theological Studies* 54, no. 1 (2003): 25-45. For instance, 2 Maccabees 1:24-29 reads, “24 The prayer was to this effect: 'O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, you are awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful, you alone are king and are kind, 25 you alone are bountiful, you alone are just and almighty and eternal. You rescue Israel from every evil; you chose the ancestors and consecrated them. 26 Accept this sacrifice on behalf of all your people Israel and preserve your portion and make it holy. 27 Gather together our scattered people, set free those who are slaves among the Gentiles, look on those who are rejected and despised, and let the Gentiles know that you are our God. 28 Punish those who oppress and are insolent with pride. 29 Plant your people in your holy place, as Moses promised.'”

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid.: 26.

⁵⁸ Ibid.: 39.

He argues that the extant information about Samuel the Little and about pre-70 sages more acutely place him before Jerusalem's destruction. The sayings attributed to him in the benediction were employed before the traditional date for the composition of the benediction leading one to believe that it predated 70 (see n. 69).⁵⁹ Tradition also holds that he was a disciple of Hillel (cf. *SongR.* 8.13). In this case one would expect him to align with the teachings of pre-70 Judaism. Finally, Samuel is never referred to as rabbi which was uncommon following 70 unless they "lack rabbinic expertise."⁶⁰ The only bit of evidence suggesting a post-70 date is the insertion of Jabneh in the Talmud account of Samuel (*b. Ber.* 28b).⁶¹ The implication is that the picture of Samuel illustrated in extant sources is someone who was active before 70.

He notes that Samuel is responsible for exegeting Ecclesiastes 7:15 (*EcclR.* 7:7.24) and Proverbs 24:17 (*mAb* 4:19). Both of these passages he argues indicate an attack on the Sadducees. They are complaints about God allowing the Sadducees to prosper, he posits a historical situation that some complained about the Sadducees.⁶² As a result the benediction was composed as a product of this complaint to remind them that "God judges the wicked who prosper."⁶³

If Instone-Brewer is correct then one must answer at least two questions in order to maintain that the benediction was composed to deal with heretics from the post-70 era, including Jewish Christians. First, how did a benediction strictly about Sadducees fit the

⁵⁹ Ibid.: 40.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.: 43.

⁶² Ibid.: 41.

⁶³ Ibid.: 42.

needs of the Pharisees, who no longer tangled with them, would not the benediction been discarded or forgotten much like the Sadducees? Second, as he points out many prayers and benedictions were limited to what could be changed, how then did such a dramatic change occur?

The work of Reuven Kimelman, in “*Birkat ha-minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity*,” has been in part a driving force for the rejection of the notion that the *Birkat ha-minim* is responsible for the situation described in John.⁶⁴ He argues that the benediction aided in attaining a “normative self-definition in rabbinic Judaism.”⁶⁵ It operated as a curse against Jews who absconded from the Jewish community to the Romans during difficult times. Subsequently it was reformulated and the curse included the *minim*. He notes three important theories concerning the *Birkat ha-minim*. The first is that it was used to isolate one who acted as precentor in the synagogue. Kimelman rejects this theory because the benediction does not point out specifically what is offensive; moreover, the *min* would not have viewed himself as a heretic. Hence, the force of the benediction would have lost its power since it was not specific.

The second major theory is that the benediction refers to Jewish Christians. Kimelman seems to reject this theory because there is no evidence that it refers specifically to this group. He opts for the third choice in which the curse simply operates like all other curses, merely a petition to God to curse heretics. He supports this position because it “does not assume that *minim* had a specific connotation beyond heretics or,

⁶⁴ Kimelman, 226-244.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 226.

what may be closer etymologically, sectarians.”⁶⁶ Second, it corresponds with other heretical parties described in Tannaitic literature. Finally, it corresponds with *Vayyiqra’ 3* which assumes the *Birkat ha-minim* is a shortened expression for “the benediction of the cursing of the *minim*.”⁶⁷

Next he delves into an elaborate discussion of the semantics of *minim* and *notsrim*. In the discussion of the *minim* he notes that in Tannaitic literature it clearly encompasses deviant Jews. As a result, he has no problem including Jewish Christians in the curse, but he is reluctant to specifically note them as the only target of the benediction, instead he alludes to them as a prominent figure in the benediction.⁶⁸

In his discussion of the *notsrim* he states that the outcome of his investigation (i.e., if *notsrim* was included in the original formulation) rests heavily on the impact (or lack of) Christianity had on Judaism. He concludes there is a lack of evidence supporting a heavy impact of Christianity on Judaism.⁶⁹ On top of this, if *notsrim* was originally included, the benediction would have most likely been classified as the *Birkat ha-notsrim* by Talmudic literature. Also, if it were a term used from the first century and following it would have occurred commonly in rabbinic literature, however, it never appears in Tannaitic literature, which supposedly the Tannaitic period is when this benediction was produced.⁷⁰ For Kimelman then, the original formula included the *minim* which

⁶⁶ Ibid., 228.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 233.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 232-234.

encompassed Jewish Christians among others. As for *notsrim* it was not included in the original formula.

He also takes a position concerning the *Birkat ha-minim* and John's gospel. He argues that Johannine Christianity's encounter with the synagogue is an anomaly. There is no evidence to suggest that a similar circumstance occurred anywhere else. Moreover, the reference to the Pharisees in 12:42 suggests it was grievance with local leadership and not a widespread phenomenon.⁷¹ He points out that more than one Christian author would have recorded such a dramatic episode had it affected all of Christendom. Therefore, it is hardly shocking that ἀποσυνάγωγος appears only three times in the gospel of John. He also notes that it was possible that John invented this drama to convince Jewish adherents to Jesus to stay away from the synagogue. This would also explain the polemic against the Jews.⁷² The bottom line is that John never alludes to any curse or prayer against Jewish adherents to Jesus, leaving the evidence that the *Birkat ha-minim* manipulated the Jesus and his adherents to leave the synagogue very thin.

In *The Gospels for All Christians*, Richard Bauckham and his colleagues argue that the gospels were not addressed to and about specific communities.⁷³ They submit that the "consensus" that the evangelists wrote to their own communities is virtually unquestioned and that it requires rethinking. I will briefly outline each position and then conclude by explaining how this affects the understanding of John's conflict with the Jews of the synagogue.

⁷¹ Ibid., 234.

⁷² Ibid., 234-235.

⁷³ Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge, U.K.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997).

Richard Bauckham authors two articles the first is titled, *For Whom were the Gospels Written*, in this article he argues that the gospels were intended to reach a universal audience.⁷⁴ He bases this conclusion on the fact that, contrary to many scholarly views, Christian communities were not isolated; rather they were a well-connected network of believers.⁷⁵ First, in the Roman world communication among communities was abundant. Business relations, at times required extensive travel. Second, Christian literature indicates that it was self-aware of its widespread status in its nascent stage. Third, Christian leaders such as Paul often traveled around in the execution of their ministry. He notes, for instance, that John the revelator would have been familiar with the seven churches he wrote to; that is seven churches that were not fundamentally the same community.⁷⁶

In his second article he argues that, assuming Markan priority, John was written for audiences that were familiar with Mark. In his opinion, the gospels were not necessarily written as dependent on Mark as the Documentary Hypothesis assumes, rather John complements Mark. John expected his readers to have some experience with the gospel literature, particularly Mark. This assumes then that the gospels enjoyed widespread audiences.⁷⁷

Another contributor, Michael Thompson, argues that communication was widespread in the ancient Christian world in the Roman Empire in light of business

⁷⁴ Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?" 30.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁷ Richard Bauckham, "John for Readers of Mark," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 147-172.

relations, travel, and annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem for Jewish festivals.⁷⁸ He notes that the ancient Christians hungered for news and information. Moreover, news from different regions, including traditions about Jesus, created dialogue, and perhaps even served as a catalyst for the creation of gospels; as a result they may have complemented each other.⁷⁹

Loveday Alexander argues that the gospels were produced and published through previously established networks. That is, only through relations prior to the writing of the gospels would they have had the chance to circulate.⁸⁰

Richard Burridge notes that too much stress is placed on the “interest of the community.” For instance, ἀποσυνάγωγος reflects the interests of the author and not the community. More precisely, it expresses the biographical interests of the evangelist.⁸¹ He critiques the idea of the gospels representing “community minutes” by adding that the gospel writer combined his sources to create a biography.⁸² Moreover, these biographies are intended for a widespread audience. Finally, the implication then is that the presentation of the Jews in John is characteristic of the situation that encompasses the entire Mediterranean.⁸³

⁷⁸ Michael B. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 52-53.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 58, 69-70.

⁸⁰ Loveday Alexander, "Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 72-112.

⁸¹ Burridge, "About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences," 126.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 136-137.

Stephen Barton argues that the historical, literary, and social-scientific methods should not be employed to investigate the communities behind the gospel; rather one should examine the characters in the gospel, this will provide a more acute description of the gospel situation.⁸⁴

Finally, Francis Watson argues that the gospels should not be “allegorized” but should be read “literally.”⁸⁵

The implications of *The Gospels for All Christians* are great. Their research questions the idea that the gospels reflect a “history” of a particular community. If they are correct the backdrop of John, then, is not limited to the so-called Johannine Community. Accordingly, John reflects the experiences of a wide-spread geographical area and the experiences and interests of the author. In other words, the employment of the *Birkat ha-minim* as the catalyst for the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, then, reflects perhaps isolated incidents and conditions that the author is aware of or had previously experienced, thus he writes to share the experiences with the “network.”

⁸⁴ Stephen Barton, “Can We Identify Gospel Audiences?” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 173-194.

⁸⁵ Francis Watson, “Toward a Literal Reading of the Gospels,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 207-213.

Chapter 3

A Look at the *Birkat ha-minim*

Part 1: Versions and Perspectives

There are several extant versions of the *Birkat ha-minim*; accordingly, determining which version was extant in the first century is no simple task. The many extant versions create difficulty for the researcher who desires to point out which version(s) paralleled early Christianity; yet there are texts that traditionally are accepted as more ancient than others, but not with absolute certainty.¹ Despite this ambiguity, the function of the benediction is similar from version to version—it curses the heretics. For the purposes of this thesis, I will briefly examine the language and wording of the two accepted as the more ancient editions, paying attention to only a few differences.² The purpose of this is to determine whether the *Birkat ha-minim* could have had a direct relationship to the Johannine situation; particularly if it illuminates John 9:22; 12:42, and 16:2.

In my opinion the benediction does not demonstrate a direct relationship with John 9, 12, and 16 and is not necessarily what John describes. Most likely the benediction demonstrates a formal programmatic expulsion of heretics from the synagogue, while John recounts an informal effort towards expulsion. Moreover, no element of the benediction seems particularly Johannine; that is, there is nothing significant about the benediction that ties it to John, which would indicate that it is not aimed toward a specific community.

¹ For the purpose of this thesis I will examine the texts that are traditionally the most ancient texts, the Palestinian and the Babylonian.

² See note 1.

The texts accepted as the oldest are the Babylonian and the Palestinian; more specifically, *Seder R. Amram* (Babylonian) and a Genizah fragment T-S K_{27.33b} (Palestinian).³

Palestinian Version (Geniza)

In regard to the apostates: let there be no hope; and let the kingdoms of the arrogant be hastily plucked in our days, and the *notsrim* (often translated Nazarenes, referring specifically to Jewish Christians) and *minim* (heretics) as an instant be exterminated; may they be wiped out from the book of the living and not written with the righteous. Blessed are you, Lord, humbler of the insolent.⁵

Babylonian Version (Amram)

For the apostates let there be no hope, and may the *minim* instantly perish and all the enemies of your people be cut off and may the kingdom of the arrogant be quickly uprooted and crushed and humbled in our days blessed are you Lord, breaker of our enemies and humbler of the arrogant.⁴

Observations

Some scholars suspect that both versions first appeared late in the Tannaitic period; on the other hand, some scholars posit a date prior to 70.⁶ At any rate, they both appear in the Talmud, which suggests that by the time each Talmud was gathered they had gained some importance in Palestine and in the Jewish Diaspora. This, however, does not mean that they were extant during the time of Jesus, making it difficult to connect to John's narrative. Those who suspect a dating prior to 70 C.E. can only speculate about a possible parent text, but have no solid evidence tying it to this period or to John's

³ Instone-Brewer: 28. See also Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1977), 35.

⁴ The Babylonian version was adopted from Instone-Brewer: 37. For other Hebrew versions and English translations see Binyamin, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Ein Gedi Inscription," 72.

⁵ The Palestinian Version is my own translation of the text from Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 396.

⁶ Instone-Brewer: 36. See also A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 102-103.

narrative. The extant evidence ties them to a period several centuries after John. Next, I will make some observations about the differences in the text.

Perhaps the most significant difference is the word order. Both versions begin with the same opening statement (“For the apostates let there be no hope”), but transpose their following sentences. However, slightly before the transposition the Babylonian version adds “and all the enemies of your people be cut off.” To the section in which the *minim* is alluded to, the Palestinian version adds *notsrim* to the curse. With the addition of the *notsrim*, it also adds a request for them to be removed from “book of the living,” and that the enemies will “not be written with the righteous.”

Finally, the Babylonian version also adds “crushed and humbled” to “quickly uprooted in our days.” Both end almost verbatim with the exception of the addition of “breaker of our enemies” in the Babylonian version.

Findings

Each author utilizes language in synonymous parallelism according to the situation it addresses. The Palestinian version adds a lengthy parallelism addressing the “righteous” and the “book of life,” this, in my opinion, indicates that it was aimed at a theological opponent. The Babylonian version adds verbs such as “crushed,” “humbled” and uses “breaker” as a noun. It is possible that the author wants his enemies destroyed, which could be indicative of a physical struggle and not a theological struggle.

In other words, the author of the Babylonian text would not necessarily use military language against a burgeoning sect of Judaism which was peaceful, but theologically subversive. This makes sense since Anderson points out that the benediction functioned as a “formalization” of the opinion Jews held, that Christians

should be rooted out of Judaism in order for them to experience the full blessing of God.⁷

In John 9, 12, and 16 this opinion came to fruition sporadically in the form of ἀποσυνάγωγος and later formalized in the *Birkat ha-minim*. This is evident because it would have taken time for Jewish Christianity to develop into a threatening force that required religious leadership to formalize this anathema against Jewish Christianity.⁸ Along the same lines, the Palestinian text seems to be the clearest indication of a formalized opinion against a theological opponent, especially in its efforts to secure the blessings of God in phrases like, “may they be wiped out from the book of the living and not written with the righteous.”⁹

In my opinion, neither version is indicative of John 9, 12, and 16. The Babylonian may indicate a violent situation possibly involving a military struggle. Idelsohn and others have suggested that the Babylonian version was directed toward the Romans (i.e., if it was composed during the Jewish struggle with the Romans).¹⁰ There might be some truth to this if one considers that the Babylonian version utilizes much stronger language (i.e., crushed, humbled and cut off) and does not use the theological language that the Palestinian version does (e.g., “may they be wiped out from the book of the living and not written with the righteous”). Its language seems too violent to be directed at a small faction within Judaism, namely Jewish Christianity. Accordingly, this version does not

⁷ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

⁸ Steven T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 1 (1984): 63-76. This, however, does not exclude the conflict Jesus and his followers encountered.

⁹ Genizah fragment T-S K_{27.33b}. See Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, 396.

¹⁰ Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development*, 102-103.

seem to indicate a direct relationship to John since the Johannine situation was not locked in a physical struggle with Judaism, it was locked in a theological struggle.

On the other hand, the Palestinian version points toward a theological consensus against a theological opponent, which was hardly plausible in Jewish Christianity's nascent years, since they would not have had enough time to develop a consensus. This is suggested by the lack of writings against the Jewish Christians in this period. Moreover, the Palestinian version utilizes language that indicates a struggle for the benefit of God's blessings. But according to John's side of the story it seems that the religious leadership was angry over Jesus' christological and theological claims. Therefore, it would have been advantageous for the writers of the benediction to be more specific about their rejection of Jesus claims. Yet this never appears in the benediction.

Even if one were to argue that the Palestinian version was a recalibrated version of the Babylonian to handle Johannine Christianity by omitting some of its stronger language—such as “and all the enemies of your people be cut off,” and “breaker of our enemies,”—it still does not necessarily mention anything analogous to the struggle in John. In short, neither benediction suits ἀποσυνάγωγος in John. My argument so far still leaves one question, even if the macro picture of benediction does not parallel the Johannine situation, what about the more specific words *notsrim* and *minim*?

Now I will examine the words *minim* and *notsrim*, including their functions, targets, and briefly their function in other literature. The result of these investigations will help reveal whether or not they could plausibly be applied to the Johannine situation; also it will help reveal if John's narrative reflects any interaction with the benediction.

Part 2: To Include or Not to Include, *Notsrim* is the Question: A Discussion of the *Notsrim*, its Inclusion, Meanings and Implications

Anyone who is familiar with the *Birkat ha-minim* has surely encountered the story of Samuel the Little, its alleged composer. It entails the story of what prompted him to write the benediction; this story emerges (supposedly) from late in the Tannaitic period. Unfortunately, it does not include the exact wording of his work.¹¹ This problem along with ambiguity concerning its date has fueled debate among scholars concerning the wording of the twelfth benediction; particularly the exclusion or inclusion of the word *notsrim*.¹²

The relationship of *notsrim* to the Johannine situation depends whether or not Jewish Christianity had impacted Judaism significantly enough to cause them to issue this appellation, and include it in a systematic expulsion. If John was familiar with this appellation he never mentions it.¹³

On the other hand, if one argues that the *notsrim* were not included in the benediction until over a hundred years following the composition of John's gospel then perhaps Jewish Christianity had not significantly impacted Judaism at this point. Many have used this argument to maintain that Jesus adherents and Judaism did not quarrel in the early years. The result of this investigation will determine if *notsrim* is an indication of a direct relationship between the benediction and John and demonstrate that there was a perpetual conflict between Jewish Christians and their Jewish counterparts.

¹¹ See Chapter 1 note 22.

¹² Jakob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: The Relationship between Church and Synagogue*, 3 ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), 56.

¹³ In Kimelman (234) he delivers an enticing argument suggesting that synagogue expulsion was not a widespread phenomenon

The specificity of *notsrim* or Nazoreans denotes serious tension between them and the writers of the benediction unparalleled by *minim*.¹⁴ By the time Justin was on the scene the conflict between the Jews and Christians had come to full fruition.¹⁵ Justin's references of Jewish hostility toward Christians in the synagogue, in *Dialogue with Trypho*, are normally understood to correlate with Johannine references to hostility, but with a very developed execution.¹⁶ The question is, how developed was the conflict during John's epoch, was it developed to the point where all Jewish synagogues anathematized Christians? In my opinion, this does not correlate with John, since it represents an unsystematic anathematization.

Scholars who posit that the word *notsrim* was an ingredient in the original formula also support the idea that it was aimed directly at Jewish Christians.¹⁷ Katz notes three important factors that support this position.¹⁸ First the patristic writings provide allusions to conflict between Jews and Christians. For example, Justin, Origen, Jerome, and Epiphanius all level accusations against the Jews for forcing them out of the

¹⁴ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 52.

¹⁵ Horbury, "The Benediction of the Minim and Early Jewish-Christian Controversy," 19.

¹⁶ See Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 16, 93, 95, 123, 133.; Ibid.

¹⁷ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 64. Scholars that take this position include Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 299f.; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel of John and Judaism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1975).; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 380.; Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 276; Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Society for New Testament Studies. (Cambridge, Cambridge U. P.: 1967), 54-56, 65-66; Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: The Relationship between Church and Synagogue*, 51-57; Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*; Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, 135-425* (New York: Published for the Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1986), 236.; J. T. Townsend, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," in *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

¹⁸ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 65. NB: This is not Steven Katz's position, but he summarizes this position well.

synagogue.¹⁹ Fourth century Epiphanius mentions that they were cursed three times daily; only the eighteen benedictions were repeated three times daily. Second, the Genizah version reflects Palestinian tradition.²⁰ Therefore, it reflects some of the oldest material available, making it likely that John was familiar with it. Third, the evidence in the gospel of John points toward a formal excommunication (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). These factors, Katz notes, all intimate the antiquity of the Genizah version and its wording including *notsrim*.

However, he states, there is much evidence against the inclusion of *notsrim*.²¹ First, it is unnecessary to add *notsrim* to the formula since *minim* covers all heretics including Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians would not have been a concern to the formulators of the benediction. Second, Origen and Justin, although they mention a curse against Christians, never mention this word, but in the writings of the later Jerome and Epiphaneus the word occurs.²² Third, John never mentions a specific liturgical function in the synagogue designed to liquidate Jewish Christians from participation. Fourth, he notes that during John's day Christianity was not the juggernaut it became in later eras. Fifth, (so Kimelman) if the *notsrim* had any particular significance (enough to be specifically named in the benediction) the appellation would read *Birkat ha-notsrim* as opposed to *Birkat ha-minim*.²³

¹⁹ Kimelman, 235-240.

²⁰ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 65.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.: 66.

²³ Ibid.: 67.; Kimelman, 233.

As Katz and Kimelman have illustrated, the other position scholars have taken is simply that the *notsrim* was not included in the original formula. They simply argue that there is not enough evidence to support such an assumption, precisely because the date of the Genizah version's composition is untenable. They also argue that aside from the Genizah fragment no "version from either a Christian or, what is more significant, a non-Christian country (where there was no concern with Christian sensitivities and no Christian censors) includes reference to *notsrim*."²⁴

Katz also argues against positing that the word *notsrim* was included on the basis that the benediction was a product of Samuel the Little combining two older benedictions, or adding to it.²⁵ J. Heinemann, in an argument refuting the notion that there were only 17 benedictions argues that it was customary to combine two benedictions into one.²⁶ This allows no possibility that *notsrim* was drawn from another older source.²⁷

The main thrust of this position is that the recovery of the wording of the original benediction is untenable. Moreover, with the evidence stacked up against the inclusion of the *notsrim* it is unlikely that it was not included in the original formula. While the Jewish Christians were not isolated with inclusion of *notsrim* into the formula, they were covered in the word *minim*. Therefore, it is unlikely that during the period John describes Jesus' adherents became a force that required systematic anathematization; but this does

²⁴ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 68.; Kimelman, 233.

²⁵ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 67.

²⁶ Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns*, 225-227.

²⁷ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 67.

not mean that conflict did not exist, the fact that it appears later demonstrates a perpetual conflict beginning in Jesus' day.

It is difficult to imagine that Jewish Christians quickly rose to the occasion to cause such a deep separation that would require them to be isolated in anathema. I believe that this schism required several decades beyond what the first century allowed following the appearance of Christ. Moreover, as Katz and Kimelman have pointed out, there is a lack of evidence supporting the inclusion of *notsrim* in the benediction. Furthermore, the evidence that the supporters allude to postdates the Tannaitic.²⁸ For instance, many allude to the work of Justin and other church fathers. Others such as Martyn suggest that "in the service of worship ideally followed in every Pharisaic synagogue, a centrally important element was the formal prayer spoken by a member of the congregation" which included the twelfth benediction a curse against Jewish Christians.²⁹ Yet, this is conjecture, since there is no evidence for this in Jesus' day.

One scholar supporting the inclusion of the *notsrim*, W. D. Davies, argues that a position arguing for the exclusion of *notsrim* is "dubious."³⁰ He maintains that the removal of *notsrim* disturbs the balance and innovation provided by its author. Interestingly, at the conclusion of his argument, he leaves some room for uncertainty by adding, "in any case, a petition, either against heretics, including Jewish Christians, or against heretics and specifically Jewish Christians, was introduced into the Tefillah at Jamnia, at what date exactly we cannot ascertain."³¹

²⁸ Ibid.: 68.

²⁹ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 58.

³⁰ Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 276.

Even the origin of this word (*notsrim*) is somewhat suspicious. Kimelman notes that this word never appears in the Tannaitic period; moreover, he points out that the only place this word appears in this form is in the Amoraic period (particularly sometime during the third century C.E.).³²

Kimelman's observations are significant for two reasons. First, the sparse allusions to the *notsrim* indicate that among Jewish writers, during the first few hundred years of Christianity, the use of this word was not widespread. This indicates that, even if the Jewish Christians were counted among the *minim*, they did not impact Judaism enough to cause rabbinic writers to single them out during earlier years of Christianity in the *Birkat ha-minim*. However, since it is included in later writing it demonstrates that tensions did continue to develop between the two parties—culminating in the ultimate separation of Judaism and Christianity. In other words, it is possible that the consistent employment of this word developed as tensions between the two groups escalated, but did not necessarily appear during their initial conflicts.

This leads to the second observation that, the late occurrences indicate that the Jewish Christianity during the early period did not pose a serious threat to Judaism. On the flip side, Christian writers, such as Origen and Justin testify to harsh treatment by the Jews, indicating that expulsion had matured by their day.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kimelman, 234.

Therefore, it is plausible to conclude, as Anderson has pointed out, that conflict between the two parties originated during Jesus' day; however, during this period it had not escalated, yet, to a point demanding the isolation of all the *notsrim*.³³

Kimelman notes, that there are only two occurrences and that they are from the same writing in the Babylonian Talmud, specifically, in *b. Taan. 27b*.³⁴ He argues that the word is actually *nasrim* instead of *notsrim*, and that this is closer acoustically to "Nazoreans."³⁵ To arrive at this conclusion Kimelman translates נצריִם *nasrim* instead of *notsrim*. The first occurrence of this word is in a "generally unknown source" where the word is identical to the word for Egypt except the נ in *nasrim* and the מ Egypt.³⁶ The second source is a much more explicit reference. In *b. Taan. 27b* R. Johanan speaks on behalf of the Jews that they had observed Jesus' adherents failing to fast on the Sabbath. Kimelman's translation of נצ (t'sade) is a bit suspicious; especially since he implies נצריִם is actually "Nazorean" and may be related to מצריִם (*Miz'raim* or Egypt). His intention seems to be that no tension existed between the Jews and the Jewish Christians. This seems to draw attention away from the fact that the word was probably referring to Jesus and his followers.

He goes on to argue that, if it was referring to Jewish Christians—alluding to R. T. Herford's comments on another passage, *Sopherim* 17.5—that the writer has projected

³³ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

³⁴ Kimelman, 234.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 240. He also makes his position clear that the word refers specifically to Nazoreans and not Christians.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 241. The source is *bGitt 57A*.

the conditions of his day onto the first century.³⁷ According to this position the writer has only pointed out specific issues from a later day.

If this passage truly is one of the earliest occurrences of the word then it demonstrates a developing tension between the two groups, indicating that the inclusion of *notsrin*, appeared during a later time and probably did not have a direct relationship to the Johannine situation. However, Kimelman's thesis that the writer projected his own agenda onto the first century is not necessarily true.

In order for Herford's and Kimelman's ideas to be plausible, one must conclude that the Jews ignored the Christian practices prior to the Amoraic period, which was at least 150 years following the birth of Christianity. Unless they turned a blind eye to Christian practices they surely would have noticed the Christian's unusual practices regarding fasting, etc. Therefore, one must conclude that these practices were detected by Jews in the first century, however they were only recorded when the tensions were more matured (as in the Talmud where widespread opposition to Christians appears) in the Amoraic period. Kimelman is wrong to insist that Jewish and Jewish Christian tension did not exist. Kimelman provides a lucid argument about the issues surrounding Christians' offensive practices, particularly rejoicing on Sunday instead of fasting; this demonstrates why Jews in the third century would dispute this; however, his discussion about the dating of this practice is weak.³⁸

In his argument he tries to prove that the fasting issue did not occur prior to the destruction of the temple, therefore, pacifying the conflict. In my opinion, Kimelman

³⁷ Ibid. See also R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1975), 172.

³⁸ Kimelman, 242-244.

does not successfully argue that the conflict occurred only during later years; rather his position only confirms the culmination in later years, since he can only conclude that this practice was not noted prior to the temple destruction. Therefore, although Kimelman is correct to argue that there are no appearances of this word prior to the Amoraic period, he is incorrect to suggest that the Talmudic authors imported their own agenda onto the text. The word most likely appeared in its context as a result of a longstanding practice of fasting offensive to Jews as opposed to later ones as he seems to suggest.³⁹

In my opinion, they were extant during the Johannine period adding to the building tensions that matured in the Amoraic period. The problem I have with Kimelman's position is that he seems to minimize the conflict between Jewish Christianity and Judaism. Although the conflict was not necessarily widespread as Martyn and others perceive it to be, one cannot deny that it existed. These Talmudic passages and the Johannine writings testify to some conflict occurring. Notwithstanding, Kimelman's admission that the *minim* encompassed the Jewish Christians, he minimizes the conflict by understanding the word as it occurs Talmudic passages to be a third century problem that was unrelated to the first century.⁴⁰

Kimelman uses patristic writings to minimize the conflict between the groups. He rightly observes the difficulties of citing the patristic writings as evidence for inclusion of the *notsrim* in the original formula; specifically he points out the lack of compatibility between the *Birkat* and patristic evidence.⁴¹ He also argues for Jewish Christians

³⁹ There were certainly other Christian practices that offended the Jews as well, this is the one the Talmud uses to make its point.

⁴⁰ Kimelman, 228-232.

⁴¹ Ibid., 235-240.

frequenting the synagogues, which would eliminate the possibility of widespread influence of the *Birkat ha-minim*; however this does not prove there was no conflict it merely proves that the conflict was sporadic, again one cannot ignore the evidence of conflict, specifically in John. In my opinion, patristic writings do not prove widespread persecution, but as Bauckham and others have proven the experiences recorded are perhaps attestation of several communities as opposed to a single community, indicating the writer and his audience were at least aware of conditions between Jews and Jewish Christians.⁴²

In conclusion, the appellation *notsrim* had not affected Johannine Christianity at this point. It would be difficult to maintain that it had since the word is never mentioned in Johannine literature and is rarely used in Jewish literature, indicating that this was not a popular term for Jewish Christians. One should also consider that it is never mentioned in the book of Acts, which records several incidents demonstrating the conflict between Jews and Jewish Christians.⁴³ Moreover, when the word does occur in rabbinic writings, it appears over a hundred years after the composition of John's gospel, making it difficult to hold that they were specifically isolated. This, however, does not demand that one conclude that no conflict existed, neither does it indicate that Jewish Christians did not experience trauma in the Johannine period. It may prove that it was not a phenomenon experienced by Christians across the board; notwithstanding, conflict did exist.

Kimelman and others seem to minimize this arguing that the later writers

⁴² Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴³ Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985), 300. This is an interesting point made by Rowland, which he expands by adding that the type of conflict portrayed in Acts does not match that in John.

projected their situations onto the first century. I argue that the conflict written about in later centuries existed in the first century, but that it escalated as time went on further dividing the two groups.⁴⁴ In other words, the inclusion of the word *notsrim* probably did not occur in the original formula, making it difficult to posit a programmatic expulsion in John 9, 12, and 16—the anathema in John was premature—nevertheless conflict did exist as recorded in John. Kimelman and company do admit however, that Jewish Christians were encompassed in the *minim*, which leads us into our next discussion.⁴⁵

Part 3: Sectarians, Christians, Apostates, and Heretics: Who are the *Minim*?

The debate over the *notsrim* has not been alone; perhaps the most disagreement has been over the identity of the *minim*. The fundamental issue surrounding the *minim* is precisely who are they? It has caused scholars to take a variety of positions concerning their identity. The word is often translated “heretics,” but through the ages it has denoted a variety of groups (Christians, Jewish Christians, apostates, etc.). Kimelman notes that opinions range from a “catch-all term” for heretics in Judaism to Jewish Gnostics and Christians to Gentile Christians and pagans.⁴⁶ Philip Alexander notes that the rabbis used it to label Jews who were regarded as to be outside of the nation of Israel.⁴⁷ However, as Lawrence Schiffman has demonstrated it is nearly impossible for one to lose his Jewish

⁴⁴ See the essays, Philip Alexander, “The Parting of the Ways from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” in *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (London: SCM Press, 1991), 8-9. And Dunn, “Let John Be John,” 293-322. See also Kimelman, “The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer,” 243.

⁴⁵ Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973), 462-463.

⁴⁶ Kimelman, “The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer,” 228. See also Katz, “Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration,” 69.

⁴⁷ Alexander, “The Parting of the Ways from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” 6-7.

identity.⁴⁸ As this diversity of scholars' opinions demonstrates, the issue is very complicated. Alan F. Segal points out the difficulty in precisely identifying the *minim*, by alluding to a passage from the Mishnah.⁴⁹ In *m. Megilah* 4:8, 9 it illustrates certain practices which declare one a heretic, and unfit for participation in synagogue liturgy. It reads,

he who says, I am not going to pass before the ark wearing colored clothes also in white ones should not pass before the ark. He who makes his phylactery round- it is a source of danger and (still) does not fulfill a religious requirement. If he put it on his forehead or on the palm of his hand, this is the way of outsiders.⁵⁰

Segal's point is that it merely highlights something that the Jews considered offensive, but does not specifically name any party; according to Segal, "it is impossible to ascertain not only the identity of these sects but the number of different sects implied in the passage." He also notes that this is the typical presentation of sectarian practices that are offensive in rabbinic literature.⁵¹ The atypical and more concise occurrence of offensive sectarian practices is found in a passage from *j. Taanith* 65b, "R. Abahu said: If a man says to you, I am God, he is a liar. If he says the Son of Man, in the end, people will laugh at him. If he says, I will go up to heaven, he says so but he will not do it."

Segal points out here that Christians anticipated a Son of Man figure and, moreover, that he ascended and descended from heaven as a sign that this was possibly

⁴⁸ This is the basic of argument of Lawrence Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism*.

⁴⁹ Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 149.

⁵⁰ Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 323.

⁵¹ Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World*, 149.

directed at Christianity.⁵² Segal is correct to note the ambiguities that exist in rabbinic writings, but even the more specific *j. Taanith* passage could perhaps be understood as a messianic group or an eschatological faction within Judaism (which certainly includes Christianity); the point is that one should be careful to use this, and similar passages, as absolute proof since they do not specifically name Jewish Christians.

Some have proposed that the *minim* originated prior to 70 C.E., and even predated Christianity. As I noted above, David Instone-Brewer is one major proponent of this position; he posits the *minim* focused on the Sadducees, who were once the arch nemeses of the Pharisees.⁵³

David Flusser argues that *minim* was utilized prior to the fall of Jerusalem, stating that “the common opinion that *Birkath ha-minim* was added after the Destruction of the Temple and directed against Christians is incorrect.”⁵⁴ He states that the benediction originated during the later Maccabean period. It was the second in a series of three sections of writings placed into the *Shemoneh Esreh*. The first section was a curse against the Sadducees, and the third was a blessing on the Pharisaic community.⁵⁵

The second group is the heretics, which includes the Essenes. He argues that this is evinced by Josephus, who mentions Essenes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.⁵⁶ Jewish Christians were only secondary in the benediction. They were not exclusively targeted by

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Instone-Brewer, "The Eighteen Benedictions and the *Minim* before 70 C. E.," 25-45.

⁵⁴ David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988), 638.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the benediction (*notsrin*) until around the fourth century, correlating with the complaints of Jerome and Epiphanius that the Christians were expelled from the synagogue. Around this time *notsrin* was added in order to emphasize the fact that *minim* primarily targeted Jewish Christians. He suggests that the tensions grew during the second century when the conflict between the Christians and the synagogue was at its height.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, they remained secondary since they are only mentioned in two fragments of the benediction at Cairo Genizah; moreover they were merely added to older texts.⁵⁸

The *minim* were originally anyone that could be considered a dissident, apostate, or traitor—those who handed Jews over to Gentiles—and those who separated themselves from the Jewish camp. He argues that *minim* refers to lists of these Jews predating Christianity, in fact he describes them as the *vorlage* (parent text) of the *Birkat* (cf. *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 13:5 and *Midrash Seder 'Olam*).⁵⁹ He cites lists of *parshu* (those who separated themselves from the community) including heretics, traitors, and apostates.⁶⁰ The implication of this appellation is that one has severed all ties with the Jewish people. In sum, the position that Flusser maintains is that *minim* was not a novel idea originating with Samuel the Little at Jamnia. It had originally referred to Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees. The *vorlage* of the benediction was a list of heretics and apostates that separated themselves from the community. In the second century it became evident that the Jewish Christians had crossed the point of no return and were added,

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 639.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See Ibid.

secondarily, to this group. By the fourth century, *notsrin*, was added because it specifically pointed out the Jewish Christians.⁶¹

Many have followed the lead of J. Louis Martyn in connecting Jamnia with the categorization of the *minim*.⁶² He connects the conflict in John with *b. Berakoth* 28b which recounts the recruitment of Samuel the Little to reformulate the benediction.⁶³ The tenet of his argument is that Jewish Christians were connected with the “heretics” because of their liturgical practice in the synagogue. In other words, their heresy was detected when they participated in synagogue liturgy.

As the outline of a few scholarly arguments suggests, scholars argue for a variety of possible dates that heretics were originally denoted as *minim*. Perhaps, certain groups were always considered heretics. That is, the appearance of the word was probably a systematic way of classifying heretics. Perhaps, then, Kimelman is correct to call *minim* a catch-all phrase for heretics. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem it would not have been necessary to classify opposing groups as heretics since a systematic effort to unify Judaism under the rabbis did not occur before this time. Therefore, the use of the word was not necessarily related to Jesus and his followers in John.

Another important issue concerns the origin of the word *minin*. In its basic form, מִינִי (*min*) means “schismatic or heretic.”⁶⁴ It denotes any group that deviates from the

⁶¹ Ibid., 638-643.

⁶² Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. Martyn was not responsible for making this connection, however, in recent scholarship, that is since the first publication of this book in 1968, he is responsible for popularizing it.

⁶³ Ibid., 65.

“way of the Torah.”⁶⁵ It probably became a useful reference for the rabbis to point out those who did not agree with them. Elbogen rightly cautions, however, that the exact type of heresy targeted is uncertain.

The meaning of this word would indicate that Judaism’s religious leaders were uninterested in sharing control of the religious movement, it would be to their advantage to add as many deviant groups to the *minim* as possible, since it exposed those who deviated from their line of thought.⁶⁶ As Kimelman demonstrates the earliest Tannaitic literature alluding to the *minim* illustrates how those who did not follow rabbinic practices were considered *minim*. In *m. Megilah* 4:8 it considers one who places their phylactery on the forehead or palm is following the way of the *minut*.⁶⁷ Kimelman also points out that in the *Tosfta* (*tBM* 2.33) the *minim* are juxtaposed with Gentiles and in the end the *minim* receive the worse punishment according to the law.⁶⁸

As Schiffman rightly argues, the rabbis never intended to eliminate Jewishness from the *minim*, this was impossible according to halakhic standards.⁶⁹ By identifying

⁶⁴ Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, 31. See also, Francis Brown and others, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979), 568.

⁶⁵ Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, 31.

⁶⁶ Lawrence Schiffman, "Jewish Sectarianism in Second Temple Times," in *Great Schisms in Jewish History*, ed. Raphael Jospe and Stanley M. Wagner (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc, 1981), 78.

⁶⁷ Kimelman, "The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer," 228. See also p. 44 of this thesis.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 229. The situation is regarding meat.

⁶⁹ Schiffman, "At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism," 146.

certain Jews as *minim* it destroys their credibility, and may even eliminate them from participation in the resurrection.⁷⁰ This is suggested by *mSanhedrin* 10:1 which reads,

All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as it is said, ‘Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified forever.’ And these are the ones who have not portion in the world to come. He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching that does not derive from the Torah, and the Torah does not come from Heaven; and an Epicurean.⁷¹

What one should gather from the passage above is that being labeled a *minim* does not eliminate one’s Jewish identity. The passage describes religious consequences; it does not eliminate one’s Jewishness. This indicates that the issue of heresy in rabbinic Judaism is limited to religious implications. In other words, the word *minim* is strictly limited to Jews and religious issues. This could include Jewish Christianity but is certainly not limited to it. In any case, it demonstrates a mature systematic sanction against certain groups of Jews. This is certainly different than the informal accusations leveled against Jesus and his followers in John 9, 12, and 16. In other words, *minim* represents a developed theology regarding heretics. This could hardly have included nascent Jewish Christianity, because the Jews would have needed time to develop their theology against its adherents.

A classic example of religious consequences for heresy can be found in the Babylonian Talmud. In *bSanh* 90a it tells the story of one who denied the resurrection and for that reason will not participate in it. Here this man’s punishment is rejection in the resurrection not a lack of Jewish identity.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid., 140.

⁷¹ Neusner, 604.

It was important for Jewish religious leaders to threaten *minim* with this label since it deterred other Jews from straying from their doctrine. It also added stability to rabbinic Judaism, since a denial of central beliefs threatened Judaism politically and religiously.⁷³

Whatever the case may be, it seems that after the fall of Jerusalem, and the dissipation of the Sadducean movement a reprioritization of interests occurred in Judaism.⁷⁴ An obvious contribution to this need was the destruction of the temple since the Sadducees would have no longer been in contention for the inheritance of Judaism. Likewise Jewish Christianity burgeoned in its nascent years and by the time the rabbis appeared it became necessary for them to categorize heretics, but this could have hardly happened in Jesus' day. It was probably a surprise to religious leadership that even after Jesus was crucified the movement continued to flourish, leading one to believe that the process of categorizing Jewish Christians as heretics took time.

While conflict may have existed between Jewish Christians and their Jewish counterparts the *Birkat ha-minim* did not play a role in the earliest conflict, it formalized Jewish efforts following what John describes. This does not mean that Jewish Christians could not have been considered *minim*, but in Jesus' day, they did not necessarily carry that label. In my opinion, the conflict that the gospel of John testifies to regarding the synagogue in the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and its presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι that has caused some scholars to associate this word with Jewish Christianity is

⁷² Schiffman, "At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism," 140.

⁷³ Ibid., 144-145.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Berakoth* 28b

indicative of Jesus' day; but it is not necessarily indicative of a direct relationship with the *Birkat ha-minim* in Jesus' day.⁷⁵ These signs of existing conflict may reflect Jewish Christianity's reaction to religious persecution by the Jews, but it is premature to associate this to Jesus day.⁷⁶

As I have already noted the fall of Jerusalem to Rome called for drastic measures in Judaism. Surely, sectarianism had plagued Judaism throughout its history, but now more than ever, in order to ensure its survival, and with the assistance of the destruction, many sects were liquidated.⁷⁷ Subsequently, rabbinic Judaism codified its protest against competing sects, to which the *Birkat ha-minim* testifies, but this was not the case in the early Johannine tradition. Scholars have often turned to the Jamnian council under Gamaliel II as the source of the codification, which occurs after the period John describes.⁷⁸ I have also noted that the fall allowed the rabbis to become the juggernauts of Judaism and the means to label various groups as *minut*. This is evinced by the fact that only their (aside from Christian) literature survived.⁷⁹

In the words of Reuven Kimelman, "it can be concluded that one of the prominent groups which could be included in the term *minim* was Jewish Christians."⁸⁰ As I have

⁷⁵ See chapter 1 of this thesis, and for a scholarly treatment of the subject see Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

⁷⁶ Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 132.

⁷⁷ Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 235.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

⁷⁹ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

⁸⁰ Kimelman, "The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer," 232.

indicated above, it is precisely because they did not follow the line of thought that rabbinic Judaism did, hence they, and any other group that didn't, were labeled *minim*. Those labeled with this appellation, as Kimelman pointed out, were excluded from the resurrection. It encompassed Jewish people and was limited to religious implications, it did not ostracize one from the Jewish ethnic community, but it was a programmatic means of ostracizing one from the Jewish religious community.⁸¹ Support for this position can be noted by the word's relation to the *Birkat ha-minim*. That is, the function of this word in the *Birkat ha-minim*, is to target those in the synagogue who are not in solidarity with the religious requirements of the rabbis. Moreover, it functioned in the synagogue, which became a fundamental Jewish religious institution. What early Christian evidence suggests that the Jewish Christians may have been implicated in this benediction? In my opinion, nothing prior to the second century, it is simply too premature to associate the benediction with John.

This leads to the conclusion of this chapter and opens the door to the next chapter. The more that Jewish Christianity developed it became unlike its parent religion, which in my opinion resulted in deeper conflict, and if history paints us a picture with any degree of accuracy, no attempt was made to reconcile Judaism and Jewish Christianity. The gospel of John reports the initial stage of this conflict, but the inclusion of Jewish Christians in the *minim* most likely happened in its more developed stages when the Jews made systematic efforts to expel Christians. Chapter 4 will examine John's side of the story.

⁸¹ I would argue however, that while the *Birkat* did not entail ostracism, it probably resulted in ostracism. Perhaps the longer one was excluded from formal religious fellowship the more separated one became from one's community.

Chapter 4

The Evidence in John

Introduction

In this chapter I will analyze the material in John's gospel indicative of conflict between the Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews—this is the environment within which the *Birkat ha-minim* would most likely appear. There are a few important elements in the gospel that indicate a tainted Jewish and Jewish Christian relationship. First, there is a seemingly negative portrayal of the Ἰουδαῖοι.¹ Second, the word ἀποσυνάγωγος (put out of the synagogue), occurring only three times in the entire NT and all in John suggests an intense conflict. John indicates that the non-Christian Jewish synagogue community expelled Jewish believers. Naturally, this caused the Jewish Christians to have animosity toward the Jews—which may explain the negative presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι. The popular theory surrounding ἀποσυνάγωγος in John is that expulsion from the synagogue occurred as a result of the *Birkat ha-minim*—the negative presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι is then an upshot of this situation.²

The question I want to ask in this chapter is does the elements I have mentioned (i.e., John's presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι, and the passages in which ἀποσυνάγωγος occurs) suggest a direct relationship to the *Birkat ha-minim*? In my opinion the answer is no. First, I believe the seemingly negative presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι is the result of many elements and not exclusively the expulsion from the synagogue especially a

¹ Robert Kysar, "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel of John," in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald Alfred Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 114.

² Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

programmatic expulsion like the *Birkat ha-minim*. Second, I do not believe the evidence is conclusive enough to make a solid connection between the *Birkat* and ἀποσυνάγωγος. Finally, the lack of evidence for a benediction in the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages makes it difficult to establish a direct relationship between the *Birkat ha-minim* and the ostracism from the synagogue communities that Jesus' followers faced in John. I will discuss each of the reasons I have given for rejecting this idea in their respective sections.

Subsequently, I wish to examine the work of Richard Bauckham and his colleagues in *The Gospels for all Christians*.³ I believe their work successfully demonstrates why a synagogue situation was perhaps not limited to one Jewish Christian community. In this section I will also discuss why I believe synagogue expulsion did not occur in every community and why I believe it was sporadic.

Part 1: Ἰουδαῖοι and the Gospel of John

One of the most hotly debated issues in Johannine studies is John's presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι. The issue of John's so-called negative presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι is a primary focus in the dilemma of anti-Judaism in John's the gospel; many have argued that it presents the Jewish people in a negative light by Christians.⁴ Some have argued that the author uses Judaism symbolically to illustrate a point; that is, the negative presentation of the Jews is symbolic, the author was not alluding to a historical presentation of the Jews.⁵ Wayne Meeks has argued that by the time the gospel of John

³ Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*.

⁴ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 9.

⁵ David M. Granskou, "Anti-Judaism in the Passion Accounts of the Fourth Gospel," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, ed. Peter Richardson and S. G. Wilson (Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 209. See

emerges Johannine Christianity was divorced from Judaism and had no expectations of persuading Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. Therefore, the occurrence of Ἰουδαῖοι can refer to deviant Christians in his community—“Jews” is code for unbelievers.⁶

Some have argued for a more positive view of John's Jews; for instance, James Dunn argues that this word occurs in a negative context in only half of its appearances.⁷ Charlesworth concurs arguing that much of the negative light on the Ἰουδαῖοι is the result of mistranslation. He argues that when any hint of negativity is present in the context of Ἰουδαῖοι it should be translated as “religious leadership.”⁸ The particular passage he alludes to is John 11:45-54. It reads,

45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. 47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." 51 He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. 53 So from that day on they planned to put him to death. 54 Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.⁹

also Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 111-117.

⁶ Wayne A. Meeks, "Am I a Jew-Johannine Christianity and Judaism," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 182.

⁷ James D. G. Dunn, "The Embarrassment of History: Reflections on the Problem of 'Anti-Judaism' in the Fourth Gospel," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and et al (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 43-53.

⁸ James H. Charlesworth, "The Gospel of John: Exclusivism Caused by a Social Setting Different from That of Jesus," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and et al (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 247-278.

This scene immediately follows the raising of Lazarus by Jesus (John 11:1-44). Many Jews believed in Jesus when they saw the miracle he performed on Lazarus (11:45), others informed the religious hierarchy, particularly the Pharisees, of what Jesus had done (11:46). They perceived Jesus to be a political threat since many were drawn to him as they witnessed his miracles, causing the Romans to interpret Jesus' new movement as insurrection resulting in destruction by the Romans.¹⁰ Subsequently, for this reason, they plotted to kill Jesus. Hence his move away from the "Jews" is directed towards a specific group, namely the Pharisees. Moreover, there is nothing in this passage to indicate that John intended the reader to know that Jesus went from one town to the next; there is nothing pejorative about this occurrence.

I think Charlesworth is correct to evaluate the context of this passage geographically, noting that Jesus referred to Judean religious leaders, and that Jesus traveled from one geographical location to another.¹¹ He also argues that since Jesus is Jewish any reference to the Jews as "Jews" in a negative sense is ludicrous. The problem with this, however, is that it denies that tension existed among Jews. But, if one views the negative attitude in light of a religious conflict between two groups of the same ethnicity, where the stakes are the inheritance of God's promises, then the conflict has nothing to do with anti-Semitism. Moreover, it explains the tension in the word Ἰουδαῖοι. In my

⁹ This passage is drawn from the NRSV translation of John 11:45-54, it is typical of what Charlesworth argues against particularly the translation of Ἰουδαῖοι as "Jews" as opposed to "Jewish religious leaders."

¹⁰ Perhaps the Romans would view it as a violation of what the parameters concerning the legal Jewish religion.

¹¹ Charlesworth, 256-257.

opinion it is unnecessary to assuage negativity between the two groups, since they had a valid conflict, precisely a religious one.

In an essay about John 8:38-47, where Jesus refers to Jews as children of the devil, Urban Von Wahlde argues that the passage should be interpreted in its context, and one must consider the gospel writer's use of rhetorical tools.¹² He maintains, the context determines that Jesus is engaging in debate with "Jews" who did not believe in him, which Von Wahlde argues is a sign that one rejected God; in the dualistic mind of the gospel writer (i.e., if one rejects God they embrace the devil) it is not a blanket statement about Jewish ethnicity, it is a theological statement. In other words, rejection of Jesus, in the gospel writer's mind, is an utter rejection of God.

Johannes Beutler argues that one must correctly distinguish the semantic value of each individual occurrence of Ἰουδαῖοι in the gospel. Some, for instance, refer strictly to Judean religious authority; others are references to ethnic Jews. He concludes that the original readers were capable of determining the nuance of Ἰουδαῖοι in each occurrence.¹³

H. J. de Jonge argues that the harsh presentation of Ἰουδαῖοι was aimed at Christian Jews contemporary with John. Therefore, it is not an all-inclusive term for the non-Christian Jewish community, but an appellation against Jewish Christians who rejected Johannine christology. In support of this idea, he contends that the gospel was primarily a story about Jesus' earthly ministry, onto which the gospel writer imports the

¹² Urban C. Von Wahlde, "You Are of Your Father the Devil" in Its Context: Stereotyped Apocalyptic Polemic in John 8:38-47," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 192.

¹³ Johannes S. J. Beutler, "Faith and Confession: The Purpose of John," in *Word, Theology, and Community in John*, ed. John Painter and et al (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 19-32.

conflict with his own fellow Christians (non-Johannine) who are the opponents of Jesus in the narrative.¹⁴

De Boer argues that conflict between Jews and Christians is the creation of the author. He argues that the strongest passages using the verb μισέω (hate) (3:20; 7:7; 15:18, 19, 23, 24, 25) toward the Jews are in relation to evil and not the Jews. Moreover, no hostility exists in the gospel toward Jewish traditions and beliefs. Even Jesus' Jewishness is presupposed by the author and the audience making it unlikely that the author would have alluded to "Jews" pejoratively. Therefore, since the gospel writer provides no explanation as to why Jesus appears to be negative to Jews; it is understood that the reader would comprehend John's use of the "Jews" as a rhetorical device. The gospel writer assumes his audience would have interpreted "Jews" as a reference to the world. The crux of his article is that the anti-Jewishness in the Fourth Gospel is highly suspicious. De Boer finds no validation in the gospel to support the idea that Christians hated Jews.¹⁵

Adele Reinhartz argues that the anti-Jewish attitude in John's presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι is an element of two-pole dualistic rhetoric (e.g. evil vs. good, light vs. dark).¹⁶ This form of rhetoric is inclusive of those who accepted the evangelist's christology and exclusive to those who rejected it.¹⁷ This type of rhetoric was essential to the author's

¹⁴ Henk de Jonge, "The Jews in the Gospel of John," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and et al (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 121-122.

¹⁵ Martinus C. de Boer, "The Depiction of the Jews in John's Gospel: Matters of Behavior and Identity," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and et al (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141-157.

¹⁶ Adele Reinhartz, "'Jews' and Jews in the Fourth Gospel," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and et al (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 214.

Christological emphasis; hence he could not include salvation for the Jews. Naturally, the Jews represented those who rejected Johannine christology.¹⁸

In my opinion, the issue was not ethnicity, it was theology and politics. Raymond Brown's position supports an argument for a theological conflict, by suggesting that there are several connotations of the word. Some occurrences are ethnic designations (4:9, 22; 18:35); some are geographical (Judean Jews as opposed to other Jews 4:47, 54; 7:1, 3; 11:7); and other times it is a pejorative reference to those who are hostile to Jesus.

The negative connotation of Ἰουδαῖοι against the Jews is the result of religious tension originating in Jesus' day. John makes an effort to point out those who were hostile to Jesus and his followers.¹⁹ This is evidenced in John's comments that his opponents are not true "Jews." In 5:46-47 he accuses them of not truly believing in Moses; in 7:19, 24 and 8:15 he accuses them of not keeping the law and seeking to kill Jesus. John also says that they will die in their sins, they are not the children of God, they are liars, they are the devil's children, and they are spiritually blind (8:24, 34, 41, 44, 47, 55; 9:41).²⁰ Brown continues by arguing that Ἰουδαῖοι as a pejorative appellation represents an attitude that suggests Johannine Christians no longer considered themselves Jews.²¹ I agree with Brown that the negative presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι in John's

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Samuel Sandmel also holds that the schism between Jews and Christians may have been deepened to emphasize John's Christology. He is not denying the historicity of John, but seems to believe that John made extra effort to emphasize his Christology making the conflict seem more severe than it was. See Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). Samuel Sandmel, *The First Christian Century in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Oxford, 1969).

¹⁹ Brown and Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 158.

²⁰ Ibid., 157-158.

²¹ See also Granskou, 201-202.

gospel is the result of religious conflict between Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews (11:47-48), but it is difficult to follow the idea that Johannine Christians did not consider themselves Jews since they accused the religious leadership of not being true Jews. Moreover, John limits the pejorative use of the term to those who are in conflict with Jesus and his followers, which is not inclusive of the Jewish nation as a whole.²²

In addition to the issue of Jewishness Anderson proposes that tensions between the northern and southern parts of Israel may have influenced the pejorative use of Ἰουδαῖοι. The basic idea is that Jesus was rejected in the south (Judea) since he would have been considered a prophet from the north (Galilee). Naturally, this occurred in the midst of the Jerusalemcentric worldview of the Judea's religious leaders.²³

Peter Tomson takes issue with those who argue that the term Ἰουδαῖοι had any other meaning but the Jewish ethos, therefore, the opposition was not a Jewish group but Gentiles.²⁴ He notes,

the intention has often been to show not the 'real Jews' were meant, but the 'Jews' as a theological type or as the theological leadership, as opposed to the nation of the Jews themselves; or alternatively, the 'Judeans' as opposed to the Galilean Jews in the Greco-Roman period none other is ever meant but the Jew.²⁵

Tomson's argument is untenable for several reasons. First, he limits language's ability to morph under special circumstances—like the emergence of the Jewish Christian

²² Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 11.

²³ Paul N. Anderson, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue-Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," (Georgfox University, 2005), 1-16.

²⁴ Peter J. Tomson, "The Names Israel and Jew in Ancient Judaism and in the New Testament," *Bijdragen tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie*. 47, no. 3 (1986).

²⁵ Ibid.

movement and its encounter with opponents.²⁶ The gospel narrative warrants a variety of uses of Ἰουδαῖοι in order to point out Jesus' opposition. According to Tomson John could not use the term to refer to the religious see of Jerusalem; his idea suggests that according to John, opposition of Jesus is indicative of Jewishness. Second he suggests that no extant evidence indicates an alternative meaning of "Jew."²⁷ This ignores the gospel of John in which a variety of nuances of Ἰουδαῖοι occur. Third, it appears that he must argue for a Gentile opposition in order to avoid accusing John of blatant anti-Judaism. However, if one places John's pejorative use of the word in its context—a hostile intra-Jewish conflict—then it solves the issue since John was merely pointing out Jesus' opposition.

If the word has so many different connotations, as most scholars agree, how did its broad semantic range develop? The term Ἰουδαῖοι first appeared after the Assyrian conquest and was used geographically; that is, it came to represent Jews in the southern part of Israel.²⁸ In the Babylonian and Persian periods the term picked up religious connotations; it became associated with Judaism.²⁹ During the Hasmonean era Ἰουδαῖοι was associated with the political and military institutions of the nation.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid.: 47.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Morton Smith, "The Gentiles in Judaism 125 B.C.E.-C.E. 66," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W. D. Davies William Horbury, John Sturdy (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999), 193. It developed simultaneously with the word for the pagan people גוֹ which came to refer to pagan peoples or nations.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 210.

In Philo's writings the term occurs mostly in a religious context (Flacc., 49; Virt., 212, 226). For instance in Virt., 226 an enemy of the "Jew" is one who teaches one to reject obedience in favor of placing one's trust on the accomplishments of one's ancestors.³¹ In Josephus the word occurs to represent a religious group and a national group (cf. Ant. 11, 13, 171, 173).³²

By the time the Johannine writer uses the term its semantic domain includes an intra-Jewish usage.³³ This is not to say that the writer is limited to an intra-Jewish usage, but it is characteristic of his use. In 8:31 John refers to "Jews who believed in him" (NRSV) indicating that there are Jews who do not believe in him. They appear in 8:33 and 37 where Jesus indicts them as slaves to sin, they disagree arguing that they have never been enslaved. In verse 37 Jesus exposes their intention to kill him. Clearly in these instances Jesus does not use Jew pejoratively toward the entire Jewish race but only those who do not believe his message and plan to kill him.³⁴

In my opinion, there is no reason to believe that John is hostile to the Jews only because they engaged in conflict with Jewish Christians in the synagogues— John is hostile as a result of the plot against Jesus.

Perhaps a separation of two millennia creates difficulty in understanding the free use of the term. There is no reason to believe that John and his readers required a

³¹ Walter Gutbrod, K. G. Kuhn, and Gerhard Von Rad, "Israel," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 370.

³² Ibid., 371.

³³ Urban C. Von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *New Testament Studies* 28 (1982): 47.

³⁴ Ibid.

conscious effort to distinguish between each occurrence, inasmuch as one today could not distinguish the plethora of meanings “American” has.

In short, the pejorative occurrences of Ἰουδαῖοι are not the result of the *Birkat ha-minim*. The most plausible backdrop of John’s critical use of term is opposition to Jesus. But as Charlesworth and Brown have pointed out, John targeted a very specific group of “Jews.”³⁵ In my opinion, a conflict as well as, the pejorative use of the term originated prior to the emergence of the *Birkat*, since initial conflict between Jews and Jesus’ adherents occurred prior to its composition.

ἀποσυνάγωγος and the Lack of Evidence for a Direct Relationship to the *Birkat ha-minim*

Perhaps the sturdiest evidence that John had the 12th benediction in mind as he wrote rests on a single word that occurs three times in the entire New Testament, ἀποσυνάγωγος (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Despite its sparse appearance in the New Testament scholars who conjecture the direct relationship of the benediction to John’s gospel have depended on it as proof that the synagogue community ousted Jesus’ followers under the auspices of the *Birkat ha-minim*.

The word connotes a complete and total excommunication from the synagogue, literally to “be put out of the synagogue.”³⁶ This is distinct from other punishments imposed in the synagogue. Two levels of punishment existed, and none of these resulted in utter excommunication.³⁷ The first and most common form of punishment, נָדָו, resulted in a thirty day suspension from participation in synagogue life. There are several

³⁵ Brown and Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*; Charlesworth, 250.

³⁶ Wolfgang Schrage, “Apasunagogos,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 849.

³⁷ Ibid., 848.

occurrences of this in Talmudic literature (*bNed.*, 7b; 50b; *bMQ*, 16a, b; 17a; *jMQ* 3, 1).

One acquired this punishment by pronouncing the divine name, disrespecting one's teachers, and denigrating Jews before non-Jews.³⁸

The second level of punishment required the offender to abstain from synagogue participation indefinitely. One acquired this punishment after at least two failed attempts at rehabilitation by first level punishments (cf. *bMQ* 16a).³⁹ Despite its severe sanctions, even the second level allowed for reinstatement in the community; the sanction of ἀποσυνάγωγος, however, exceeded even this.

In order for scholars who posit a direct relationship of the benediction to the Johannine situation to maintain their argument, they have had to connect the severity of ἀποσυνάγωγος to the *Birkat ha-minim*. The question, then, is do the three verses in John where the word ἀποσυνάγωγος occurs warrant such a correlation; is there ample evidence to support this connection? Some think it does.

J. Louis Martyn, in *History and Theology of the Fourth Gospel*, argues that if one reads the ἀποσυνάγωγος passages as the history of the second-generation community (circa 70-90 C. E.) it indicates the implementation of the *Birkat ha-minim* following the Jamnian council, which resulted in the expulsion of the Jewish Christians from synagogues.⁴⁰ Likewise, C. K. Barrett argues that the benediction closely parallels John's

³⁸ Ibid., 849.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

depiction. Moreover, the language in the benediction indicates the Jewish Christians as its target.⁴¹

In this section I will briefly examine the three passages where ἀποσυνάγωγος occurs in order to determine if a direct relationship exists between the benediction and the excommunication John records. In my opinion, there is no direct relationship, because no evidence exists to support a correlation. What Jesus and his disciples encounter is rash and perhaps violent expulsion; John seems to describe the immediate reaction of the Jewish leadership to the threat of Jesus' growing influence. It is uncharacteristic of the programmatic or systematic expulsion found in the *Birkat ha-minim*. They struck fear in the hearts of those who considered a public confession of Jesus. I will accomplish this investigation by exegeting the three passages. It is my contention that the conflict John records is sporadic, and occurred prior to the codification of efforts to expel the Jewish Christians, that is before the emergence of the *Birkat ha-minim*.

Part 2: John 9:22

John 9:22 occurs in the pericope about a blind man that Jesus heals shortly after the Feast of Tabernacles (9:1-41).⁴² One may assume that it took place shortly after the Feast of Tabernacles for five reasons. First, the text notes that the blind man “sat and begged” (9:8) which may indicate that he was near the temple gate where heavy traffic occurred during feast times. Second, Jesus instructed the man to go to the pool of Siloam (9:7).⁴³ Third, chapter 8 concludes as Jesus exits the temple. Fourth, his disciples are not

⁴¹ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 301.

⁴² Beasley-Murray, *John*, 153.

⁴³ Ibid.

present in chapters 7-8 but reappear at the opening of 9. Finally, according to chapters 7-8 the schism between Jesus and the religious leadership expanded.⁴⁴ The fact that the scene happens shortly after a feast is significant since it connects the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees with the conflict from 7 and 8. In other words, tension had built up from previous confrontations and perhaps they feared losing their following to him. Hence, it explains why they divided the crowd over Jesus miracle (9:16). The fact that this conflict happened shortly after a feast probably fueled the Pharisees agitation with Jesus. To add more fuel, Jesus, a prophet from Galilee invaded their territory and engaged in practices subversive to their Jerusalecentric practices.⁴⁵

As the scene opens an undisclosed amount of time had elapsed since Jesus' trip to the temple for the feast-evidenced by the reappearance of the disciples in chapter 9 after a two chapter hiatus in 7 and 8. The pericope initially revolves around the reason for the man's blindness. As Jesus and his disciples walk they encounter the blind man, and naturally the curiosity of the disciples causes them to ask Jesus why the man is blind. John sets up their question by informing the reader that the man's condition plagued him since birth—it is also implied that the disciples knew since no one told them.⁴⁶ They inquire with two possible reasons. First, they ask him if the man's sin caused his blindness. Second, they ask if his parent's sin was responsible. In other words, their

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Anderson, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue-Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," 5.

⁴⁶ Ernst Haenchen, Robert Walter Funk, and Ulrich Busse, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 37.

ideology is that sin causes sickness as a punishment.⁴⁷ One can acquire sickness by one's own sin or one's parents can pass it on to their children.

For them sickness is related to sin, it is even passed on to one's offspring. This line of thinking was common among the people of the day. For instance, several Jewish and non-Jewish texts note that one's affliction and infertility was the result of one's wrongdoing.⁴⁸ 1 Enoch 98:5 reads, "why is a woman not given (a child)? On account of the deeds of her own hands would she die without children. I swear to you, sinners, by the Holy Great One, that all your evil deeds are revealed in the heavens."⁴⁹

Jesus responds to their inquiry, probably to their shock, "neither" (9:3). Jesus then sets up the theological backdrop of the miracle he is about to perform by shifting the initial preoccupation with the cause of the man's sickness to its theological implications (3b-5).⁵⁰ He moves on by explaining the reason for the man's blindness, "he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (9:3b NRSV). Next through a dualistic statement, he shifts the focus from the blind man to himself. Jesus says, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:4-5). The use of light-darkness metaphors in the texts prompt the reader to recall John 1, where the issue of light is first discussed and re-established in 8:12.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 775.

⁴⁸ CD 15. 14-15; 1QM 7.4-5; *b. Ber.* 58b

⁴⁹ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, vol. 1 (Doubleday, 1983), 78.

⁵⁰ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 377.

The point Jesus makes is that the reason the man is blind is unimportant, but the fact that God is revealing his work in the man is significant.⁵² Moreover, in light of God's activity he charges them to continue the work of God as opportunities—such as the blind man—occur.⁵³

Following his brief charge to the disciples Jesus proceeds to perform the miracle on the blind man (9:7). Great shock occurred among those who knew the man as a blind beggar, some recognized him and others did not want to believe it (9:9). Immediately, the people questioned the man about the source of his miracle. He responds by telling them it was Jesus and the crowd demands to know where he is (9:12).

In the next verse, the story shifts from Jesus to the man's encounter with the Pharisees. In my opinion, John uses this opportunity to develop the distinction between the followers of Jesus and the opposition. This is evidenced by Jesus' second encounter with the man in verse 35, where Jesus suddenly reappears and asks him if he believes in the Son of man.

In verse 14 John specifies that the healing occurred on a Sabbath day. The Pharisees initial attack questioned Jesus' miracle since he healed on the Sabbath. They contended that Jesus had to be a sinner since he violated the Sabbath rule.⁵⁴ The violation is likely related to the Mishnah's ruling from Shabbat 7:2 and 8:1 which read, "He who

⁵¹ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, 1st pbk. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 190.

⁵² J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1989), 160. See also Paul W. Meyer, *The Word in This World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

⁵³ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 292.

⁵⁴ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 292-293.

knows the principle of the Sabbath and performed many acts of labor on many different Sabbath days is liable for the violation of each and every Sabbath he who takes out water enough to rub an eye salve.”⁵⁵

However, the Pharisees did not receive unanimous approval in their rejection of Jesus’ miracle. Verse 16 declares that in response to the Pharisees some in the crowd shouted that as a sinner, Jesus could not have performed the miracle. As a result, the crowd divided. In the midst of their division, they turn to the man who Jesus healed for his opinion, and he responded that Jesus was a prophet.⁵⁶ The man’s answer did not satisfy the crowd, however, since, they had suspicion about the claim that his condition occurred at birth (9:17). In doubt, they turn to his parents to hear their spin on the situation (9:18). Interestingly, the parents respond very carefully in order to avoid a confrontation—they contended that the man had the ability to answer for himself. Verse 22 explains that the parents wanted to avoid the “Jews”—most likely the synagogue authorities, since some were ἀποσυνάγωγος or put out of the synagogue.

The parent’s plight is reasonable, since ostracism from the synagogue meant severance of social ties—most of one’s social life circled around gatherings in synagogues. Perhaps even economic hardship occurred at the hand of expulsion.⁵⁷ As I discussed above, the implications of ἀποσυνάγωγος are permanent, as opposed to the other two levels of punishment in which one could re-establish their membership in the synagogue community.

⁵⁵ Neusner, 187, 188.

⁵⁶ Haenchen, Funk, and Busse, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 39.

⁵⁷ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 146.

Verse 22 states that the synagogue leadership expelled Jews who confessed Jesus as the Messiah. Does this warrant the claim that the *Birkat ha-minim* is responsible for the ostracism the parents of the man healed feared? In my opinion no solid evidence exists to suggest that John had the benediction in mind.

The writer(s) of the *Birkat ha-minim* established it for use in the synagogue, and it would have had no affect in the context where John utilizes ἀποσυνάγωγος. According to the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakoth 28b*) the benediction uncovered one's hesitation to read it in the synagogue. Martyn argues that,

any Jew who made the messianic confession would have to pay the price of absolute severance from the synagogue. The Benediction of the Heretics was employed for detecting such Jews, and they were promptly excommunicated.⁵⁸

The procedure that he argues for is untenable, precisely because such a severe excommunication would require the authority of a court; even the second level of punishment administered by the synagogue required the authorization of a court, naturally a more severe and final punishment required the same.⁵⁹ In my opinion, ἀποσυνάγωγος seems more severe than luring one into reciting the benediction as a precentor in a synagogue meeting as Martyn suggests.⁶⁰ Judging by the strict guidelines the Jews followed to avoid tainting the synagogue, the suspected confessor would not have even had the opportunity to participate as a precentor in order to avoid embarrassment to the community. If I am correct, 9:22 falls short of connecting ἀποσυνάγωγος with the *Birkat ha-minim*.

⁵⁸ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 53.

⁵⁹ Schrage, "Apasunagogos," 849.

⁶⁰ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 53.

Even more damaging to a position positing a direct relationship to the benediction is no mention anywhere in John or in the New Testament of Jewish liturgy utilized to expel people from the synagogue. John records that synagogues expelled people for confessing Jesus as the Messiah.⁶¹

The pericope is theologically pregnant, and therefore, should lead one to examine it theologically and not as an attempt to reconstruct the historical condition of a community—precisely because John is a theological narrative.⁶² In my opinion, it seems conclusive that John intended his readers to draw theological and social ramifications about confession of Christ as Messiah and not to relive the history of the second generation Johannine Christians. 9:22 is most likely part of a motif in John to warn the readers about the consequences for following Christ—a very specific example. Another example of Jesus bracing his followers for the approaching conflict is 15:18-21,

If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world-- therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me (NRSV).

In conclusion, the historical element in this passage occurred during Jesus day. Most likely, synagogue expulsion occurred sporadically, and initiated shortly after the emergence of synagogues—possibly during Jesus' ministry. It is my contention that John included this information in his narrative to stress to the reader the sacrifice of those who

⁶¹ Alan F. Segal, "Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson (Waterloo, Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1986), 155.

⁶² Watson, 205-217.

confess Christ and to brace the reader for the same challenge of giving up one's social and possibly economic status for the sake of Christ. The circumstances surrounding ἀποσυνάγωγος in 9:22 indicate a more intense and sporadic expulsion than the *Birkat ha-minim* could deliver—there is no evidence of a programmatic expulsion. Also, if one reads John “literally” as a theological narrative (like Watson proposes) one must take the conflict at face value and posit that John is describing events from Jesus ministry—not necessarily after Jamnia as the *Birkat ha-minim* proponents argue.⁶³ Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence that in Jesus' day a unified effort to remove Jewish Christians from the synagogue existed—such as the *Birkat ha-minim*. The *Birkat ha-minim* represents a “codified” effort long after the most intense conflict had passed.⁶⁴

My conclusion highlights why Richard Bauckham and company's research is so significant. It challenges what he calls the scholarly “consensus” of the reconstructed community forcing the reader to read the narrative as a document addressed to all Christians; in turn, a theological interpretation is perhaps the most efficient.⁶⁵ I will return to Bauckham following a discussion of 12:42 and 16:2.

Part 2: John 12:42

The tone of this passage is set by, what Brown calls, a “chain of actions.” That is, the Lazarus story initiated a movement toward Jesus' death.⁶⁶ The Lazarus miracle focuses the reader on Jesus as the “resurrection and the life” (11:25), correlating with a

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

⁶⁵ Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, 30.

⁶⁶ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 469.

definitive statement about his work in 12:32-33, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die” (NRSV).⁶⁷

It is part of a literary unit beginning at 12:23 and continuing until 12:50. It opens as a group of people, Jews and Greeks (12:20), attending the Passover confronts Philip and requests to meet with Jesus. For some reason John advertises the presence of non-Jews. Schnackneburg argues that Jesus did not pay attention to them, but that John inserted this information for theological reasons, precisely to alert the reader of Jesus’ imminent death in which will open the door for Greeks.⁶⁸ However, in verse 19, out of frustration, the Pharisees say, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!” (NRSV; cf. 11). Perhaps they meant “whole world” literally, in that Greeks were present. The fact that Jesus captivated even the Greeks who came to the festival probably angered the Pharisees even more.

This is important for understanding the passage since Jesus is emphasizing his imminent suffering of which the Pharisees share in the blame. The fact that it is an urgent matter is evidenced by Jesus’ climactic introduction in Greek, ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα—the hour has come.⁶⁹ This sets the stage for what Jesus is about to discuss, the end of his life, and what is necessary for them to remain disciples. Therefore, one must read the passage in

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Schnackneburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 382.

⁶⁹ Barnabas Lindars, “The Persecution of Christians in John 15:18-16:4a,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G.M. Styler*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 81.

that light to understand why Jesus is delivering his message, and its theological meaning.⁷⁰

In verse 24 John states that Jesus answers his crowd, yet there is no explicit question asked by the crowd, but 12:18 states that the crowd wanted to meet with him because he had raised Lazarus from the dead.⁷¹ Jesus avoids entertaining their question by directing the meeting to a discussion concerning the importance of discipleship.⁷² Discipleship he explains requires a total sacrifice which requires following Jesus in all circumstances.⁷³

In verse 27, Jesus' anxiety is clear as he tries to explain to the crowd that he is going to die, but will intransigently endure.⁷⁴ Jesus is aware of the option of turning back on his decision to die, but chooses to proceed.⁷⁵ In verse 28 his audience experiences a surreal encounter with God hearing a voice from heaven. The voice in heaven confirms what Jesus is telling his crowd; this is suggested by the fact that Jesus tells his listeners the voice was for them not Jesus (12:30).⁷⁶

Verses 31-33 are theologically pregnant. John allows the reader to know that Jesus' death is more than an imminent historical event; verse 33 is a literary aside in

⁷⁰ W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1965), 95.

⁷¹ Michaels, *John*, 223.

⁷² Beasley-Murray, *John*, 211.

⁷³ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 213.

⁷⁴ Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 487.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 489.

⁷⁶ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 877.

which John notes why Jesus is going to die—to draw all him (verse 32).⁷⁷ Verses 31-32 explain the meaning of Jesus death. First, Jesus explains that his death means judgment to the world and to the “ruler” of this world.⁷⁸ Second, his death means all men are invited to experience God through Christ. I believe this is suggested by the presence of the Greeks noted in verse 20. Barrett argues that Jesus ignored the Greeks since he had not died. However, there is nothing in the passage suggesting that he sent them away or ignored them. A more convincing description of the passage is that the magnitude of his death and resurrection was so great that its power transcended his death. This is confirmed by verse 42 which states that many believed in him, including authorities; it is also confirmed by Jesus ministry—he healed the sick, raised the dead and built up a community of apostles and disciples. It was a true sign that Jesus death was significant. Even the Pharisees knew that Jesus’ popularity was too dominant to assuage.

In verses 34-36 Jesus does not entertain the crowd’s question about the Messiah’s inability to die, but warns them that they must follow him to the end in order to become children of the light. Following the encounter with the crowd John writes that Jesus hid from them. Perhaps this is John’s way of shifting attention from Jesus to the crowd, since Jesus disappears until verse 43.

John notes that despite Jesus miracles many did not believe (12:37). He interprets this situation through the lens of Isaiah 6; John believed that Isaiah predicted Jesus’

⁷⁷ Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 1 (1972): 65.

⁷⁸ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 357.

rejection, in verse 39 he states that they could not have believed because of this passage.⁷⁹

Following his excursus on Isaiah, he adds that despite Isaiah's prediction many believed (12:42). This group of believers was special, however, because they believed in Jesus, but they did not confess him because they were afraid of the "Jews."⁸⁰ One encounters a similar fear in 9:22 when the parents of the blind man that Jesus healed are afraid to concede that he healed their son. That passage, however, does not indicate that the parents believed. In this passage a group of believers that is too afraid to confess Jesus emerges; this is one of several occurrences of "closet Christian." This verse stands out because a major theme in the gospel is confession (cf. 1:48-51).⁸¹ And the matter is all the more serious since those described as believers were also authorities, perhaps part of the group plotting against Jesus.⁸² The challenge, then, is to love God more than "human glory" (12:43).⁸³

The key to understanding this passage is verse 43 where John explains that they chose human glory over God's glory. This is a key to John's theology and the reason he includes the story in his narrative. He is trying to convince the reader that unless one is willing to sacrifice all they fall short of Christ's expectation.

This is not the first time "closet Christians" have appeared. Perhaps the most famous occurrence is in John 3 with Nicodemus, the ruler that was too afraid to approach

⁷⁹ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 883.

⁸⁰ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 364.

⁸¹ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 418.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 419.

⁸³ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 885.

Jesus during the day.⁸⁴ If one maintains that 9, 12, and 16 concerns a second generation then one must conclude that Nicodemus is also a post-Jamnian account. I find it difficult to maintain an allegorical two-level reading of the gospel when this passage seems to clearly indicate that a historical Nicodemus encountered the historical Jesus. In any case, the Nicodemus story indicates that association with Jesus may attract harm, even in Jesus' day. Yet, Martyn and others have understood verse 42 to speak exclusively of second generation Christians. John P. Meyer calls the possibility of the event described in 12 happening in Jesus day inconceivable and uncharacteristic of the social climate in Palestine around 28-30 CE.⁸⁵ He explains that it was a new experience for John and his community but is cautious about the involvement of the *Birkat ha-minim*.⁸⁶ Martyn comments,

at some time prior to John's writing, an authoritative body within Judaism reached a formal decision regarding messianic faith in Jesus. Henceforth, whoever confesses such faith is to be separated from the synagogue.⁸⁷

His comments are *a priori* without any sufficient evidence to support his claim.

He refuses to take this story at face value occurring in Jesus day. He assumes that a committee formally banning Jewish Christians from the synagogue had to convene before the religious see could expel the confessors of Jesus from the synagogue.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ John P. Meyer, *A Marginal Jew: Companions and Comparisons*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 334.

⁸⁶ John P. Meyer, *A Marginal Jew: Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 743.

⁸⁷ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

In further support of his ideas Martyn cites Jesus' argument with the Pharisees in which they say to the crowd, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses" (9:28 NRSV).⁸⁸ Martyn argues that,

This statement is scarcely conceivable in Jesus' lifetime, since it recognizes discipleship to Jesus not only as antithetical, but also as somehow comparable, to discipleship to Moses. It is on the other hand, easily understood under circumstances in which the synagogue has begun to view the Christian movement as an essential and more or less clearly distinguishable rival. The agreement is, then, a formal one, reached by an authoritative body within Judaism intended to separate two rivals, and at John's writing it has already been in effect for some indeterminate time.

Martyn's comments are unwarranted for two reasons. First, Martyn makes the antithetical claim of the Pharisees to be indicative of a programmatic effort to have confessors removed from the synagogue—the implementation of the *Birkat ha-minim*.

According to the narrative, this is the result of a frustrated Pharisaical camp trying to undermine Jesus—he had major conflicts with the Pharisees in 7 and 8 that resulted in their frustration. Second, Anderson has convincingly argued that formal efforts commenced after the hottest conflict between the confessors and the synagogue; the *Birkat ha-minim* was not an issue during the Pharisees efforts to frustrate Jesus.⁸⁹

I think Martyn is correct to believe that Jewish Christians were expelled from the synagogues during the second generation, but he seems to deny the possibility that the situation described in John occurred before fall of Jerusalem, perhaps in order to maintain his two-level drama—an allegorical narrative of the community's history.⁹⁰ He maintains

⁸⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁹ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

⁹⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 217.

that there is no way John could have known that this group was unbelievers.⁹¹ However, as Bauckham and company have pointed out because Christians in many communities had frequent contact, they passed on many Christian traditions in the course of meeting.⁹² Therefore, it is untenable to limit this story to only the “Johannine Community.”

To consider the *Birkat ha-minim* responsible for the fear of the believers in 12:42 is untenable since there is no indication of it. It is not mentioned, there is no Jewish liturgy mentioned, and there is no indication of a formal effort to expel the Jewish Christians from the synagogue.

If one follows a theological interpretation of the passage however, then the historical details of the passage are not as important and one clearly sees John’s mission to describe the lifestyle of one who confesses Jesus. This certainly fits the context, in which Jesus is very concerned that his disciples understand that following him requires absolute sacrifice. What’s more is that, John says of those who could not cross over into full confession, “for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God” (12:43 NRSV). In other words, only full commitment to Christ is acceptable. Finally, if John feared the *Birkat ha-minim* he certainly would have included it in his narrative to expose the reality of confessing Jesus even stronger. Obviously, John had nothing to hide as indicated by his explicit description of the synagogue separation and how it struck fear on the hearts of Jewish believers (9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

⁹¹ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 49.

⁹² Thompson, “The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation,” 40-65.

Separation from the synagogue was a grave matter for a people whose social status depended on their participation in the synagogue.⁹³ Also as I pointed out in my discussion of 9:22, the expulsion by the Pharisees seemed to be more severe than the efficacy of the 12th benediction permits. The efficacy of the *Birkat ha-minim* was limited to tricking one to have the responsibility of a precentor and hoping they struggle reading the 12th benediction so that the synagogue leaders could label one a *minut*. This passage describes the Pharisees actively seeking out Christ confessors to excommunicate. This also explains why the group in 12:42 was afraid to confess Christ—with frequent travel around Jerusalem and Judea and the fact that people gathered from all over for Passover it is possible that word spread quickly about the Pharisees efforts to expel Christ confessors from synagogues. If even only a few synagogues had expelled confessors there is no telling how out of proportion the truth about the practice of excommunication spread by word of mouth!

What John 12 demonstrates, is an unorganized attempt to draw Jesus' followers away by fear. The passage records that many believed in Jesus but because of the Pharisees' strong-arm tactics they did not openly confess Christ. The people feared the Pharisees and not the benediction or its employment. There was nothing programmatic about this experience.

Part 3: John 16:2

This verse occurs in a theological discourse analogous to the verse in the foregoing analysis, 12:42. In the pericope beginning at 15:18 Jesus exhorts his disciples about what to do when maintaining their confession of Christ becomes exceedingly

⁹³ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 215.

difficult.⁹⁴ The theme he challenges his audience with is “remaining”; according to 15:7-8, remaining in Christ means to have his word abide in one.⁹⁵

The theme was exceedingly relevant because at this point his disciples had to be aware of Jesus’ imminent fate, and perhaps even distraught; this is suggested by chapters 13-15. In 13:1 John says, “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father” (NRSV). Also in 13 Jesus exposes Judas’ plan to betray him. Another indication that Jesus speech in 16 correlates with preparing the disciples, is the final pericope of chapter 13 Peter’s dramatic promise to Jesus that he would lay down his life for him, and Jesus’ response that Peter would deny him. In verse 14, Jesus offers the disciples comforting words by promising that their separation is not permanent. This makes the speech Jesus delivers to his disciples in 16 appropriate since it continues the preparation of his disciples for his death.⁹⁶

Following almost three chapters of preparation—Jesus explaining his death, the necessity of “remaining” in him, and that the separation is not permanent—he delivers a crucial reminder. In 15:18 he explains that if the world hates them, it hated him first. Perhaps John’s audience had grown accustomed to adversity that led to ostracism from the synagogue community—he had introduced this in 9:22 and 12:42. Adversity toward Christians is also recorded outside of the Christian writings in the *Annals* of Tacitus 15.44,

Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom

⁹⁴ Kurt Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum: Locis Parallelis Evangeliorum Apocryphorum Et Patrum Adhibitis*, Ed. 13 rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985), 448.

⁹⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 275. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 421.

⁹⁶ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, 67.

the name had the origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.⁹⁷

The brutal reality of utter rejection by society, I believe, was not a brand new experience for Jewish Christians by the time John finished writing; the text points out that they should expect hatred from the world that rejected Jesus and will continue rejecting him by rejecting his disciples.⁹⁸ However, the reason John hammers the motif of preparation and warning about the danger of confessing Christ, was because it was such a harsh reality for all Christians—everyone needed to be aware of it. This means that John probably did not write in order to retell the story of a community. The fact that the persecution would continue is supported grammatically, the word “hate” that Jesus uses to describe the situation *μεμίσηκεν* appears in its perfect form, and Brown notes that this indicates that John intended his readers to understand that the hatred of Jesus will continue to happen through his disciples.⁹⁹

In 5:19, Jesus indicates another reason he believes that the world will hate his disciples—because they are not from this world.¹⁰⁰ In support of his statement he juxtaposes their identification with Christ to identification with the world. He does this to show that if they were part of the world they would be accepted. But Jesus says that since he has chosen them, they are hated by the world.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Cornelius Tacitus and others, *The Complete Works of Tacitus: The Annals. The History. The Life of Cnaeus Julius Agricola. Germany and Its Tribes. A Dialogue on Oratory* (New York: The Modern library, 1942), 380.

⁹⁸ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 399.

⁹⁹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 686.

¹⁰⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 275.

¹⁰¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 686.

In verse 20, Jesus accentuates the probability of rejection by guaranteeing they will experience it. Through a familiar Johannine Jesus saying, he says that they are not exempt from suffering, “Servants are not greater than their master if they persecuted me, they will persecute you”; this saying also occurs in 13:16.¹⁰²

In verse 21 Jesus explains why the unbelievers will persecute the disciples; they persecute because they do not know God. The rejection of Jesus demonstrates one’s separation from God (cf. 5:38; 8:42f, 46f).¹⁰³

In verse 22 Jesus indicates that there are some who utterly reject him. He is very clear about what this represents. First, it represents the full fruition of his ministry. John explains that “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,” and, “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11, 14 NRSV). Second, it indicates theologically that rejection of Jesus is rejection of God. The unbelievers have rejected God’s revelation of himself in Jesus for their understanding of God.¹⁰⁴ In verse 23 Jesus states his theology perhaps clearer than in any place in the gospel—“whoever hates me hates my father also” (5:23). Jesus qualifies his bold claim in verse 24 by repeating to his disciples that the works he did revealed his father, yet they rejected him and hence his father (cf. 14:7).¹⁰⁵ Jesus concludes by alluding to a Jewish scripture Psalm 35:19 to accuse the opposition by their own law.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 115.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 117.

¹⁰⁴ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 430.

¹⁰⁵ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 1021.

¹⁰⁶ Francis J. Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13-21* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 70.

Verses 26-27 of chapter 15 wrap up the preceding discourse and lead into the next chapter. Jesus explains why it is so important to “remain” in him, precisely because they are the witnesses to the whole world.¹⁰⁷ Their witness in conjunction with the witness of the Holy Spirit will testify on Jesus’ behalf.¹⁰⁸

To summarize the discourse to this point, Jesus stresses the importance of remaining in him, the difficult challenges they will encounter, why the world hates them and finally reminds them of the work they must complete—witnessing about Jesus in conjunction with the Holy Spirit. This clarifies what Jesus says at the beginning of 16.

In 16:1 Jesus says, “I have said these things to keep you from stumbling” (NRSV). This statement is inclusive of 15:18-27, not just the immediate preceding verses, that is he is preparing them for persecution not just their job to witness.¹⁰⁹

In 16:2, Jesus warns the group that for confessing him his opponents will force them out of the synagogues. Moloney notes, that Jesus probably mentioned this because for some this was already a reality.¹¹⁰ In the gospel of John, it seems that Jesus’ greatest concern is the falling away of his disciples, naturally it makes sense for him to warn them about what to expect as his servant. Verse 16:2 does not seem to be a prediction, but a note on what to expect in the trenches as a confessor of Jesus.

The context of 16:2 makes clear that Jesus’ (and John’s) intentions are not to retell the story of a community but to equip the disciples with a strategy about how to win

¹⁰⁷ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 277.

¹⁰⁸ Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13-21*, 71.

¹⁰⁹ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 690.

¹¹⁰ Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13-21*, 72.

battles in the trenches, and moreover, how to endure. Jesus makes it clear that they should expect to encounter the most difficult situations, including ostracism from the most important social institution for a Jew in the first century. The latter half of verse 2 points out that the opposition to Jesus and his followers did not limit themselves to synagogue expulsion, but killed them.¹¹¹ This indicates that the conflict with the synagogue was much more severe than the *Birkat ha-minim* permitted.

The most important story about the benediction from *Berakoth 28b* limits the actions to one who fails as a precentor. However, John describes a much graver punishment—expulsion and death. In my opinion, John describes something analogous to vigilante justice. Jesus' opposition was a very limited group, it does not seem plausible that his opposition could garner the support required to install a benediction powerful enough to wipe out Jesus' disciples. The *Birkat ha-minim* then is not a factor in 16:2.

Raymond Brown points out something important about the breadth of the synagogue conflict in 16:2,

It is impossible from the adjective ἀποσυνάγωγος to be certain that John is not referring to one local synagogue. But the whole context of the introduction into synagogue prayer of the curse against the Jewish Christians, plus John's sweeping condemnations of 'the Jews' and the hostile references to different synagogues in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 makes us think that he is referring to the Synagogue in general and fighting a policy that is, at least, in effect in all the synagogues of the area he knows.¹¹²

Brown is correct to say that ἀποσυνάγωγος cannot be limited to one synagogue. However, I disagree with Brown on a couple of the details and would expand on another. First, I disagree with him that the ἀποσυνάγωγος in 16:2 was a widespread policy. Jesus

¹¹¹ Haenchen, Funk, and Busse, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 143.

¹¹² Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 690.

was not preparing his disciples for the 12th benediction, he was preparing them for excommunication, which during Jesus' day, was limited to sporadic non-programmatic efforts, programmatic efforts appeared—according to most pundits in this area—in the *Birkat ha-minim* nearly 60 years after Jesus.

I would expand on Brown's last statement about John's knowledge of where ἀποσυνάγωγος occurred. As I argued in my discussions of 9:22 and 12:42, John was not limited to one area, since he probably knew stories from many Jewish Christians about expulsion from the synagogue. In other words, John's intention was not to describe the situation in a single geographical area. I believe that the most serious conflict occurred during Jesus' day so by the time John writes this passage most likely he had many stories to describe.

Another scholar, Rudolf Schnackenburg, understands the verse as “an addition composed by a second person or persons who wanted to clarify Jesus' prophecy of persecution in the light of the community's immediate experiences.”¹¹³ Schnackenburg's understanding opens the door for one to understand 16:1 as the result of the *Birkat ha-minim*—if one accepts its dating around the late 90's. This interpretation is not necessarily indicative of John.

The importance of the passage is not in understanding what happened to a so-called community, but in what Jesus says. I believe John uses the stories in the gospels to prepare the readers theologically, not to recount the history of a community. John did not include the discourse to illustrate the current condition of one group of Christians, but to illustrate and prepare the readers for a difficult way of life that a confessor of Christ can't

¹¹³ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 120.

avoid. Finally, it is implausible to suggest, as Schnackenburg and others have, that the difficulty Jesus predicts no earlier than 60 years after he gave this speech, and moreover, that there was a hiatus from difficulty between these years. It seems to me, that Jesus' disciples continued to experience persecution. The quote above from Tacitus also testifies to an ongoing persecution.

In conclusion, in every ἀποσυνάγωγος passage preparation for a difficult journey is the theme. John is less concerned with recounting the history of a community and more concerned with preparing Jesus disciples for disturbing situations that may cause one to recant their confession in Christ. Like the other two ἀποσυνάγωγος passages, there is no sign of the *Birkat ha-minim* or any form of programmatic excommunication from the synagogue.

Part 4: Why the lack of evidence for the “Johannine Community” and theological interpretation do not support the involvement of the *Birkat ha-minim* in the Fourth Gospel: an exercise in the Gospels for All Christians

In this section I plan to demonstrate why I believe the 12th benediction did not have a direct relationship to John's gospel in light of the conclusions reached in *The Gospels for all Christians*.¹¹⁴ This work challenges ideas about the audience and purpose of the gospel long held by scholars.

The fresh ideas that the contributors present, I believe, have an affect on the outcome of one's understanding of the gospel. Moreover, their ideas add further evidence suggesting that the *Birkat ha-minim* did not influence John's gospel. First, they argue there is a lack of evidence that supports the formation of one specific “community” that identified with John's gospel, therefore, making it difficult to hold that events described

¹¹⁴ Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*.

in John characterize a homogenous group known as the “Johannine community.” Second, if one approaches the text theologically one finds it difficult to prove any connection between the gospel and the benediction. John alludes to an unsystematic expulsion from the synagogue only three times (9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and never as a result of a benediction. Furthermore, they occur in the context of Jesus’ ministry; that is, several years before the earliest possible dating of the benediction (around 70). More importantly, theologically one sees how rejection from the synagogue demonstrated the Jews’ further awareness of Jesus as the Messiah, and how they took offence to it.

It is more plausible to accept the text at face value; in other words, the events described in John happened during Jesus’ life and ministry—John did not import events current in the second generation of the “community” onto Jesus’ life. I am not denying that the second generation of Jewish Christians experienced expulsion from the synagogue, but John used events from Jesus’ day in his narrative to prepare his readers theologically for difficult circumstances.

Many scholars have developed ideas about gospel interpretation based on what Bauckham calls the “consensus”; that is, the evangelists responsible for writing the gospels wrote to, for, and about specific communities.¹¹⁵ The “consensus” holds that gospel communities,

may be understood as, not just one church, but a small group of churches, but in that case it is treated as axiomatic that this group of churches was homogeneous in composition and circumstances. The unargued assumption in every case is that each Gospel addresses a localized community in its own, quite specific context and character.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Bauckham, “For Whom Were the Gospels Written?” 9-48.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

The alternative they offer is that the gospel writers wrote with no specific community in mind, but imagined as their audience any church.¹¹⁷ According to the consensus every trait and characteristic the writer uses to describe the community is indicative of every character, circumstance, and situation in the community—a totally homogeneous entity.¹¹⁸ However, it is ludicrous to expect that every aspect of the gospel accurately described one single community. If this was the case, the gospel tradition would have died out; for instance what use would the Matthean community in completely different circumstances than the Markan community have with Mark's gospel. It is impossible to say that the gospels were entirely relevant to everyone that encountered them, but if the writers addressed general audiences, then it is safe to say that gospel tradition remains extant because it was relevant enough for the audiences they encountered.¹¹⁹

Another assumption the consensus maintains is that the communities existed in isolation. Thompson argues that the early Christians, like other communities in the Roman Empire, actively traveled around the empire in the course of business and trade, etc.¹²⁰ As a result, the Christian oral tradition developed into something analogous to the internet.¹²¹ One important way that traditions were transmitted was hospitality. As Christians traveled throughout the empire they were hosted by other Christians; for instance, in Romans 12:13 Paul exhorts his readers to, “extend hospitality to strangers”

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 24-25.

¹²⁰ Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation," 52-53.

¹²¹ Ibid., 51-55.

(cf. 1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2; Titus 1:7-8).¹²² Hence, many opportunities to share stories about Jesus occurred on a regular basis. If this is the case, then by the time John wrote he probably did not care about the origin of the source, but rather focused on the theological wealth of the information.

The genre of these narratives is also an important element in determining if the *Birkat ha-minim* had a direct relationship to the Johannine situation. It is my position that the gospels are theological and christological charged narratives about Jesus.¹²³ By this I am suggesting that they are not necessarily historical narratives about historical communities, but stories about Jesus. More precisely, they seek to understand Jesus christologically.¹²⁴ Therefore, in passages where it seems possible that the *Birkat ha-minim* influenced the story one must understand it christologically (cf. 3:1; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2); in other words, one must not suppose that the writer is reflecting on contemporary situations by importing them on Jesus; instead one must understand them as Jesus developing theologically, and understanding the situations he faces christologically.

In the case of these passages (3:1; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), the stories were integral to the development of Jesus' character in the narrative as the Messiah. For instance, in chapter 3 Nicodemus' fear is the result of the controversy surrounding Jesus. Martyn understands this passage as an example of Christians who believed in Jesus, but were afraid to publicly acknowledge him.¹²⁵ However, by interpreting it as a situation in the next generation (the second level about the community) it changes the focus from Jesus

¹²² Ibid., 55.

¹²³ Burridge, "About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences," 125.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 120-121.

¹²⁵ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 125ff.

to the community. Precisely because it is impossible to reach this conclusion without arguing that John nuanced the story in order to import the community's experience. In the passages where ἀποσυνάγωγος occurs, shifting the focus to the community relegates the importance of seeing the controversy Jesus stirs, in his own day, over christology. The authors constructed their narratives based on their knowledge and the resources available to them about Jesus.¹²⁶ The shaping of their narratives, therefore, did not shape according to the needs of one community but, by the experiences and theology of Jesus, therefore, it would have seemed relevant to them.¹²⁷

For these reasons it is difficult to maintain the idea that the *Birkat ha-minim* had a direct relationship to the gospel. The *Birkat ha-minim* occurred much later than Jesus' day and his disciples had already experienced ostracism from the community, moreover it had nothing to do with John's gospel or he probably would have mentioned it. Even if the *Birkat ha-minim* was a problem in Asia Minor, the supposed location of John's community, it would have most likely plagued many other communities, thus, suggesting a wider audience. Moreover, if the narratives are biographical about Jesus, then one must contend that Jesus and the first generation of confessors encountered synagogue expulsion, making it difficult to believe that John alluded to the benediction in his narrative because one community experienced it. More plausibly he included it because it was part of Jesus' story and was important in Jesus' emphasis on continuing one's faith in him despite the most difficult circumstances.

¹²⁶ Burridge, "About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences," 130-131.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 132-137.

Chapter 5

OTHER EVIDENCE

Aside from passages in John that suggest the possibility of a direct relationship to the *Birkat ha-minim*, movements such as the Ebionites, and patristic writers such as Justin Martyr, emulate similarities with situations John describes. In this chapter I will argue that other evidence does not support a connection between the gospel and the benediction. I will examine two possibilities: the Ebionites, and Justin Martyr. I have selected the Ebionites because this mysterious group has some connection to the synagogue and they took an unusual approach to Christianity that may have resulted from the threat of excommunication. I have selected Justin Martyr because he seems to have the clearest allusions to a synagogue situation.

Part 1: The Ebionites and Johannine Christianity

The origin of the Ebionite movement is somewhat mysterious. Some argue that they emerged out of the Essenes and developed into a brand of Christian Gnostics.¹ Anderson notes that they viewed Jesus as a prophetic leader but did not accept his Messiahship and divinity.²

The Ebionites rejected the divinity of Jesus and held that he was a prophet, a spokesman for God analogous to the prophets of the Old Testament.³ Some accepted the virgin birth and other said that Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph. They believed that

¹ E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and His Opponents: Trends in Research," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 264-299.

² Anderson, "A Historical Outline of Johannine Christianity-a Longitudinal Consideration of the Dialectical Johannine Situation," 16.

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1953), 121.

According to Levine the Ebionites had some connection with the synagogues, in the writings of Epiphanius he mentions that their leaders took part in arranging marriages in the synagogues.¹¹

At any rate, the nature of the Ebionites may prove to have a connection with portions of John. Anderson notes that the goal of Jesus' opponents expelling Jewish Christians from the synagogues was probably designed to force them to recant their confession of Jesus.¹² This may be the case in John 9 where the Pharisees utilize tactics against Jesus' followers such as, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses" (John 9:28). In a sense, they used Jewishness against Jesus. That is, the Pharisees expelled Jewish Christians from the synagogue by discounting their affiliation to Moses; discipleship to Jesus became dialectic to a true follower of Moses. In this case, Jews who recognized God in Christ did not have to leave the synagogues. They did not affirm Jesus as the Messiah per se, but they continued to practice Christian traditions, such as baptism and so forth (c. f. *Epiphanius Panarion*, 30).

Speculating that the *Birkat ha-minim* played a role in Ebionite like behavior—which would have resulted from the Pharisees polemic in John 9—is premature. If anything, this supports Anderson's thesis that the earliest conflict did not involve the benediction, precisely because the Pharisees behavior in John 9 is hardly characteristic of a systematic expulsion; they were merely trying to convince Jesus disciples that adherence to Jesus is antithetical to adherence to Moses.

¹¹ Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 395.

¹² Anderson, "A Historical Outline of Johannine Christianity—a Longitudinal Consideration of the Dialectical Johannine Situation," 16.

While this does not establish a solid connection between John and the Ebionites (which was never my intention any way) it does suggest an alternative backdrop (possibly in conjunction with the Acts) out of which Ebionism could have developed. Without a question, however, it highlights the impact Jesus had on the Jewish community, and in my opinion this demonstrates the growing awareness his opponents had of his identity.

Part 2: Justin Martyr

An important character in the development of the early church was Justin Martyr. In his writings, Justin alludes to a synagogue situation parallel to one that John describes. In this section I will answer two questions: is it related to John, and does it emulate the *Birkat ha-minim*?

In *Dialogue with Trypho* 16, 17, 47, 95, 110 Justin seems to indicate that Christians had experienced persecution similar to what the *Birkat ha-minim* causes.¹³ The context that Justin writes in is evident in *Dialogue* 17; Here Justin indicates that the Jews spread virulent words against the Christians,

but at that time you selected and sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to tell that the godless heresy of the Christians had sprung up, and to publish those things which all they who knew us not speak against us. So that you are the cause not only of your own unrighteousness, but in fact of that of all other men.

In *Dialogue* 16, Justin writes, “cursing in your synagogues those that believe on Christ.” This short indication of synagogue expulsion occurs in a passage where Justin levels harsh words against Jews. It appears that there is intense conflict occurring at the

¹³ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 44.

time Justin is writing. Moreover, part of the conflict involved the removal of Jewish Christians from synagogues. It is difficult to determine, however, if Justin is alluding to the *Birkat ha-minim*, and even more difficult to determine if this type of persecution is parallel to what John describes. Steven Katz argues that there is no evidence suggesting that harsh treatment of Christians by the Jews is a “longstanding tradition,” he notes that it is most likely a post-war reaction (i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem) to Jewish Christian mission efforts.¹⁴ I agree with Katz, it is difficult to say that Justin is alluding to a conflict that began in Jesus’ day. The fact that Justin alludes to persecution subsequent to spread rumors, makes it difficult to posit that he had the *Birkat ha-minim* in mind; if the *Birkat* was responsible Justin would probably have alluded to a systematic expulsion.

While there are striking similarities with the situations John describes, the origin of the two are different: John’s occurs out of a direct encounter with Jesus, while Justin’s occurs because the Jews spread rumors.

In *Dialogue* 47 Justin states,

Further, I hold that those of the seed of Abraham who live according to the law, and do not believe in this Christ before death, shall likewise not be saved, and especially those who have anathematized and do anathematize this very Christ in the synagogues.

At first blush it appears that Justin is making a clear allusion to the *Birkat ha-minim*. Schiffman notes that it is a “polemical and confused” reflection of the recitation of the *Birkat ha-minim* in the synagogues of Palestine.”¹⁵ He adds that it evidences that some version of the benediction was spoken in the second century and included explicit

¹⁴ Ibid.: 45.

¹⁵ Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism*, 57.

reference to the Christians.¹⁶ Therefore, it is possible that Justin may have indirectly alluded to the benediction, but this does not help the case for a direct relationship with John. Here Justin alludes to a curse which is characteristic of the benediction, but John refers to utter ostracism.

In conclusion, Justin Martyr never directly alludes to the *Birkat ha-minim*. Notwithstanding, there are similarities between the *Birkat ha-minim* and his writings. Justin may have been aware of the *Birkat ha-minim* (but that is beyond the scope of my study), but the situation he describes is much later and different from John; John describes seemingly spontaneous action from the Pharisees that resulted from direct encounters with Jesus, while Justin describes events that result from the spreading of rumors.

In the end, it is difficult to find situations parallel with John's gospel. By the time the Ebionites were an established group and Justin is writing conditions and situations had changed from Jesus day. While Justin and the Ebionites exhibit similarities with John it is untenable to make a strong connection. Justin dealt with a set of problems that seem similar to John but they followed John's stories by over a century. It is inevitable that motivations and milieus change. The Pharisees in Jesus day discounted Jesus for their own reasons and the opponents of Christianity in Justin's day discounted Jesus for, perhaps, more developed theological reasons—they were probably more familiar with Christianity and Jesus then the Pharisees were.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The relationship of the *Birkat ha-minim* or “benediction of the heretics” to the discussion of Christian origins is an important element. It is especially important in this discussion as it pertains to Jewish and Christian relations in the first century. Recently several scholars have engaged in conversation about Jewish Christian relations; as it turns out, the *Birkat ha-minim* is usually a factor of contention.¹ Many have argued for the culpability of the twelfth of eighteen benedictions in Jewish synagogue liturgy as it pertains to the separation of Judaism and Christianity, most notably J. Louis Martyn in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.²

Discussions on the *Birkat ha-minim* and John’s gospel are equally important because ultimately they deal with the issue of anti-Judaism in John, which has recently received quite-a-bit of discussion.³ The twelfth benediction, which calls for the

¹ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 43-76; Reimund Bieringer, et al, ed., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: WJK, 2001); James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991); Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration."; Kimelman, "The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer," 226-244; Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001); Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations*.

² Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

³ Bieringer, ed., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, 99-116; John Bowman, *The Fourth Gospel and the Jews: A Study in R. Akiba, Esther, and the Gospel of John*, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series; 8 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1975); Charlesworth, "The Gospel of John: Exclusivism Caused by a Social Setting Different from That of Jesus," 247-278; W. D. Davies, "Reflections on Aspects of the Jewish Background of the Gospel of John," in *Exploring the Gospel of John*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 21-42; Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*; Craig A. Evans and Donald Alfred Hagner, *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*; Martin Hengel, C. K. Barrett, and Donald Alfred Hagner, *Conflicts and Challenges in Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999); Adele Reinhartz, "The Johannine

destruction of heretics, has attracted the attention of many Johannine interpreters because of passages in John (9:22; 12:42; 16:2) which narrate situations analogous to what the *Birkat ha-minim* would produce.⁴

This thesis has treated these issues, particularly how it pertains to John. The conclusion I have reached through this study is that the *Birkat ha-minim* did not have a direct relationship to John's gospel. Furthermore, the separation of Judaism and Christianity occurred over theological differences. The *Birkat ha-minim* arose following the most heated debates between the synagogue and Jesus' adherents—perhaps 60 years after the conflict started.⁵ Most likely, its author(s) designed it as a formal codification of the synagogue ban of heretics.⁶ The conflict between Jesus' adherents and the synagogue initialized during the ministry of Jesus. The most conspicuous evidence suggesting a connection with John's gospel, John 9:22, 12:42 and 16:2, depicts events that occurred in Jesus' day, and therefore, the benediction could have no bearing on John.

John utilizes the adjective ἀποσυνᾱγωγος to describe a rash informal expulsion that, perhaps, occurred in the heat of the moment. As the Pharisees continue to encounter Jesus they increasingly demonstrate hatred for Jesus and seem willing to go to great lengths, even violence, to deal with Jesus' popularity and seemingly subversive Torah

Community and Its Jewish Neighbors: A Reappraisal," in *What Is John?* ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998), 111-138; Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*; Reinhartz, "'Jews' and Jews in the Fourth Gospel," 211-228; Adele Reinhartz, "The Gospel of John: How 'the Jews' Became Part of the Plot," in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*, ed. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 99-116.

⁴ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.

⁵ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

⁶ Ibid.

interpretation—it even led to his death. It is my contention that these circumstances caused the initial expulsion from the synagogue.

Many scholars that argue for a connection between the gospel and the *Birkat ha-minim* have assumed that synagogue expulsion happened almost exclusively among the “Johannine community.”⁷ Richard Bauckham and company, however, have challenged the consensus that gospel writers wrote exclusively for communities and alternatively argue that they wrote for a general Christian audience, and that the gospels were not reconstructed histories about gospel communities, but christological and theological charged narratives about Jesus.⁸ Therefore, if synagogue expulsion occurred it would have occurred sporadically around the Roman Empire.

Moreover, one must approach the text literally not allegorically; therefore, the events described in the gospel were indicative of Jesus’ day and not only of second-generation Christianity.⁹ As a result, one must understand the passages that ἀποσυνάγωγος occurs in theologically. In other words, John was not recapitulating the history of the Johannine community or narrating events contemporaneous with Johannine Christianity around 70-90 C E, he was narrating the christological story of Jesus.

While the evidence intrinsic to the benediction supports a solid link between the separation of Christianity and Judaism (i.e., *minim*), there is a lack of evidence to suggest

⁷ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*; Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*.

⁸ Bauckham, “For Whom Were the Gospels Written?” 9-48.

⁹ Watson, 207-213.

that such a formal benediction occurred during the time of Jesus—it was probably informal sporadic expulsions.¹⁰

I will now summarize how I reached this conclusion in the thesis, and end with a way to move forward.

In chapter 3 I concluded that arguments suggesting that the *Birkat ha-minim* isolates and attacks Christians are untenable. First of all, it would have taken time for Judaism to garner a complete rejection of Jewish Christianity—the kind of rejection that was integrated into synagogue liturgy; there is no record that in the time of John, the conflict in John is sporadic and informal.¹¹

As far as evidence from the benediction, the *Palestinian* version isolates Jewish Christians— by its inclusion of *Notsrim*, but probably appeared much later than John's gospel making it impossible to impact John. *Notsrim* probably did not occur in the first edition of the benediction because the writers probably included other heretics among Jewish Christians as its target (i.e., anyone who challenged the rabbi's authority), and probably regarded Jewish Christianity as much of a nuisance as other Jewish sects.¹² The earliest extant edition, the *Babylonian* version (which does not include *Notsrim*), appeared no earlier than 40 years after Jesus' ministry.¹³ The fact that it could have occurred no earlier than 40 years after Jesus' ministry is suggested by *Berakoth 28b* the

¹⁰ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 43-76; Kimelman, "The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer," 226-244.

¹¹ Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C. E.: A Reconsideration," 63-76.

¹² Kimelman, "The Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer," 228,232.

¹³ Instone-Brewer, "The Eighteen Benedictions and the *Minim* before 70 C. E.," 28-29.

story of Samuel the Little, the alleged writer of the benediction, which describes Samuel's involvement no earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem in 70.¹⁴

In chapter 4 I examined evidence in John that presents a possible connection with the *Birkat ha-minim* and concluded that no plausible connection exists. I analyzed John's presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι and the passages in which ἀποσυνάγωγος appears.

In the case of the presentation of Ἰουδαῖοι, I concluded that John's negative presentation was the result of differences in theology and politics. Many recent scholars have successfully argued that John did not use the word pejoratively in every instance; however, they have tried to assuage pejorative occurrences, perhaps in an attempt to strengthen Jewish Christian relations.¹⁵ I disagree with this approach however because it discounts the real conflict that occurred. I also believe that John's presentation of Ἰουδαῖοι does not warrant anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism, precisely because what John records is an intra-Jewish conflict. To suggest racial tension is to import one's own agenda onto the text. The fact that John utilizes a pejorative connotation of Ἰουδαῖοι also demonstrates the developing friction between Jesus and his opponents. For this reason, there is no reason to connect the *Birkat ha-minim* with John's presentation of the "Jews." The "Jews" are Jesus' opponents because they disagree theologically and politically, perhaps because Jesus was a prophet from Galilee and taught ideologies subversive to the

¹⁴ Epstein, *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, 57.

¹⁵ Charlesworth, "The Gospel of John: Exclusivism Caused by a Social Setting Different from That of Jesus," 247-278; Dunn, "The Embarrassment of History: Reflections on the Problem of 'Anti-Judaism' in the Fourth Gospel," 43-53; Meeks, "Am I a Jew-Johannine Christianity and Judaism."

Jerusalocentric teachings of the Pharisees.¹⁶ The expulsion of Jesus confessors from the synagogues definitely added to the tension, but it was unrelated to the 12th benediction.

The three passages in which ἀποσυνάγωγος occurs demonstrated that John recorded issues and events contemporaneous with Jesus' ministry. The methodology by which one approaches these texts is significant; I discovered that these passages are theologically pregnant, and therefore, should lead one to examine it theologically and not allegorically in an attempt to reconstruct the historical condition of a community-precisely because John is a christological narrative.¹⁷ In my opinion, it seems conclusive that John intended his readers to draw theological and social ramifications about confession of Christ as Messiah and not to relive the history of second generation Johannine Christians.

These passages are most likely part of a motif in John to warn the readers about the consequences of following Christ. Moreover, it clearly indicates the Pharisees growing disdain for Jesus, not the story of a community. In John 9, the Pharisees had even caused the people to fear confession of Jesus. It is a far stretch to implement the *Birkat ha-minim* in these stories because there is no indication that one had to function as a precentor in order to reveal their confession in Christ (as the benediction would require), it seems that the Pharisees actively pursued confessors; the *Birkat ha-minim* indicates a more passive approach to discipline.

Therefore, since the writer(s) of the *Birkat ha-minim* established it for use in the synagogue, it would have had no affect in the context where John utilizes ἀποσυνάγωγος.

¹⁶ Anderson, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue-Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," 1-16.

¹⁷ Watson, 205-217.

Again, according to the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakoth 28b*) the benediction uncovered one's hesitation to read it in the synagogue.

As far as the evidence in John, then, the historical element in this passage occurred during Jesus' day. Most likely, synagogue expulsion occurred sporadically, and initiated during Jesus' ministry. It is my contention that John included this information in his narrative to stress a christological issue—Jesus acquired enemies over his identity and his teachings; moreover it prepared those who had confessed Christ for the possibility of giving up one's social and possibly economic status for the sake of Christ. The circumstances surrounding ἀποσυνάγωγος in 9:22 indicate a more intense expulsion than the *Birkat ha-minim* could deliver. Also, if one reads John “literally” as a theological narrative (like Watson proposes) one must take the conflict at face value and posit that John is describing events from Jesus' ministry--and not after Jamnia as the *Birkat ha-minim* proponents argue.¹⁸ Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence that in Jesus' day a unified effort to remove Jewish Christians from the synagogue existed—such as the *Birkat ha-minim*. The *Birkat ha-minim* represents a “codified” effort long after the most intense conflict had passed.¹⁹

Finally, chapter 5 highlights the fact that literature from later periods in history, that give no explicit reference to the *Birkat ha-minim* or John provide no foundation for connecting John with the benediction. The Ebionites share similarities with John, yet nevertheless, is not indicative of the Johannine situation in the first century. In my opinion, however, it may help answer a few questions about the mysterious Ebionites.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, 233.

Justin Martyr exhibits characteristics of the Johannine situation in his writing, but is concerned with an entirely different time and situation than John. They share similarities in their experience of synagogue expulsion, but not enough to suggest the Johannine situation is dealing with the *Birkat ha-minim*.

Moving Forward

Recent scholarship on the gospels, particularly Richard Bauckham and company's, *The Gospels for all Christians* challenges the reigning "consensus" that gospel writers composed their narratives exclusively for and about their respective communities.²⁰ They argue that gospels are theological narratives produced from the traditions and experiences of the evangelists and the other Christians through intricate networks of believers.

The issue of the *Birkat ha-minim* has appeared in discussions surrounding the "story behind the story" of gospel "communities," Christian origins, Jewish-Christian relations, and Jewish synagogue liturgy. One particular discussion which stands to benefit from recent research is gospel interpretation. *The Gospels for all Christians*, published in 1998, calls for re-imagination, of the notion of gospel communities. As it turns out, this may affect the connection of the gospels and the *Birkat ha-minim*. Bauckham challenges what he refers to as the "consensus" that the gospels were written for and about individual communities.²¹ He believes that they were originally intended for general circulation among the churches. Interestingly, he alludes to Martyn's work on the *Birkat ha-minim* suggesting that if Martyn is correct about the employment of the benediction to enforce synagogue expulsion, it would not be limited to the Johannine communities but

²⁰ Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*.

²¹ Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?" 10-17.

would have affected many churches in the Diaspora.²² If Bauckham is correct it would suggest that a synagogue incident was not limited to one community nor was it a uniform effort to expel all Jewish Christians from synagogues in the Diaspora or in the rest of the Empire. Perhaps, then, some Jewish Christians had experienced conflict in the synagogue, however, there is essentially no information to suggest where this activity occurred or which Christians were involved. Many have turned to John 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2, the famous ἀποσυνάγωγος passages, to suggest that the “Johannine community” had come into conflict with synagogue officials. However if Bauckham and company are correct, there is virtually no evidence or no way of knowing if any one, within John’s circle experienced conflict. Perhaps then, the evangelist experienced conflict himself, or through the oral tradition he was presented with the experience of other Christians. The most likely explanation is that the most heated conflict occurred during Jesus’ day, which is what the narrative portrays.

²² Ibid., 23.

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