In the fall of 2024, Wipf and Stock published my eighth book. It is my first attempt put a lifetime interest in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity on a public stage. I would like to briefly cover, during this session, the central argument in the book. In *Nazorean* I shine *three spotlights* onto the life of Jesus.

The first spotlight is that of *Second Temple sectarianism*. In the nineteenth century, sociologists began to pay attention to the important role that sects play in religion. The German sociologist Max Weber and German theologian Ernst Troelsch brought sectarianism to our attention by making a distinction between church and sect. Churches, they explain, are inclusive organizations that are associated with the state. They promote conservative values. Sects, in contrast, are voluntary and exclusive religious organizations. They stand in tension with mainline religious and political associations and adopt countercultural values. Church-sect typologies, when applied to western catholic and protestant churches, attempt to locate various movements along the transition from sect to church. They also seek to classify different types of sects, as we see, for example, in the work of the British sociologist of religion, Bryan Wilson. These typologies, originally honed on the social experiences of post-Reformation protestants, have been widely applied to other eras of the church and other religions.

This discussion about church and sect became more relevant to our understanding of who Jesus was when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered and published in the second half of the twentieth century. We got our first in-depth look at a sectarian movement from the late Second Temple period. The Jewish historian Josephus had made us aware that the allegiance of Jews in this era was often divided between the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes. But it was only with the emergence of the DSS documents that it became clear just how sectarian the Essenes were. The Sadducees and Pharisees in this period assumed the role of church in the church-sect typologies—they had close allegiances with the political powers and vied with each other for control of mainline religious interpretations. The Essenes, in contrast, developed their institutions, practices, and beliefs around their sectarian identity. They reinterpreted Jewish religious rituals and doctrines and gave them meanings within a countercultural framework. Their own cultic practices, for example, came to be counted as the equivalent of animal sacrifice in the temple, removing the need for them to participate in the state-sanctioned religious devotion shaped around the Second Temple. They crafted commentaries that read the Jewish Scriptures in the light of their own sectarian experience.

The implications of the Essene sectarian role have been most fully developed articles written by Brian Capper at Canterbury Christ Church University. Pondering his work *led me to think about the significance of a sectarian background for our understanding of the Jesus movement*. Almost no modern scholar doubts the countercultural nature of the movement associated with Jesus. We cannot read his gospel denunciations of the halakhic interpretations of the Sadducees and Pharisees without sensing his profound differences with representatives of mainline Judaism. But where did these differences come from? Scholarship has tended to locate these sectarian

impulses in Jesus and his immediate context. In *Nazorean*, I walk this back a step. I picture a sectarian movement that arises in Palestine near the beginning of the first century BCE. Members of the movement refer to themselves by several names, including Nazoreans, Therapeutae, The Devout, and The Way. To fill out the details of this movement, I treat the Psalms of Solomon as a product of this community, and I interpret passages in Philo and the gospels and Acts as expressions of this community's practices and beliefs.

That's my sectarian spotlight. The second spotlight I shine on the Jesus movement in *Nazorean* comes from the Hebrew and Greek wisdom literature. Throughout the Second Temple period, groups of Jewish sages *assumed a wisdom posture* toward the core elements of Judaism. They contributed their beliefs and writings and halakhah to the Jewish faith.

Who were these sages? If we look at the virtues extolled in what may be the earliest of the wisdom books, the Book of Proverbs, a picture emerges of a professional class serving those who are in power**.** They probably occupied roles in the government as advisers, ministers of state, diplomats, scribes, and judges. They merged into the bureaucracy when governments were strong. When governments were weak or antagonistic, they withdrew into their guild identities.

We can identify a stream of wisdom documents—some canonical, some deuterocanonical, some pseudepigraphic—flowing through Second Temple Judaism. In addition to Proverbs, these include the books of Ecclesiastes, Job, the Song of Solomon, and some of the Psalms. Two deuterocanonical books, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, are late additions to the collection. In the last decades of the twentieth century, biblical scholars began to underline the effect that the wisdom tradition had on early Christian writings. Parts of the Gospel of Matthew, the whole of the Epistle of James, and core passages in the Gospel of John bear a wisdom watermark.

In the book, I trace how some of these wisdom themes made their way into Christian writings. I attribute these wisdom themes to the sectarian group out of which Jesus emerged—the Nazoreans were, in essence, *a wisdom sect*. Jesus and his brothers were raised in this tight-knit wisdom community. Many of the themes in the message of Jesus were lifted directly from the Nazorean agenda. Jesus's understanding of his own role was influenced by Nazorean doctrines about Person Wisdom and by the sect's messianic expectations. Many of these Nazorean teachings were probably elaborated in now-lost sectarian commentaries. Nazorean doctrines became guiderails for Messianic interpretations of the early church.

A third spotlight that I shine on the early Jesus movement is *an apocalyptic beam*. This is the least novel of the three spotlights. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, biblical scholarship—especially German biblical scholarship—began to place the Jesus movement in the

context of Second Temple apocalyptic thought. This trend came to the attention of the wider world with the publication of Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical* in 1906.

While there is little question that the Christian church was influenced by the waves of apocalyptic thought that rolled through late Second Temple Judaism, I don't spend much time describing this spotlight in *Nazorean*. I do, though, make a novel application of it. If the sectarian background of Jesus included wisdom elements, then we must find some way to put this together with the sect's adoption of apocalyptic themes. Pairing wisdom and apocalyptic perspectives is an odd mating. The two perspectives represent very different approaches to life. The wisdom tradition focuses on the observable world of nature, interpreted through wise sayings. The sage's attention is directed to present experience in a world that is inherently good. Fellow travellers are found in urbane and international wisdom communities. Apocalyptic writers, in contrast, turn their attention to a supernatural world. Rather than living in the present, they live for a time to come, rejecting the current and corrupt world and associating with groups—often rural groups—that withdraw from society. Their truths are revealed in dreams and visions, not in wise sayings.

Ben Witherington calls this fusion of wisdom and apocalypticism "an arranged marriage." It is certainly that, and I find in this unusual pairing the seeds of division in the early Nazorean communities. The Nazoreans split, I speculate, into two distinct streams. Using hints in the Psalms of Solomon, I suggest that in the mid-30s BCE, at the time of Herod's takeover, some of the Nazoreans abandoned their Jerusalem context and sought refuge in Galilee. Over time, this group became more open to apocalyptic interpretations of their relationship to core Judaism. Members of the sect who stayed behind in Jerusalem, or who migrated to the wider Jewish diaspora in the Roman Empire, drew more heavily on their wisdom heritage. I give them names in the book: the *s-Nazoreans* in Galilee and the *i-Nazoreans* in Jerusalem, Ephesus, Egypt, and elsewhere.

This division among the Nazorean sectarians was passed along to the early church. It explains, I believe, some tensions we find in New Testament documents. The most significant of these tensions is the remarkably different account of the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John compared to what we find in the Synoptic Gospels. In the Synoptics, we have the s-Nazorean perspective of the Galileans. Jesus is a teacher of the pithy and practical wisdom found in the Sermon on the Mount, a teaching that is also spelled out in the Epistle of James. This Jesus has rural perspectives and orients himself around Galilee, making only one adult trip to Jerusalem, for Holy Week. He is also a conveyor of apocalyptic perspectives and does not hesitate to place his ministry in a context of angels, demons, cosmic eschatologies, and final judgments.

John's perspective, in contrast, is that of the i-Nazoreans. The Gospel of John reflects the more urban and urbane mystical attitudes of the wisdom tradition sect. Jesus is equated with the Person Wisdom described in wisdom texts. He comes and goes from Jerusalem—some eighty percent of the gospel's content has a Judean setting. The s-Nazoreans behind the Synoptics,

while emphasizing their own sectarian values, felt relatively comfortable with the temple-orientation of core Judaism. John's i-Nazoreans did not conform to all the religious practices of core Judaism, and those that they retained they shaped around their mystical framework.

I spend a lot of time in *Nazorean* looking at the tension between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels and interpreting these as internal sectarian tensions. This throws light on the Nazorean movement. It also sheds light on some otherwise mysterious or misunderstood passages in the gospels.

Toward the end of the book, I cast my net a little wider—I look at how this fractured sectarian background might be present in other NT documents. I'm able to provide an alternate reading for the section at the beginning of Acts, for example, that describes an early disagreement in the young church between the Hellenists and Hebraists. These two parties split, I argue, mainly along the seam between i-Nazoreans and s-Nazoreans. I also look at sectarian ways of interpreting the Epistle to the Ephesians. The argument between Paul and Apollos in First Corinthians can also be put into the context of underlying i-Nazorean and s-Nazorean disagreements. The Epistle to the Hebrews seems to be an actor in this controversy. Last of all, I found that the first part of Revelations, the letters to the seven churches, could be read in the light of these early tensions.

Turning these three spotlights on the Jesus movement produces a different result than using just one spotlight, in the same way that we can get a new colour by combining red, blue, and green-filtered light. When I first contemplated pulling together my studies of the social and religious context of the Jesus movement, I knew that I had three spotlights that I could shine on the issue. What I didn't realize is that they would cast a shadow, when all three were turned on the life of Jesus, and that the outline of this shadow would become a sectarian movement that preceded and shaped the ministry, life, and teachings of Jesus.