

independent branch of *Jewish Christianity*. At the same time, their Jewish-Christian profile appears to be so unique that it raises the question whether they should also be given a name of their own. Because they seem to have called themselves Ebionites, it would be natural to simply call them Epiphanius' Ebionites in order to keep in mind that they differed considerably from the Ebionites known to earlier church fathers. Another possibility would be to call them Samaritan-Elchasaite Christians. In any case, it seems that to label these Ebionites as simply Jewish Christians would not do justice to some of the very distinctive beliefs they had developed when they did not accept the prophets and adopted the *Book of Elchasai*.

2.2. THE NAZARENES

2.2.1. Introduction

The Jewish-Christian “heresy” of the Nazarenes was first discussed by Epiphanius, the fourth-century bishop of Salamis. Although Epiphanius dates the origin of the heresy back to the first century, it is striking that none of his predecessors refers to a heretical sect called Nazarenes whereas the Ebionites are often described by earlier heresiologists, starting with Irenaeus. By the end of the fourth century, the only other father who knows something about the Nazarenes, is his contemporary and friend Jerome.

Scholars have explained this gap in the recorded history of the Nazarenes in various ways. The explanations can be roughly divided into three categories, each connected to a particular concept of the overall development of early Christianity.

1. *The Nazarenes were later, more tolerant Jewish Christians.* Ferdinand Christian Baur argued—in contrast to early heresiologists—that the Ebionites were not originally a heretical sect but successors of the very first Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. The Nazarenes, for their part, represented a later phase of Jewish Christianity, which had developed from its strictly anti-Pauline stance to a more lenient attitude towards the gentiles.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Baur thought that the teaching and the practices of the Ebionites were so close to the very first Jewish Christianity that, in general, one could call the early Jewish Christianity Ebionism. However, he also notes that it is more common to restrict the name Ebionites

2. *The Nazarenes were early “orthodox” Jewish Christians.* Albrecht Ritschl argued—in contrast to Baur—that strict Jewish Christianity with its anti-Paulinism cannot be considered as the dominant current in first-century Christianity because the Nazarenes, who accepted the apostle Paul, were the successors of the early Jerusalem community.⁴¹ Ray A. Pritz presents a similar interpretation in his 1988 monograph. According to Pritz, the history of the Nazarenes can be traced back to the early Jerusalem community and the Ebionites came out of a split among the Nazarene ranks around the turn of the first century. The split was possibly caused by disputes concerning Christology. The doctrine of the Nazarenes was “orthodox” although they still followed Jewish law. Thus, the Nazarene Jewish Christians existed from the first century onwards but they were mistakenly called Ebionites by such church fathers as Origen and Eusebius. Justin, who wrote in the middle of the second century, possibly also had knowledge of the Nazarenes although he did not explicitly name them. The earliest heresiologists may have failed to mention the Nazarenes simply because they were not heretical enough.⁴²

3. *The Nazarenes were later, local “Catholic” Jewish Christians.* Alfred Schmidtke argued in the beginning of the 20th century that the Nazarenes in Beroea were a purely local phenomenon who had no connection to the early Jerusalem community. The Catholic Church in Beroea had originally consisted of members that were of both Gentile and Jewish pedigree. During the first half of the second century, the Jewish members had formed a community of their own in order to be better able to follow

to those Jewish Christians who excluded themselves from the Catholic Church because they were not able to keep up with the development of the Christian consciousness (“Bewusstsein”) that moved from Jewish Christianity towards Catholicism. See, Baur 1966 (1860), 174, 174 n. 1. Among contemporary scholars, for instance, G. Lüdemann and M.D. Goulder have argued that the Jewish Christians described as Ebionites by Irenaeus were an offshoot of the earliest Jerusalem community. See, Lüdemann 1996, 52–56; Goulder 1994, 107–113.

⁴¹ Ritschl 1857, 152–154. Ritschl also argued that Origen and Eusebius erroneously identified the Nazarenes with the more heretical Ebionites (p. 156) and that the separation of Gentile and Jewish Christians was caused by both the growing intolerance of the strict Jewish Christians toward the Gentile Christians and by the Bar Kochba war (pp. 250, 252–258, 266). Although Ritschl originally belonged to the Tübingen school, he wrote the second edition (1857) of *Die Entstehung*, where he rejects Baur’s construction, after the breakdown of his relationship with Baur. For the Tübingen school see, for instance, Morgan 1994, 710–713.

⁴² Pritz 1988, 108–110. Similarly Mimouni 1998, 82–86; Blanchetière 2001, 145, 183, 238–239, 521; Bauckham 2003, 162–181, esp. 162.

their national customs. Nevertheless, the Nazarenes still felt themselves part of the worldwide *ekklesia*.⁴³ Hans J. Schoeps followed Schmidtke, emphasizing that Epiphanius was responsible for the heretical reputation of the Nazarenes because he connected these “Catholic” Jewish Christians with the heretical sect of the Ebionites, the real offshoot of the early Jerusalem church.⁴⁴

All the above interpretations agree that, although Epiphanius’ description of the genesis of the Nazarenes cannot be trusted as such, it is clear that by the second half of the second century, at the latest, the Nazarenes had formed a community of their own with its own peculiar theology. Opinions differ, however, as regards the question of how closely the Nazarenes were integrated with the other forms of Christianity and whether the Nazarenes represented the theology and practice of the early Jerusalem church or were a group that had only later on broken away from Gentile Christians.

Because the ancient writers that explicitly deal with the Nazarenes, Epiphanius and Jerome, are from the fourth century and are known for often allowing their polemical interests and personal ambitions to dictate the contents of their presentations, it is no wonder that the role of the Nazarenes in second-century Christianity has been open to various interpretations. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the evidence provided by Epiphanius and Jerome and to assess its character and reliability. Critical analysis of Epiphanius’ and Jerome’s presentations leaves us with very little material that could be connected to the heresy of the Nazarenes—if the Nazarenes are understood as a separate, historically definable group or movement. Therefore, instead of being a description of a concrete “heresy” that once existed, the following presentation reads more like a pathology of heresiological writing, a story of how Christian identity is created and supported by cultivating stereotypes of others.

2.2.2. *Who Were Called Nazarenes?*

Epiphanius discusses the correct spelling of the word Nazarene (Ναζωραῖος) in *Pan.* 29.5.6–29.6.1, emphasizing that the name does not refer to nazirites or to the pre-Christian heresy of the Nasarenes (cf. *Pan.* 18) but is derived from the name of Jesus’ hometown. In the New Testament,

⁴³ Schmidtke 1911, 41–42, 105, 124–125, 301–302.

⁴⁴ Schoeps 1949, 19–20.

Jesus is called Nazarene using the Greek words *Ναζωραῖος* (in Matt, Luke, John and Acts) and *Ναζαορινός* (in Mark and Luke) which are rendered in English translations either as Nazorean or Nazarene. Accordingly, the present “heretics” are known in English either as the Nazoreans or the Nazarenes.⁴⁵

In addition to the fact that Jesus himself is called Nazarene several times in the canonical gospels and Acts, Paul is accused in Acts of being a leader of the “sect of the Nazarenes” by the high priest Ananias’ attorney, Tertullus: “We have, in fact, found this man a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” (Acts 24:5; trans. NRSV).

Obviously, the early followers of Jesus were named after their leader, Jesus of Nazareth.⁴⁶ Two of Epiphanius’ predecessors in the formative Catholic tradition still used the term “Nazarenes” in this general sense. Tertullian noted in his *Against Marcion*: “Christ had to be called Nazarene according to the prophesy of the Creator. Therefore also by this very name the Jews call us Nazarenes because of Him.” (*Marc.* 4.8; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).⁴⁷ Furthermore, Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* has the following description: “Nazareth. From this name Christ was called Nazarene and we being now called Christians received in the past the name Nazarenes.” (*Onom.* ed. Lagarde 1966 [1887], p. 138,24–25).

Eusebius’ information that the term Nazarenes was used of Christians in the past is correct only concerning Greek and Latin literature since Syrians, Arabs, Persians and Armenians used the cognates of the term Nazarenes to designate Christians in general, even after Eusebius’ time.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ For the term Nazarene in general, see Goranson 1994, 1049–1050; Schaeder 1967, 874–879.

⁴⁶ Certainly, other hypotheses about the origin of the term have also been discussed in connection with the interpretation of Matt 2:23 or based on speculations about Jesus’ being a nazirite or a former member of the allegedly pre-Christian sect of the Nasarenes, the “observants.” See, Schaeder 1967, 874–875. Pritz argues that the very first Christians used the term Nazarenes as a self-designation on the basis of a messianic interpretation of Isa 11:1, which refers to the shoot (*netser* in Hebrew) of Jesse. See, Pritz 1988, 12–14. Although Isa 11:1 may be the passage that the writer of Matthew’s gospel had in mind when writing Matt 2:23—but which he did not explicate (!)—the interpretation is too speculative to constitute a basis for the naming of the first Christians in general.

⁴⁷ If not otherwise indicated, in this chapter the translations of patristic passages are based on Klijn & Reinink 1973. However, minor corrections and modifications, like the spelling of the name Nazarenes, have been made. My own translations are indicated by the initials PL.

⁴⁸ See, Schaeder 1967, 874–875; Goranson 1994, 1049. In Syriac, a Christian is *natsraya* (ܢܫܝܪܝܐ).

In addition, Talmudic tradition includes some references to *notsrīm* (נוצריים)⁴⁹ and some versions of the Jewish *Eighteen Benedictions* include a curse against the *notsrīm*, which seems to refer to Christians in general.⁵⁰

The assumption that *notsrīm* in the *Eighteen Benedictions* refers to Christians in general is in harmony with Jerome's references. In his *Commentary on Amos*, Jerome writes: "Until today they blaspheme the Christian people under the name of Nazarenes." (*Comm. Am.* 1.11–12). Epiphanius also knows about the versions of the *Eighteen Benedictions* that refer to *notsrīm* but he connects the curse only to the heretical sect of the Nazarenes he is describing in *Panarion* 29.

Overall, among early Christian and Jewish writers, there are only two men, Epiphanius and Jerome, and some later writers who depend on them, who clearly used the term Nazarenes to designate a specific Jewish-Christian group. Furthermore, of these two writers, it is mainly Epiphanius who condemns the Nazarenes as heretics. For Jerome, the Nazarenes provided useful information from Hebrew writings. For the majority of writers before and after Epiphanius and Jerome, the term Nazarenes referred to (Jewish) Christians in general.

2.2.3. *The Profile of Epiphanius' Nazarenes*

An Overview of the Main Sources and Composition of Pan. 29

Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and Acts provided the background for the information Epiphanius collected in *Panarion* 29. Most of the information that Epiphanius used from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* can be found between *Hist. eccl.* 2.16 and 3.5, which covers the time from Mark's alleged preaching in Egypt to the disciples' flight from Jerusalem, as is shown by the following table:

Mark's preaching in Egypt,	<i>Hist. eccl.</i> 2.16	<i>Pan.</i> 29.5.4
Philo's description of Therapeutae	<i>Hist. eccl.</i> 2.17	<i>Pan.</i> 29.5.1–3
James as the first bishop	<i>Hist. eccl.</i> 2.23	<i>Pan.</i> 29.4.1–4
The disciples' flight from Jerusalem	<i>Hist. eccl.</i> 3.5.3	<i>Pan.</i> 29.7.8

⁴⁹ *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 6a; *b. Ta'an.* 27b.

⁵⁰ Thus, for instance, Horbury 1982, 19–61, esp. 59–61, in contrast to Kimelman 1975, 226–244, and de Boer 1998, 250. The different versions are discussed by Schäfer 1975, 54–64, 116–124, esp. 57–61 who suggests that *notsrīm* were included in the prayer in localities where the "Nazarenes" had become a problem. In most cases, the "benediction" refers only to the *minim*.

Epiphanius explicitly refers to Acts concerning the following points:

Jesus was called a Nazarene	Acts 2:22	<i>Pan.</i> 29.5.6 <i>Pan.</i> 29.6.7
Quote from the Apostolic decree	Acts 15:28–29	<i>Pan.</i> 29.8.6
Paul as the “leader” of the Nazarenes	Acts 24:5	<i>Pan.</i> 29.6.2
Paul’s “Nazarene confession”	Acts 24:12–14	<i>Pan.</i> 29.6.4

In addition, the wording of Acts influenced Epiphanius’ diction in several places and he drew on Galatians and several other New and Old Testament passages in his refutation of the Nazarenes, as will be shown in the course of the following discussion.

The Genesis of the Heresy of the Nazarenes: Epiphanius’ Three Explanations

When Epiphanius lists the heresies in *Panarion*, one of his main concerns is to show how they developed from each other. Therefore, the opening lines of each chapter usually link the heresy to be treated with the one that has been refuted in the previous chapter. A model for this composition was already provided by Irenaeus who traced the heresies he discussed back to the activity of Simon Magus. Heresiologists who preceded Epiphanius—Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Pseudo-Tertullian—had presented the heresies of Cerinthus and Ebion in that order. Epiphanius inserts the Nazarenes between these two, arguing that the Nazarenes came after, or were contemporary with, the Cerinthians and that the Ebionites were founded by a certain Ebion who came from the Nazarenes’ school.

In the beginning of *Panarion* 29, Epiphanius still admits that he is not sure whether the Nazarenes followed the Cerinthians or vice versa. This does not prevent him from trying to locate stories in his sources that would tell about the genesis of the Nazarenes with the result that *Panarion* 29 now contains three different and—partly incompatible—explanations of the genesis of the Nazarenes.

First, in the beginning of *Panarion* 29, Epiphanius states that he does not know when the Nazarene heresy began. According to Epiphanius, after the Cerinthians

come Nazoreans, who originated at the same time or even before, or in conjunction with them or after them. In any case they were contemporaries. I cannot say more precisely who succeeded whom. For, as I said, these were contemporaries with each other, and had similar notions.

(*Pan.* 29.1.1; trans. Williams 1987b).

If the Nazarenes originated at the same time or even before the Cerinthians, they must—using Epiphanius’ timeline—have been a pre-70 movement since Epiphanius states that Cerinthus was among those conservative Jewish Christians who, according to Acts, had gone from Jerusalem to Antioch and caused confusion there (Acts 15:24), and who also had opposed Peter (Acts 11:2–3).

Second, Epiphanius makes an attempt to determine the beginning of the heresy more exactly. He states that in the period of time when Christians

were called Jessaeans,⁵¹ for a short time after the Savior’s ascension and after Mark had preached in Egypt, some again seceded (τινὲς ἐξῆλθον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀποστόλου). They were called the followers of the apostles, indeed, but I think that they were the Nazarenes who I am describing here. They are Jews by birth and they dedicate themselves to the law and submit to circumcision.

(*Pan.* 29.5.4; trans. PL).

Epiphanius is clearly using here a source (or sources) that refer to “some people” who “went out” (ἐξῆλθον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀποστόλου) and were called the followers of the apostles, and draws a conclusion of his own that these must have been the Nazarenes. What is Epiphanius’ source and how does he date this event?

The timing, “a short time after the Savior’s ascension and after Mark preached in Egypt,” shows that Epiphanius still has in mind Eusebius’ account. There the conversion of Egyptian Therapeutae, who Eusebius falsely identifies with Christians, is said to be caused by Mark’s preaching in Alexandria (*Hist. eccl.* 2.13,16).⁵² Epiphanius has quoted this

⁵¹ Jessaeans as the title of the first Christians is not discussed by other church fathers. However, in Syriac, Christians are called not only *natsraye* (ܢܨܪܝܝܬܝܢ), as was indicated above, but also *yeshuaye* (ܝܫܘܝܝܬܝܢ), and a cognate title is to be found in Arabic as well (I owe this observation to Prof. Heikki Räisänen; see also Blanchetière 2001, 144). Therefore, it is possible that these titles were in fact known to Epiphanius from Syriac traditions but he connected them—or better, their appropriate use—only to the very first followers of Jesus. According to Jerome (*Ruf.* 2.22, 3.6), Epiphanius was versed in Syriac and Hebrew (in addition to Egyptian, Latin and Greek) but because Jerome listed Epiphanius’ language skills in order to ridicule Rufinus, who knew only two languages, he may have been slightly exaggerating. In any case, Epiphanius was trained in Egypt and wrote mainly in Greek. If his knowledge of Semitic languages was limited and he did not converse with orthodox Syriac-speaking Christians, that would explain why he thought that the terms Nazarenes and Jessaeans belonged only to the past in the history of “orthodox” Christianity.

⁵² The expression “after the Savior’s ascension” seems to be based on *Hist. eccl.* 2.13 where Eusebius quotes Justin’s *First Apology* (1 *Apol.* 26). Epiphanius’ wording follows Eusebius (μετὰ τὴν ἀνάληψιν) instead of Justin (μετὰ τὴν ἀνέλευσιν).

description in the preceding lines of *Panarion* 29 where he discusses the Jessaeans (= Eusebius' Therapeutae). Eusebius does not say anything about "some people" who "again went out/seceded." Therefore, it is clear that Epiphanius either is using here an additional source that has not survived⁵³ or is drawing his own inferences from Eusebius' account and the New Testament writings.⁵⁴

Be that as it may, it is clear that Epiphanius describes the appearance of these "some" in terms similar to Acts 15:24 where the "apostles" and presbyters write: "Since we have heard that some (τινέες) of us have come (ἐξελθόντες, literally "went out"; the same Greek term as in the *Panarion*!) and confused you ..." Notably, the majority of Greek manuscripts also include a summary of the message of these envoys. They came "saying that one has to be circumcised and keep the law." Thus, the content of the message of these envoys is the same as the "doctrine" of the Nazarenes that Epiphanius quotes in this connection: "They are Jews by birth and they dedicate themselves to the law and submit to circumcision" (*Pan.* 29.5.4). Furthermore, the description of Simon's conversion in Acts has clearly inspired Epiphanius' description of the Nazarenes' "conversion:"

When they heard Jesus' name and saw the divine signs that happened through the hands of the apostles they also believed in Jesus.

(*Pan.* 29.5.6; trans. PL).

Simon also believed and was baptized ... and when he saw the signs and great miracles that happened he was amazed ... and when he saw that through the laying on the hands of the apostles ...

(Acts 8:13,18; trans. PL).

It is clear that Eusebius' reference to the genesis of the Nazarenes draws heavily on Acts. Even if Epiphanius made use of a traditional descrip-

⁵³ For instance, Williams 1987a, xx suggests that Epiphanius may have known Justin's lost Syntagma.

⁵⁴ The description in Acts 15 of the envoys that come from Jerusalem and cause problems in Antioch is not entirely compatible with Paul's description of similar events in Gal 2. Therefore, Epiphanius—or the writer of the source he is using—may have concluded that the church in Antioch must have been attacked twice by Jerusalem conservatives: first before the Apostolic council (described in Acts 15) and then again after it (as suggested by Gal 2). As was shown above, Epiphanius claims in *Pan.* 28 that Cerinthus was among those men who came from Jerusalem, and in this connection, he explicitly quotes Acts 15. If he counted two invasions from Jerusalem, it is natural to assume that he made the Nazarenes responsible for the second one because the Nazarenes are refuted after the Cerinthians in the *Panarion*. In any case, Epiphanius consulted both Acts and Gal for *Pan.* 29 since he quotes Acts 15:28–19 and Gal 3:10, 5:2, 4 when he later moves on to refute the Nazarenes (*Pan.* 29.8.1, 6–7).

tion of the activities of early Jewish Christians, it is clear that he was himself responsible for identifying these with the Nazarenes. When he made this identification, he was mainly concerned with criticizing the Nazarenes and he did not pay much attention to the timing of the incidents described. In Eusebius' timeline, which Epiphanius basically follows, Mark's preaching in Egypt happened well before 70, whereas Epiphanius' third reference to the genesis of the sect, which will be discussed next, is clearly a post-70 event.

This heresy of the Nazarenes exists in Beroea in the neighbourhood of Coele Syria and the Decapolis in the region of Pella and in Bashan in the so-called Kokaba [ἐν τῇ Κοκᾶβῃ], Chochabe in Hebrew. For from there it took its beginning after the exodus from Jerusalem when all the disciples went to live in Pella because Christ had told them to leave Jerusalem and to go away since it would undergo a siege. Because of this advice they lived in Perea after having moved to that place, as I said. There the Nazarene heresy had its beginning. (*Pan.* 29.7.7–8; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).

Epiphanius' source for the story about the exodus from Jerusalem is again Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5) but, in contrast to the two earlier descriptions, he now dates the genesis of the Nazarene heresy after the fall of Jerusalem. There are two obvious reasons for this. First, in this connection, Epiphanius presents a list of villages where the Nazarenes supposedly lived in his time and the list also includes Pella, which connects it with the tradition about the disciples' flight from Jerusalem. Second, the timing after the fall of Jerusalem provides a very good starting point for the following refutation of the Nazarenes where Epiphanius argues that it is impossible to fulfill the law because access to Jerusalem and its temple worship is denied.

Overall, Epiphanius' remark in the beginning of *Panarion* 29 that he does not really know when the Nazarene heresy begun, accords with his contradictory descriptions about its beginning. Epiphanius ends up locating the genesis of the heresy after the fall of Jerusalem because it provides a good starting point for his refutation but he has no historical data about the origins of this movement.

The Summary of the Nazarenes' Practices and Doctrine: Pan. 29.7.2–8, 29.9.2,4

In Williams' English translation, *Panarion* 29 covers approximately seven and half pages but a relatively small number of lines describe the beliefs and practices of the Nazarenes. On the first five pages, Epiphanius discusses the reasons why all Christians were, for a short while, called

Jessaeans and Nazarenes before they began to be called Christians in Antioch. In practice, this long “introduction”—which contains several digressions typical of Epiphanius’ style—does not reveal anything more about the Nazarenes except that, in Epiphanius’ opinion, these “heretics” adopted the name that once was common to all Christians. The actual description of the Nazarenes’ practices and doctrines is to be found in *Pan.* 29.7.2–8:

Pan. 29.7.2:

- (1) They used not only the New but also the Old Testament confessing everything
- (2) as the law proclaims it.

Pan. 29.7.3: They “acknowledge both

- (3) the resurrection of the dead, and
- (4) the divine creation of all things, and declare that
- (5) God is one, and that
- (6) his Son/servant (παῖς) is Jesus Christ.”

Pan. 29.7.4:

- (7) They read the law, the prophets and the writings in Hebrew

Pan. 29.7.5:

The position of the Nazarenes is summarized: They disagree with the Jews only because of their belief in Christ and they are not in accord with Christians only because they are still fettered by the law.

Pan. 29.7.6:

Epiphanius “confesses” that he does not know whether or not the Nazarenes believed in the virgin birth

Pan. 29.7.7–8:

- (8) List of the locations of the Nazarenes and their connection to the Pella tradition

This concise description of the Nazarenes is followed by the refutation which begins in *Pan.* 29.8.1. Epiphanius quotes several passages from the Old and New Testament, including Acts and Galatians, in order to show that the Jewish law no longer binds the Christians. The refutation culminates in a description which also gives more information about the Nazarenes’ relation to Jews. Epiphanius’ point is that the Nazarenes who try to be Jews are also cursed by the Jews themselves:

Pan. 29.9.2:

- (9) The Jews “stand up at dawn, at midday, and toward evening, three times a day when they recite their prayers in the synagogues, and curse and anathematize them. Three times a day they say, ‘God curse the Nazarenes.’”
(trans. Williams 1987b, modified).

Finally, before moving on to deal with the next sect, the Ebionites, Epiphanius reveals one more detail about the Nazarenes.

Pan. 29.9.4:

(10) The Nazarenes have Matthew's gospel in its entirety in Hebrew.

However, Epiphanius does not know whether or not they have removed the genealogies from Abraham to Christ.

The Locations of the Nazarenes

As already noted, Epiphanius locates the Nazarenes in Syrian Beroea, as well as the areas of Bashan (Kokaba/Chochaba) and Decapolis (Pella). Because Jerome, who spent some time near Beroea,⁵⁵ also locates the Nazarenes there, it is clear that, by the time of Epiphanius and Jerome, Beroea had some Christian inhabitants who were called Nazarenes.

Because Epiphanius had himself lived in Palestine, in Eleutheropolis (Beth Guvrin), one can also assume that he had some knowledge about the areas where Jewish Christians were living in his time. Epiphanius locates his Kokaba/Chochaba in the area of Bashan, near Karnaim and Ashtaroth (*Pan.* 29.7.7 and *Pan.* 30.2.8–9). Kokaba/Chochaba has been identified with the remains of a town some twenty-seven kilometers east of the Sea of Galilee.⁵⁶ In the nearby village of Farj, some archaeological evidence has also been found which may suggest the presence of a Jewish-Christian community: inscriptions including both menorahs and Christian symbols. The inscriptions are dated between the latter part of the fourth century and the early fifth, which makes them roughly contemporary with Epiphanius.⁵⁷ Eusebius has also located Ebionites in a village called Choba (Χωβόα),⁵⁸ which might be the same village as Epiphanius' Kokaba/Chochaba.⁵⁹ In any case, it seems that Epiphanius identified these villages with each other because he locates the genesis of the sect of the Ebionites in his Kokaba/Chochaba (*Pan.* 30.2.8–9).

⁵⁵ Jerome first tried to fulfill his ascetic goals around 374–377 CE in Syria, near Chalcis, which was located 88 km east-southeast of Antioch and 27 km southwest of Beroea. Kelly 1975, 46.

⁵⁶ Taylor 1993, 37.

⁵⁷ Taylor 1993, 39–41.

⁵⁸ Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, ed. Lagarde 1966 [1887], p. 172,1–3; See Klijn & Reinink 1973, 150–151.

⁵⁹ Thus Klijn & Reinink 1973, 27 and Taylor 1993, 38. If the village is not the same, Eusebius' Choba must have been closer to Damascus because the biblical Hobah (Gen 14:15)—in connection with which Eusebius mentions the Choba of the Ebionites—is located to the north of Damascus.

The tradition about the disciples' flight to Pella before the conquest of Jerusalem, as transmitted by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5), is hardly historical as such. G. Lüdemann has shown that the story can be understood as a foundation legend of a Jewish-Christian community that was living in Pella.⁶⁰ If the Pella-tradition was transmitted by Aristo of Pella, as Lüdemann suggests, then it is clear that the Jewish-Christian community had settled in Pella in 135 CE, at the latest.⁶¹ In any case, it is clear that, by the time of Epiphanius, Pella was known as a local center of Jewish Christians who claimed to be the successors of the early Jerusalem community.

Another question is whether or not the Jewish Christians living in Kokaba/Chochaba and Pella were called Nazarenes. At least Epiphanius' predecessors in the formative Catholic tradition presumably called the Jewish Christians of Pella, who understood themselves to be the successors of Jerusalem community, Ebionites. Irenaeus already knew that the Ebionites were "adoring Jerusalem as if it were the house of God." Epiphanius himself also testifies that the Ebionites traced their name—*ebion* means "poor" in Hebrew—back to the time of the Apostles by claiming that they sold their properties and laid the money at the Apostles' feet (*Pan.* 30.17.2). Epiphanius' own interpretation of the prehistory of the Ebionites is in sharp contrast with this explanation since he traces the genesis of the Ebionites back to the activity of Ebion, a former member of the sect of the Nazarenes.

Although one cannot exclude the possibility that there were Jewish Christians who were generally called Nazarenes in Pella and Kokaba/Chochaba in Epiphanius' time, it is more likely that Epiphanius is responsible for connecting the Nazarenes to these environs. Because Epiphanius' *Panarion* depicts the Nazarenes as the first representatives of heretical Jewish Christianity, they had to be connected to the places where Jewish Christians were traditionally thought to be living.

⁶⁰ Lüdemann 1980, 161–173, 245–254, esp. 165.

⁶¹ Lüdemann 1980, 248 n. 19 argues that the emigration must have happened before 135. I agree with Lüdemann that, if the Pella tradition was transmitted by Aristo of Pella, who wrote around 140–150, the Bar Kokhba War (in 135) cannot have been the disaster that gave rise to the legend. However, in contrast to Lüdemann, I cannot see any apparent reason why the legend could not be rooted in the flight of some members of the Jerusalem community to Pella in the wake of the execution of James the Just. This happened a couple of years before the disaster of 70, and if there were only a few members from Jerusalem, it is perfectly possible that they survived when the Jews raided the town in revenge for the killing of their compatriots in Caesarea (Josephus, *Bell.* 2.458).

The Nazarenes' Use of the Scriptures

Because Jewish Christians were generally thought to be competent in the Hebrew language⁶² and obedient to Jewish law, there is no need to assume that Epiphanius must have used a source where it was stated that the Nazarenes used both the New and the Old Testament. On the contrary, the context where Epiphanius presents this information indicates that the reference to the Nazarenes' use of the scriptures only serves to exemplify his accusation that Nazarenes are "complete" Jews. Unlike the representatives of the Jewish sects that Epiphanius has discussed in the beginning of his work, the Nazarenes did not repudiate any parts of the Old Testament but were representatives of "orthodox" Judaism since they accepted the law, the prophets and the Writings. In Epiphanius' view, the Nazarenes were blameless as regards Judaism—except for their belief in Christ.

The Nazarenes' use of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew is referred to at the very end of *Panarion* 29, as if it were a sort of appendix to the discussion. Obviously, Epiphanius has added this note in view of his following treatment of the Ebionites.

In the next chapter of his heresiology (*Pan.* 30), Epiphanius presents several quotations from a gospel that was used by the Ebionites saying that the Ebionites call their writing the "Gospel according to the Hebrews." Epiphanius admits that Matthew, indeed, wrote his gospel in Hebrew (*Pan.* 30.3.7). However, it is clear that the gospel used by the Ebionites was a Greek document since the quotations that Epiphanius presents are in Greek and they include wordplays that are understandable only in Greek.⁶³ According to Epiphanius, the gospel that the Ebionites used was "corrupt and mutilated" (*Pan.* 30.13.1) and a quotation from the beginning of their gospel shows that it opened with the description of the baptism of John. Thus, it did not include the birth narratives (*Pan.* 30.13.6, 30.14.3).

With this kind of evidence about the writings of the Ebionites in his hands, Epiphanius must have been faced with the dilemma of how to explain the information he found in his sources which stated that the Ebionites used only Matthew's Gospel (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.26.2) or the "Gospel according to the Hebrews" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.27.4). An easy

⁶² See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.5, 3.39.16–17, 5.8.2.

⁶³ For instance, the Ebionites, who were vegetarians, had introduced changes to John the Baptist's diet by replacing locusts with honey cakes (see Chapter 2.1.4).

solution was that the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew was used by the Nazarenes who preceded the Ebionites. However, Epiphanius was not able to decide if the birth narratives were already cut from the version that was used by the Nazarenes, or only from the Greek version that was used by their successors, the Ebionites. In reality, Epiphanius had no first-hand information at all about the character of the gospel that was allegedly used by the Nazarenes. Everything he says about their gospel is based on his own deductions.

The Ebionite gospel (or some passages of it) that Epiphanius had in his hands was not the only information that was at odds with the characterization of the Ebionites that Epiphanius found in his sources. Epiphanius reports that the Ebionites were using *Circuits of Peter* and *Ascents of James* (30.15.1, 30.16.6), that obviously were sources for Pseudo-Clementine writings,⁶⁴ and “other Acts of the Apostles.” Furthermore, Epiphanius seems to have ascribed to the Ebionites views that were typical of the *Book of Elchasai*.⁶⁵

Because the documents were used by Epiphanius’ Ebionites and they gave a picture of Ebionite practices and doctrine that differed remarkably from the earlier information about the Ebionites, Epiphanius was faced with the problem of how to deal with the “traditional” picture of the Ebionites. Furthermore, had Epiphanius dealt only with the “Pseudo-Clementine” and “Elchasaite” Ebionites, he would have left open the possibility that Jewish Christianity in its more traditional, “pure” form was not so corrupt after all. My hypothesis is that, because this is not what he wanted to say, he created a picture of an earlier Nazarene heresy which made it possible for him to refute all attempts to try to be both a Jew and a Christian at the same time.

The Doctrines of the Nazarenes

As regards the Christology of the Nazarenes, Epiphanius confesses that he does not know whether or not the Nazarenes followed the Cerinthians in regarding Christ as a mere man (*Pan.* 19.7.6). This statement is revealing in two respects. First, since Epiphanius did not know the Nazarenes’ stance on such a burning Christological issue, it is unlikely that he had any personal contact with a sect known as the Nazarenes. Second,

⁶⁴ For the sources of the Pseudo-Clementine writings, see the discussion above, Chapter 2.1.4; Jones 2005.

⁶⁵ For the *Book of Elchasai*, see Chapter 2.1.4.

Epiphanius' ignorance also shows that, by his time, the Nazarenes were not generally known as "those believing Jews who do believe in the virgin birth."

In the light of Epiphanius' ignorance, it is surprising that modern scholars usually characterize the Nazarenes' theology by highlighting their belief in the virgin birth. One argument presented in favor of this view is that, although the Nazarenes were not mentioned by Epiphanius' predecessors, they were already known to Origen (*Contra Celsum* 5.61) and Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.27.1–3), who make a distinction between two groups of Ebionites: some Ebionites did believe in the virgin birth (= "Nazarenes"), while others did not (= the "real" Ebionites).⁶⁶ However, as was shown above⁶⁷ this distinction may itself be based on an early textual corruption of Irenaeus' heresiology. In any case, it is clear that Epiphanius, the "inventor" of the Nazarenes, did not identify the Nazarenes with these "more orthodox" Ebionites. Further evidence of the Nazarenes' belief in the virgin birth has been found in Jerome's letter to Augustine (*Epist.* 112) but, as will be shown below (2.2.4), the reference to the Nazarenes in this letter is extremely problematic from a historical point of view.

If Epiphanius' did not know the stance of the Nazarenes on the virgin birth, how is it possible that he was able to present some other details about their doctrines? Where did he get his information?

Everything that Epiphanius does reveal about the doctrines of the Nazarenes can be read in *Pan.* 29.7.3. Therefore, the passage will be repeated here, with the numbering of the information about the Nazarenes' doctrines that was used above:

They acknowledge both (3) the resurrection of the dead, and (4) the divine creation of all things, and (5) declare that God is one, and that (6) his Son/servant (παῖς) is Jesus Christ.

According to Pritz, one indication of the fact that the Nazarenes were the successors of the earliest Jerusalem church is that Epiphanius' information in *Pan.* 29.7.3 about the doctrines of the Nazarenes accords with Acts' information about the early Jerusalem church:

One need make only a quick comparison with the opening chapters of Acts to see that these basic doctrines had a place in the teaching of the earliest Jerusalem church: the resurrection of the dead (Acts 2:24,32; 3:15;

⁶⁶ See, Pritz 1988, 28, 108–109; Wilson 1995, 155–157; Mimouni 1998, 82, 86; Bauckham 2003, 162–163.

⁶⁷ See above, Chapter 2.1.2.

4:10); God is the creator of all things (4:24); and belief in one God and his child (παῖς) Jesus Christ (3:13,26; 4:27,30). To this point we do not have anything that would differentiate the Nazarene church from the primitive church.⁶⁸

Pritz finds here substantial evidence for his thesis, according to which the Nazarenes were successors of the early Jerusalem community and that their doctrine was “orthodox” from the very beginning. However, this line of thought is problematic in two respects. First, from a historical point of view, it is clear that Acts presents Luke’s interpretation of the life and doctrines of the early Jerusalem community. Therefore, if there is a perfect match between *Pan.* 29.7.3 and Acts, it is questionable how much this reveals about the Nazarenes’ relation to the early Jerusalem community. It only accords with Luke’s picture of the early Jerusalem community. Second, as was shown above, at least some connections between *Panarion* 29 and Acts can be traced back to Epiphanius’ use of Acts as a source in *Panarion* 29, which raises the question if that is also the case in *Pan.* 29.7.3.

Because the *belief in resurrection* does not play any role in other parts of Epiphanius’ discussion of the Nazarenes, it is somewhat surprising to find it listed among the Nazarene doctrines. This reference becomes understandable in the light of Epiphanius’ use of Acts since the resurrection is one of the main points of contention between Paul and his Jewish accusers in Acts.⁶⁹ For the sake of his own rhetoric, Paul—who is accused of being the leader of the Nazarene heresy—“confesses” the main points of the “Nazarene doctrine” in Acts 24:14–15:

However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a heresy (αἵρεσις). I believe everything that agrees with the law and that is written in the prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. (trans. NIV).

A few verses later, Paul’s defense culminates in his recalling of the earlier events in Jerusalem:

Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: “It is concerning *the resurrection of the dead* that I am on trial before you today.” (Acts 24:20–21; trans. NIV).

⁶⁸ Pritz 1988, 44. Similarly, de Boer 1998, 246.

⁶⁹ Cf. Schmidtke 1911, 122–123.

Pritz correctly notes that Acts often connects resurrection with Jesus' position as *God's servant*. Notably, Epiphanius uses here the same Greek word (παῖς) that is also used in Acts 3:13–15, 26.⁷⁰ Because Epiphanius argued that the Nazarenes were mimicking the early Jerusalem church, it is easy to understand why he spiced up his description of the Nazarenes by borrowing these details from Acts.

However, Epiphanius did not need to consult Acts in order to state that the Nazarenes believed in the *divine creation of all things*—though one can find this belief in Acts 4:24—or that the Nazarenes declared *belief in one God*. These characteristics were traditionally connected to Jewish Christians ever since Irenaeus' heresiology, which emphasized that, in contrast to the Cerinthians, the Jewish Christians (Ebionites) did not believe that the world was created by a power (demiurge) that was separate from the supreme God (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.26.1–2).

Conclusion: The Profile of Epiphanius' Nazarenes

Besides Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and Acts, Epiphanius seems to have had no sources from which he could have derived information about the Nazarenes. His intention was to provide a prehistory for the Ebionites who were his contemporaries, and he accomplished this by tracing evidence of the activities and beliefs of conservative Jewish Christians in Acts and *Ecclesiastical History*.

The Jewish-Christian profile Epiphanius created for the Nazarenes is perfect in the sense that it combines exemplary Jewish features with exemplary Christian characteristics, derived directly from the early Jerusalem community. In contrast to the Ebionites, who rejected the prophets and part of the Pentateuch, the Nazarenes

use not only the New Testament but the Old Testament as well, as the Jews do. For unlike the previous sectarians [Jewish sects in the *Panarion*], they do not repudiate the legislation, the prophets, and the books Jews call "Writings."
(*Pan.* 29.7.2; trans. Williams 1987b).

He summarizes their position as follows:

They are different from Jews, and different from Christians, only in the following. They disagree with Jews because they have come to faith in Christ; but since they are still fettered by the law—circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest—they are not in accord with Christians.
(*Pan.* 29.7.5; trans. Williams 1987b).

⁷⁰ παῖς appears 24 times in the NT: Matt 8, Luke 9, John 1, Acts 6.

This short characterization could function as a simple definition of Jewish Christianity for modern scholars as well. It is no wonder because this is what Epiphanius was aiming at: a description of Jewish Christianity in its simplest, stereotypic form. With a picture like this, it was easy to condemn all attempts to mix Christianity with characteristically Jewish practices and ideas: “In this section, too, my brief discussion will be enough. People like these are refutable at once and easy to cure—or rather, they are nothing but Jews themselves.” (*Pan.* 29.9.1; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).

Social psychologists have known for a long time the importance of stereotypes in the creation and maintenance of social identities. The so-called *social identity approach*⁷¹ has also been successfully applied in Biblical studies to cast light on group phenomena where strong stereotypes and boundaries are created.⁷² Heresiologies are also perfect objects for such socio-cognitive analyses since they were written and used precisely for the kinds of purposes that the social identity approach is designed to expose: categorization of outgroups, accentuation of differences between the ingroup and the outgroups and the search for subjective cognitive coherence.⁷³ Epiphanius’ Nazarenes are a prime example of an identity-building stereotype which has very little to do with reality but which perfectly serves border marking and the building of a positive group identity.

2.2.4. *The Profile of Jerome’s Nazarenes*

In *Pan.* 29, Epiphanius devotes an enormous amount of energy and space to a discussion of what kinds of names were applied to the first Christians; how the heretical Nazarenes differed from the “orthodox” Nazarenes; how the term Nazarene is not to be confused with the nazirites or with the pre-Christian sect of the Nasoreans; and that, besides Nazarenes, the Christians were for a short while also called Jessaeans.⁷⁴ These termino-

⁷¹ The term *social identity approach* is an umbrella term that refers to Henri Tajfel and John Turner’s *social identity theory*, mainly developed in the 1970s in Bristol, to Turner’s *self-categorization theory* developed in the mid-1980s, as well as to later adaptations of these theories. For an introduction, see Tajfel 1981; Hogg & Abrams 1988 and Hogg & Abrams 1999.

⁷² For instance, Esler 1998, 2003; 2007; Hakola 2007; Jokiranta 2007.

⁷³ Luomanen 2007b, 220–224.

⁷⁴ Jessaeans as the title of the first Christians is not discussed by other church fathers. However, in Syriac, Christians are called not only *natsraye* (ܢܨܪܝܝܐ), as was indicated above, but also *yeshuaye* (ܝܫܘܝܐ) and a cognate title is to be found in Arabic as well. Therefore, it is possible that Epiphanius knew these titles from Syriac traditions

logical clarifications indicate that the term “Nazarenes” was not commonly used as a title for “heretical” Jewish Christians before Epiphanius wrote his *Panarion*. However, once the point of reference for the term “Nazarenes” was fixed in the *Panarion*, it worked very well among Greek and Latin-speaking Christians because no contemporary, “orthodox” Christian group bore that name in Latin or Greek. After Epiphanius, several authors in the West used the term, but usually referring to Jewish Christians in general, so that it became synonymous with “Ebionites.” Yet we know that before and after Epiphanius in the East, the cognates of the term Nazarenes were commonly used to denote Christians in general among Syrians, Arabs, Persians and Armenians.⁷⁵ It follows that, once we move over to sphere of Semitic Christianity in the East, we have to reckon with the possibility that the term “Nazarenes” was used to denote Christians whose beliefs and practices were not clearly “heretical.” As a matter of fact, it seems that Jerome’s Nazarenes provides an example of one such group.

Before a discussion of Jerome’s references to the Nazarenes, a short overview of Jerome’s biography is needed in order to determine how his references are related to Epiphanius’ information about the Nazarenes. A more detailed account of Jerome’s life with special emphasis on his literary activity follows in Chapter 3.2.

Jerome was born in Stridon in 347 or 348.⁷⁶ He had Christian parents and he received his education in Rome. He made his first trip to the East in 372. Originally he had planned to go to Jerusalem but illness prolonged his stay in Antioch and finally made him give up the plan. Instead, he tried the life of a monk in Beroea (374/375–377). Most scholars assume that if Jerome really met Nazarenes, whose gospel he started to quote ten years later, it must have happened here. Jerome returned to Rome in 382 in the company of bishops Paulinus and Epiphanius, with whom he stayed in regular contact afterwards. After the death of Pope Damasus in 384, Jerome entertained hopes of becoming his successor. However, he was not elected and he headed again to Jerusalem where he arrived in 385. After a short trip to Alexandria, Jerome settled in Bethlehem in

and connected them to the first Christians because, being Semitic, they had a ring of authenticity. See above footnote 83.

⁷⁵ For the term Nazarene in general, see Chapter 2.2.2.

⁷⁶ Kelly 1975, 337–339 has argued for an earlier date of birth, 331. However, this is not convincing since that would make Jerome 32 years old when starting grammar school. Thus, Nautin 1986, 304–306.

386. He founded a monastery and spent the rest of his life there. Because Jerome spent long periods of time in the East, it is reasonable to assume that he had some reliable information about Christians who were called Nazarenes there.

Jerome's information about the Nazarenes can be classified into three main categories: 1) occasional references to Nazarene beliefs and practices in connection with the treatment of other topics, 2) explicit descriptions of the Nazarene biblical exegesis in Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah*, and 3) quotations from a gospel used by them. In this chapter, I focus on the first two categories. The Nazarenes' gospel tradition is treated in more detail in Chapter 3.3.

Jerome's Occasional References and His Letter to Augustine

When assessing Jerome's references to the Nazarenes, it should be kept in mind that he wrote after Epiphanius' *Panarion* was composed and after he had been in contact with Epiphanius several times, especially during their common journey to Rome in 382. Although Jerome does not explicitly quote the *Panarion*, it is probable that, when he moved to Palestine and started to refer to the Nazarenes, he was already influenced by Epiphanius' interpretation of the Nazarenes as "heretics."

Most of Jerome's references to the Nazarenes are to be found in contexts where he refers to or quotes writings that were used by the Nazarenes: a gospel that they used and a commentary on Isaiah. However, occasional references to Nazarenes are also scattered around Jerome's large literary production. According to Jerome, Christians were called Nazarenes because of Jesus' home village (*Sit.* 143). The Nazarenes are cursed in the synagogues of the Jews (*Comm. Am.* 1.11–12; *Comm. Isa.* 5.18–19, 49.7, 52.4–6). The Nazarenes use the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew (*Vir. ill.* 3). Jerome also tells how he has met Nazarenes and received their writings (*De vir. ill.* 3, *Comm. Matt.* 27.9–10) and he refers to the Nazarenes' beliefs in his letter to Augustine (*Epist.* 112.13).

As compared to Epiphanius, Jerome's attitude towards Christians called Nazarenes is much more positive. Jerome's critical comments are usually aimed at Ebion and the Ebionites but on one occasion he also criticizes the Nazarenes. This is in his letter to Augustine in 404, where Jerome defends his interpretation of Paul's and Peter's conflict in Antioch (cf. Gal 2).

As regards the scholarly discussion about the Nazarenes' doctrine, the letter to Augustine has played a central role since this quotation is the only place where one might see an explicit reference to the Nazarenes'

belief in the virgin birth.⁷⁷ However, scholars who draw such conclusions about the Nazarenes on the basis of this passage seldom pay attention to its overall context and, more specifically, to the way Jerome develops his case against Augustine. Jerome's overriding interest is to confute Augustine's interpretation of the Antioch incident. Jerome's and Augustine's disputation had a long and complicated prehistory and Jerome's reputation as a biblical scholar was at stake. Therefore, Jerome's critical reference to the Nazarenes cannot be understood correctly without knowing the background of the letter.

Almost two decades earlier (386/7), Jerome had stated in his *Commentary on Galatians*—following Origen and other Greek commentators—that in reality Paul and Peter did not have any disagreement concerning the Christians' obedience to the law. The conflict in Antioch (cf. Gal 2:11–14) was staged only for didactical purposes: Peter pretended to obey the law in order to win Jews to his side and Paul pretended to reprimand him in order to make it clear that the gentile Christians were not obliged to obey the law. Augustine was offended by this interpretation because it seemed to indicate that the Bible was not trustworthy. He sent his own interpretation of the incident followed by some critical remarks and questions to Jerome. Jerome did not get Augustine's first letter and Augustine had to resend his inquiries. The original of the second letter also failed to reach Jerome and when Jerome was finally informed of Augustine's critical remarks through an abbreviated copy of the letter that was circulated around, he refused to answer. However, the dispute had become widely known and in 404 Jerome could no longer postpone his answer.⁷⁸ Jerome pushes Augustine's case to the extreme, claiming that Augustine obviously wants all the Jews who have become Christians to continue to obey the law. This would lead into the heresy of Cerinthus and Ebion:

If this [i.e., Augustine's interpretation] is true, we shall fall into the heresy of Cerinthus and Hebion, who believe in Christ and for this only have been anathematized by the fathers, because they mixed the ceremonies of the law with the Gospel of Christ and in this way they confess new things while they did not cut loose from the old. What shall I say of the Ebionites who claim to be Christians? Until now a heresy is to be found in all parts of the East where Jews have their synagogues; it is called "of the Minaeans" and

⁷⁷ See for instance, Pritz 1988, 53–55.

⁷⁸ For the conflict between Augustine and Jerome, see Kelly 1975, 217–220, 263–272; Hennings 1994, 274–291.

cursed by Pharisees up to now. Usually they are named Nazoreans. They believe in Christ, the Son of God born of Mary the virgin, and they say about him that he suffered and rose again under Pontius Pilate, in whom also we believe, but since they want to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither Jews nor Christians.

(Jerome, *Epist.* 112.13; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).

Jerome comes back to the same argument a bit later (112.16) but then he refers only to the Ebionites. Clearly, Jerome is not giving here an objective account of the Nazarenes' doctrines. The name of the Nazarenes is mentioned only in passing, as a synonym for the Ebionites whose heresy Augustine is propagating, in Jerome's opinion. Jerome is making exactly the same point here as Epiphanius does at the end of *Panarion* 29: If you try to be both a Jew and a Christian at the same time, you end up being neither Jewish nor Christian and you will be anathematized. I think it is not too far-fetched to assume that Jerome owed this argument to Epiphanius.

The reason why the name of the Nazarenes is taken up in this context is that the Pharisees were not known for cursing the Ebionites in their synagogues but the "Minaeans" and the "Nazarenes"—obviously corresponding to the two forms of the *Eighteen Benedictions* that were in use in Jewish synagogues. Since no curse of the Ebionites was known, Jerome had to bring in the "Minaeans" and the "Nazarenes" in order to show that Augustine's position was anathematized both by Jewish and Christian "fathers." Furthermore, Epiphanius' description of the Nazarenes'/Ebionites' beliefs is all but a quotation from early Christian creeds: "They believe in Christ, the Son of God born of Mary the virgin, and they say about him that he suffered and rose again under Pontius Pilate, in whom also we believe . . ." The "fact"⁷⁹ that some of the Ebionites believed in the virgin birth was certainly known to Jerome from Origen's and Eusebius' writings. By reciting an early Christian creed, Jerome demonstrates that correct doctrine does not help if one still adheres to Jewish law.

This passage does not necessarily have anything to do with specifically Nazarene doctrine (if there even was one—which I doubt). Jerome only quotes the creed in order to make clear that even if a person has the correct doctrine but tries to combine Christianity with Judaism (like

⁷⁹ As was noted above (Chapter 2.1.1), the distinction between two kinds of Ebionites is historically unreliable.

Augustine does, in Jerome's view), that person is cursed. Therefore, one should not build any concept of the character of the Nazarenes on this passage.

The Nazarenes and the Rabbis

A much more reliable source for information about the Nazarenes is the Nazarenes' explanation of Isaiah, quoted by Jerome in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, written around 408/410. Jerome's commentary contains five quotations from the Nazarenes' explanation. Three of these are to be found in one block, at the end of Isaiah 8 and in the beginning of Isaiah 9. The remaining two are in Isa 29:17–21 and 31:6–9. All these quotations exemplify the Nazarenes' highly critical attitude towards the early rabbis and their tradition. Because Jerome does not draw on the Nazarenes' commentary in any other connection or even refer to the work in any of his writings, he probably did not have the entire explanation available. More likely, he was only using a Nazarene collection of prophetic testimonies against the "scribes and the Pharisees" that he had either received from the "Nazarenes" or that was connected to them for some other reason.⁸⁰

The Nazarenes' Interpretation of Isa 8:14: The "Scatterer" and the "Unholy"

At the beginning of the first quotation, Jerome introduces the Nazarenes as the ones "who accept Christ in such a way that they do not cease to observe the old law." The quoted explanation itself concerns the two houses mentioned in Isaiah 8:14.⁸¹

According to Jerome,

the Nazarenes ... explain the two houses as the two families, viz. of Shammai and Hillel, from whom originated the Scribes and the Pharisees. Akiba who took over their school is called the master of Aquila the proselyte and after him came Meir who has been succeeded by Joannes the son of Zakkai and after him Eliezer and further Telphon, and next Joseph Galilaeus and Josua up to the capture of Jerusalem. Shammai then and Hillel were born not long before the Lord, they originated in Judea.

⁸⁰ Schmidtke 1911, 63–90 assumed that Jerome had received the information about the Nazarenes' Isaiah exegesis from his teacher Apollinaris. The assumption is a part of Schmidtke's—generally dismissed—hypothesis that both Jerome and Epiphanius (in *Pan.* 29) derived their information about the Nazarenes from Apollinaris.

⁸¹ Isaiah 8:14: "... but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare."

The name of the first means scatterer and of the second unholy, because he scattered and defiled the precepts of the law by his traditions and δευτερώσεις. And these are the two houses who did not accept the Saviour who has become to them destruction and shame. (*Comm. Isa.* 8.11–15 [interpretation of Isaiah 8:11–15]; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).

The interpretation of the name of Hillel indicates that the one who was responsible for it was working with the Hebrew script since Hillel becomes “unholy” if one reads the root as הלל instead of הלל. Pritz has also pointed out that Telphon in Jerome’s quotation most likely refers to Tarphon, who was one of Akiva’s students. This mistake is also understandable only in an unpointed Hebrew text where vowels are not indicated and a defective ל may resemble ר. A third indication of Hebrew/Aramaic being the original language of the exposition is to be found in the passage that is quoted below. There it is stated that the “preaching became more dominant, that means the preaching was multiplied” (*ingrauada est, id est multiplicata praedicatio*). However, neither “becoming more dominant” or “multiplied” fits the context very well. Obviously, Jerome has here had difficulties in translating the Hebrew root כבד which can mean (in Hiphil) both “make heavy” and “make honored.” Jerome’s Vulgate opted for the first meaning in Isa 8:23 and that was also his starting point when he was translating the Nazarene’s exposition. However, the original meaning in the context of the Nazarenes’ expositions must have been “made honored,” which Jerome did not realize. Klijn has also pointed out several connections between the Nazarenes’ expositions and Targumic traditions,⁸² which is a further indication of the fact that the passages Jerome quoted were derived from Aramaic-speaking Christians.

The trick with the explanation of the name Shammai (שמאי) is that it is interpreted as being derived from the root שממ so that it becomes “scatterer.” As a matter of fact, this pun has a clear connection to Jerome’s Latin translation of the Old Testament. In the Vulgate, *dissipare* (“to scatter”) is often used to translate the Hebrew root שממ. Thus, it is possible that Jerome himself was responsible for this interpretation. Furthermore, the sequence of the rabbis is incorrect since Meir should be the last one on the list. This may indicate that the list was later enlarged with

⁸² Klijn 1972, 241–255. In addition to connections that Klijn has pointed out, it is to be noted that the translation *vectigales* (see below *Comm. Isa.* 31:6–9) reflects the later Hebrew meaning of the root מס and the language of the Targums. See, BDB, מס (pp. 586–587).

Yohanan ben Zakkai and his students and the reviser did not know the real sequence of the rabbis, or that the one who added the reference to the rabbis was not too well-versed in the rabbinic tradition in the first place.⁸³

In addition to the interpretation of the name Shammai the quoted passages also have other connections to the wording of the Vulgate.⁸⁴ Because the exposition often paraphrases Isaiah's passages, it is natural that Jerome drew on his own Latin translation instead of preparing an independent, direct translation from the Nazarenes' exposition.

Nevertheless, even if the passage was enlarged with some critical notes later on (by Jerome), the mere fact that Shammai's and Hillel's schools are identified with the two houses of Israel, which are to face the judgment, indicates that the Nazarenes' own explanation must already have been directed against the rabbinic tradition.

The Nazarenes' Interpretation of Isa 9:1: Did They Still Observe the Old Law?

The criticism of the Scribes and the Pharisees is so obvious in the Nazarenes' expositions that there is no doubt that the Nazarenes totally rejected the early rabbis and their teaching. However, at some points the criticism goes so far that it becomes questionable if the excerpts really were derived from people "who accept Christ in such a way that they do not cease to observe the old Law," as Jerome claimed in the introduction to the first quotation.

The Nazarenes whose opinion I have set forth above, try to explain this passage [Isaiah 9:1] in the following way: When Christ came and his preaching shone out, the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali first of all were freed from the errors of the Scribes and the Pharisees and he shook off their shoulders the very heavy yoke of the Jewish traditions. Later, however, the preaching became more dominant, that means the preaching was multiplied, through the Gospel of the apostle Paul who was the last of all the apostles. And the Gospel of Christ shone to the most distant tribes and the way of the whole sea. Finally the whole world which earlier walked or sat in darkness and was imprisoned in the bonds of idolatry and death, has seen the clear light of the gospel.

(*Comm. Isa.* 9.1; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973, modified).

⁸³ See Pritz 1988, 59,61; Schmidtke 1911, 123.

⁸⁴ For instance, the following expressions are paralleled in the Vulgate: *stridunt in incantationibus suis* (Isa 8:19), *qui peccare faciebant homines in verbo* (Isa 29:21).

According to this quotation, the Nazarenes fully accepted Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Thus, their stance was totally different from the Ebionites and from the Jewish-Christianity of the *Pseudo-Clementines*.⁸⁵

Even though it might be possible to interpret the clause "were freed from the errors of the Scribes and the Pharisees" so that only the rabbinic tradition was dismissed by Christ, in the following sentence the "heavy yoke of Jewish traditions" (*grauissimum traditionum Iudaicarum iugum*) is discarded altogether. Notably, the image of the "yoke"—which in Judaism is often connected to covenant loyalty in general—cannot be found in those verses of Isaiah that the passage paraphrases (Isa 8:23, 9:1). It is deliberately brought into the exposition in order to make it clear that Jesus' preaching did not comply with the "Jewish traditions."

The Nazarenes' Interpretation of Isa 8:19–22: Idol Worship

The total rejection of Jewish traditions can also be seen in the following passage which equates the following of the traditions with a nation's worship of idols:

For the rest the Nazarenes explain the passage [Isaiah 8:19–22] in this way: When the Scribes and the Pharisees tell you to listen to them, men who do everything for the love of the belly and who hiss during their incantations in the way of the magicians in order to deceive you, you must answer them like this. It is no wonder if you follow your traditions since every nation consults its own idols. We must not, therefore, consult your dead about the living ones. On the contrary God has given us the Law and the testimonies of the scriptures. If you are not willing to follow them you shall not have light, and darkness will always oppress you.

(*Comm. Isa.* 8.19–22; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).

The last passage that Jerome quotes also targets the Israelites as whole, not just the Scribes and the Pharisees as their leaders:⁸⁶

The Nazarenes understand this passage [Isaiah 31:6–9] in this way: O sons of Israel who deny the Son of God with the most vicious opinion, turn to him and his apostles. For if you will do this, you will reject all idols which to you were a cause of sin in the past and the devil will fall before you, not because of your powers, but because of the compassion of God. And his young men who a certain time earlier fought for him, will be the

⁸⁵ Cf. Häkkinen 2005 and Jones 2005.

⁸⁶ Klijn 1972, 253–254 thinks that the Nazarenes' exposition only attacks the Jewish leaders but it is hard to find such a distinction in the texts.

tributaries of the Church and any of its power and stone will pass. Also the philosophers and every perverse dogma will turn their backs to the sign of the cross. Because this is the meaning of the Lord that his will take place, whose fire or light is in Sion and his oven in Jerusalem.

(*Comm. Isa.* 31.6–9; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).

The passage reveals a viewpoint that is nothing short of the formative Catholic view: The Jews are expected to convert and accept the apostolic faith. In order to do so, they will have to abandon their worship of idols, which—as was shown above—is the same as following Jewish traditions. Consequently, the young men of Israel, who earlier had fought with the devil against the Christians, will become the tributaries of the Church. Finally, the conclusion of the passage also indicates that, despite its sharp criticism of the Scribes and the Pharisees, the Nazarenes' exposition was also attacking the “philosophers” and other “perverse dogmas.” Thus the Nazarenes guarded their dogmatic frontiers much like the church fathers themselves.

The Nazarenes' Interpretation of Isa 29:17–21: The Dating of the Exposition

On the basis of the rabbis named in the quotations, the passages cannot be dated earlier than the mid-second century. However, the quotation that deals with Isaiah 29:17–21 may give us further evidence about the time of the composition of the Nazarene's commentary.

What we understood to have been written about the devil and his angels, the Nazoreans believe to have been said against the Scribes and the Pharisees, because the δευτεροταῖ passed away, who earlier deceived the people with very vicious traditions. And they watch night and day to deceive the simple ones who made men sin against the Word of God in order that they should deny that Christ was the Son of God.

(*Comm. Isa.* 29.17–21; trans. Klijn & Reinink 1973).

Since the exposition also indicates that the δευτεροταῖ—the church fathers' standard expression for early rabbis—have passed away and states that these dead teachers should not be consulted, it is to be assumed that the writer(s) of the exposition were confronted with Jewish teachers who already had the Mishnah in their hands, and that the Mishnah had also been established as authoritative teaching. If this is correct, then the most likely time of composition for the expositions would be the late third or early fourth century. Because the comments were written in Hebrew script and the writer was acquainted with Targumic traditions, the writer must have been a Jewish convert.

Second Legislation in the Didascalia Apostolorum

A remarkable parallel to the Nazarenes' position can be found in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (DA), which confirms that the Nazarenes' interpretation exemplified a typically Syrian attitude towards the early rabbis. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* makes a clear distinction between the First law that binds the Christians (Moses' Ten Commandments) and the Second Legislation (δευτέρωσις; cf. δευτερώσεις in Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 8.11–15) with which the Jews were bound after they had fallen into idol worship (Exod 32). Consequently, obedience to this Second Legislation is equated with *idol worship* and described as a *heavy burden* and a *hard yoke* in contrast to the First law, which is described as a *light yoke* and equated with the “*law and the prophets*” that Jesus has come to fulfill according to Matt 5:17.⁸⁷ Obviously, Jerome's Nazarenes and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* had a similar view of the Second Legislation. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* is usually dated to the third century but it was still used in Syria in the latter half of the fourth century since Epiphanius found it in the hands of the Audians who were Syrian Christians and “heretics” to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 70.10.1–4; cf. *DA XXI*; Lagarde, pp. 91–92).

Conclusion: The Profile of Jerome's Nazarenes

In the light of Jerome's passages and similar views presented in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, it is difficult to picture Jerome's Nazarenes as a strict, law-observant sect separated from the formative Catholic Church. The Christians from whom Jerome received the expositions unreservedly accepted Paul and his mission to the gentiles. They also leveled criticism at the Jewish nation and people as a whole. The Jews were required to repent/convert, and this did not presuppose the maintenance of a particular Jewish identity or aim at the reestablishment of a traditional Jewish covenantal relationship, as one would expect if a person who still had a Jewish self-understanding repented. Instead, the Jews were expected to adopt a Christian identity by becoming subjects of the Apostles.

⁸⁷ See, *DA II*/ed. Lagarde 1911 [1854], pp. 4–5; *DA IV*/ed. Lagarde 1911 [1854], p. 12; *DA XIX*/ed. Lagarde 1911 [1854], p. 79 and *DA XXVI*/ed. Lagarde 1911 [1854], pp. 107–109, 111–112, 115. For *DA*'s use of the term δευτέρωσις, see Fonrobert 2001, 495–499.

³³ Irenaeus' heresiology is probably based on Justin Martyr's (lost) *Syntagma* (written before 150 CE). However, most scholars think that Justin's heresiology did not mention Ebionites because Justin's other works show that he did not regard them as clearly heretical. See Häkkinen 2005, 248–249.

Overall, Jerome's Nazarenes—as far as their beliefs can be reconstructed from their Isaiah exegesis—exemplify such clear Christian self-understanding that I would not label them Jewish Christian. The sole basis for doing so would be the fact that they were versed in Semitic languages and might have been ethnic Jews. Jerome's Nazarenes clearly sided with Catholic Christianity and nothing of the idea of *tertium quid* between Jews and (other believing) Christians, which seems to characterize the ideology of the Pseudo-Clementine *Basic Writing*, can be found in Jerome's Nazarenes.⁸⁸ These Nazarenes may simply have been *Syriac Christians*, who were of Jewish pedigree—enough to render them suspicious in the eyes of the overtly anti-Jewish Jerome and his compatriots—but who no doubt felt themselves Christian and would have been classified as such by most modern critics.

2.2.5. Conclusion: Who Were the Nazarenes?

Epiphanius' description of the "heresy" of the Nazarenes in *Panarion* 29 is first and foremost a refutation of an idealized, stereotyped picture of people who try to be both Jews and Christians at the same time. The refutation of this standard type of Jewish Christianity needed to be included in the *Panarion* because—as it seemed from Epiphanius' point of view—the Ebionites who were known to him had adopted all kinds of strange ideas from Elchasite and Pseudo-Clementine writings. Epiphanius did not have any Nazarene texts or any sources describing the Nazarenes available, but on the basis of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Acts and his own conclusions, he was able to create a picture of the genesis, doctrines and practices of the heresy of the Nazarenes that was easy for him and his fellow Christians to refute. The heresy of the Nazarenes as it is depicted in *Panarion* 29 is pure fiction.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ cf. Jones 2005, 329–332.

⁸⁹ If the "heresy" of the Nazarenes is fictional, as is argued in this volume, it probably is not the only fictional group in Epiphanius' long list of heresies. An interesting point of comparison is the Alogi, who Epiphanius discusses in *Pan.* 51. In the case of the Alogi, Epiphanius explicitly states that he himself invented the term to be used for those who reject the Gospel of John and Revelation. For Alogi, see Marjanen 2005b, 249–252. According to Williams 1987a, xvii, "We cannot assume that, because Epiphanius refers to a given group as a 'sect' and gives it a name, it was necessarily an organized body ... Epiphanius says that he himself coined the names, 'Alogi,' 'Antidicomarians,' and 'Collyridians,' and he may have done the same in other cases. Certainly some of his 'sects' are simply persons who take a particular position; ... An Epiphanian 'sect,' then, may represent anything from an organized church to a school of thought, or a tendency manifested by some exegetes."

Nevertheless, three pieces of information with some historical credibility can be inferred from Epiphanius' story. First, by Epiphanius' time in some Jewish synagogues in Palestine and Syria, the prayer of *Eighteen Benedictions* included a curse on the Nazarenes, that is Aramaic/Syriac-speaking Christians. Second, areas to the east and north-east of the Jordan River and especially the villages of Kokaba and Beroea were known as places where Christians adhered to Jewish law. Third, "Nazarenes" was a common title for all Christians in Syriac and it seems that, in the Latin/Greek-speaking Christian communities of Antioch, the term Nazarenes was especially used for some Christians who lived in Beroea. This, together with the fact that for the Latin and Greek fathers, Syriac-speaking Christians, the "Nazarenes," had a reputation for being heretical,⁹⁰ may have been a good enough reason for Epiphanius to call the "standard" Jewish Christians, who were not yet influenced by Ebion's and Elchasaï's weird doctrines, Nazarenes.

In principle, Jerome shared Epiphanius' view of the Nazarenes as Jewish-Christian heretics but in practice, except for some general references, he did not polemicize against them. Obviously, some Christians who were called Nazarenes had provided Jerome useful information about the Hebrew scriptures which he was able to use to back up his program of *Hebraica veritas*. As will become clear below, Jerome may also have been reluctant to criticize the Nazarenes because the excerpts from the Nazarenes' writings he had received did not evince heretical ideas or practices. Instead, they provided him with a powerful weapon to be used in his anti-rabbinic polemics. As a matter of fact, the fragments in Jerome's writings that are likely to be derived from some Christians called Nazarenes—instead of testifying to the existence of a group of heretics—indicate that the term Nazarenes was also connected to Syriac/Aramaic-speaking Christians whose views barely differed from mainstream Catholicism.

Overall, there is no historically reliable evidence which would justify an assumption that, among Syriac/Aramaic-speaking Christians, there might have been a more or less organized faction with borders defined by characteristically "Nazarene" doctrines, practices or self-understanding, distinct from other Syriac/Aramaic-speaking Christians. Even for the church fathers who lived in Palestine, Syriac/Aramaic-speaking Chris-

⁹⁰ This is especially reflected in their earlier history up to the time of Ephrem and the bishop Rabbula. See, Segal 2001 [1970], 87–93.

tianity was by and large an unmapped territory of which they had gained knowledge more by hearsay than through personal experience.

Christian Identity in the Making: The “Genesis” of the Heresy of the Nazarenes

Why did Epiphanius create the picture of the Nazarene heresy practically out of nothing? I have suggested above that this was because the sources that Epiphanius had in his hands, and which he connected to the Ebionites, did not match the traditional information about the Ebionites and because Epiphanius still wanted to refute Jewish Christianity even in its “pure form.” Thus, in line with his basic conviction that heresies sprung from each other, he painted a picture of the development of Jewish-Christian heresies where the Nazarenes, placed between the Cerinthians and the Ebionites, played the role of imitators of the early Jerusalem church, pure in their “Christian doctrine” as the early Jerusalem community was pure in Epiphanius’ mind, and erring only in their adherence to Jewish law. With such a clear picture, it was easy to refute all the attempts to connect Christianity with the practicing of Jewish law. Epiphanius’ comment at the end of *Panarion* 29 is revealing: “People like these are easy to catch and refute—they are nothing but Jews” (*Pan.* 29.9.1).

Stereotypes are very powerful tools in creating and maintaining boundaries. According to social identity theory, stereotyping often accompanies ingroup/outgroup categorization.⁹¹ Fredrick Barth has modeled the formation of (ethnic) identity on three levels: 1) the micro level which focuses on personal and interpersonal interaction, 2) the median level which focuses on the formation of collectives, and 3) the macro level which is connected to the apparatus of the state. According to Barth, the

median level is needed to depict the processes that create collectivities and mobilize groups ... This is the field of entrepreneurship, leadership and rhetoric; here stereotypes are established and collectives are set in motion ... Processes on this level intervene to constrain and compel people’s expression and action on the micro level; package deals and either-or choices are imposed, and many aspects of the boundaries and dichotomies of ethnicity are fashioned.⁹²

⁹¹ See, for instance, Hogg & Abrams 1988, 77–78; Esler 2003, 21–22.

⁹² Barth 1994, 20–22. For a summary of Barth’s approach, see Esler 2003, 42–49. According to Esler, the median level of Barth’s modeling “corresponds to what Paul is attempting to achieve in Romans.”

Although Barth is mainly interested in the formation of ethnic identity, it is clear that the median level of his analysis can also be applied to illuminate the role of heresiologies in the formation of Christian identity, especially as far as this identity is formed in relation to an ethnic group such as the Jews. Epiphanius—and other heresiologists—can be seen as social entrepreneurs who create stereotypes and collectives in order to control the actions of individual Christians and their relation to outsiders.

One central aspect in the formation of social identities is the patterning of time by highlighting significant events in the history and future of the people whose collective identity is being created. The concept of “social time” refers to the recording of events of social change which a group finds significant. Those who have the power to impose their interpretation of the significance of events on others, largely determine which events will become significant within a group. Consequently, when power relations change within the group or when new events call forth restructuring of the social time, the history of the community needs to be rewritten. Philip Esler has aptly described this process: “Thus, as power relations in society at large or within a particular group change, modifications are made to the patterning of social time. Those in power rewrite the meaning of some events, erase some, and invent others.”⁹³

In the case of early Christian heresiologies, one can clearly see that the heresiologists not only aimed at refuting undesirable doctrines and practices but also imposed their interpretation of the history of the “heresies” they were discussing. The history of the early Catholic Church was purified and all ties to “heretic” groups cut by claiming that the heresies were sprouting from one single root separate from the Church. The heresiologists, who were writing mainly for their own community, had full power to create a prehistory for the groups and doctrines they were refuting. At some points, where the writers were involved with polemics, glimpses of the way in which their opponents themselves viewed their own earlier history come to the surface, as can be seen in Epiphanius’ note about the Ebionites who traced their origins back to Apostolic times. Yet it was easy for Epiphanius to place the Ebionites in the history created for the heretics by claiming that the Ebionites originated with a certain Ebion—who had already been invented by

⁹³ Esler 2003, 24.

Epiphanius' predecessors⁹⁴—and that Ebion got his “poor” name from his parents by prophecy. All this is nonsense from the viewpoint of present standards of critical history but its value for building up the sense of the doctrinal purity of the church cannot be underestimated.

The parallel story of the heresies was already there when Epiphanius started to write his *Panarion*.⁹⁵ He only needed to update the story to incorporate more recent heresies as well. In the case of Jewish Christians, he was able to anchor the genesis of this branch of heresy more firmly in history when he came up with the idea that the Nazarenes started to imitate the Christians who had escaped to Pella. By doing this, Epiphanius argued that people who mixed Jewish practices with their Christian way of life were not descendants of the early Jerusalem community. Instead, they were people who had misunderstood the true character of Christianity from the very beginning.

The stereotyped picture of the Nazarenes that was created by Epiphanius has proved to be very pervasive. In the light of the above assessment, this persistence is hardly based on the weight of historical evidence about their existence. However, even present critical scholarship usually takes it for granted that there once existed a group of Christians who were not just called Nazarenes (as all Christians were in Syriac) but who were also distinguishable from other Christians in respect of their doctrine, practices and the literature that they used.⁹⁶ One reason for this might be that once a very clear picture of a historical entity is created, it may be easier for the human mind to try to define its “true” character and place it in history rather than to discard the idea altogether. There may be other explanatory factors as well. One cannot help asking if the image of the Nazarenes has been so pervasive in scholarly discourse because it still has a positive role in legitimizing the present Christian identity. For instance, by showing that to the extent that Christians continued to regard the Jewish law binding, this was done in full accord with the earliest community in Jerusalem by Christians whose Christology was “orthodox” in character.

⁹⁴ The name Ebion probably appeared for the first time in Hippolytus' *Syntagma*. See, Häkkinen 2005.

⁹⁵ Irenaeus had traced the heresies back to Simon Magus, and Hippolytus back to Greek philosophies.

⁹⁶ Cf. Taylor 1990, 326; Bauckham 2003, 162; de Boer 1998, 239.