

**PROFILE OF THREE FORMS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY**

(See also [www.barriewilson.com](http://www.barriewilson.com), Notes, “Two Early Christianities”)

	JESUS MOVEMENT	CHRIST MOVEMENT	GNOSTIC MOVEMENT
leader	James (30-62) and Jesus’ original disciples Simeon (until early 100’s)	Paul and his converts (mostly Gentiles who were “God-fearers”)	many leaders
location	Jerusalem and the Jewish Diaspora	Jewish Diaspora (modern day Turkey, Greece); in time the Mediterranean world	Jewish Diaspora; Mediterranean world
emphasis	Law (Torah)	faith in the Christ	gnosis/insight
focus	teachings OF Jesus	teachings ABOUT the Christ	teachings of the Living Jesus
typical beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Followed what they thought the Jesus they knew taught &amp; practices</li> <li>▪ Torah-observant</li> <li>▪ Participated in Temple worship</li> <li>▪ Thoroughly Jewish</li> <li>▪ Jesus human</li> <li>▪ Jesus resurrected</li> <li>▪ Jesus a potential messiah*</li> <li>▪ No significance attached to Jesus birth (no virgin birth)</li> <li>▪ No significance attached to Jesus death (not a saviour)</li> <li>▪ Viewed Paul as a false teacher (denied Torah; making a human into a divinity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Followed what Paul said the mystical Christ communicated in and through him.</li> <li>▪ Faith in the dying-rising Savior God-human, the Christ. The hope was that by participating in his suffering and death, so, we, too, can hope to participate in his resurrection</li> <li>▪ No interest in the Jesus of history: his teachings (e.g. parables of the Kingdom, Sermon on the Mount, Lords Prayer)</li> <li>▪ Did not follow Torah; rejected those who did (like James and Jesus’ original followers)</li> <li>▪ Viewed the Christ as the saviour of all humanity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Followed teachings of the spiritual Jesus who enlightened followers</li> <li>▪ Jesus a teacher, guide, guru – not a saviour nor a messiah</li> <li>▪ Jesus prodded us into achieving insight into 1) who we are, 2) where we have come from and 3) where we are going. Personal transformation essential.</li> <li>▪ Not interested in Jesus’ birth, death or life – just his teachings</li> <li>▪ Considered Mary Magdalene to be the most important apostle</li> <li>▪ Did not follow Torah</li> </ul>
also known as	Ebionites, Nazarenes. Died out or were suppressed or were absorbed by Islam in the 5 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> centuries	“Proto-Orthodox” (this was the strand that eventually became Christianity, 4 <sup>th</sup> century CE)	Gnostics went by various names but died out or were suppressed in the 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> centuries
writings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gospel of Matthew (short form)</li> <li>▪ rejected writings of Paul; other gospels found in the NT</li> <li>▪ letter of James</li> <li>▪ gospel of the Ebionites</li> <li>▪ Letter of Peter to James</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ letters of Paul</li> <li>▪ letters attributed to Paul</li> <li>▪ later writings by Proto-Orthodox leaders such as Ignatius of Antioch, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gospel of Thomas</li> <li>▪ Gospel of Mary Magdalene</li> <li>▪ Gospel of Philip</li> <li>▪ Apocryphon of John</li> <li>▪ Book of Thomas</li> </ul> <p>(some use of Paul whom they interpreted Gnostically)</p>
note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Led by people who knew the Jesus of history (family members, original disciples)</li> <li>▪ Considered Paul a false teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paul never met Jesus</li> <li>▪ Paul rarely quotes Jesus</li> <li>▪ is uninterested in either his life or his teachings – focuses just on his death.</li> <li>▪ Disagreed with Jesus’ original followers and kept his distance from them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a spiritual, elite approach, that stressed personal transformation</li> <li>▪ thought others were unenlightened</li> </ul>

\* to say that a person is a messiah is to say that that person is the Davidic ruler of Israel who will help God bring about eschatological times (universal peace, worship of the one God, elimination of the unrighteous, the righteous living for ever, the dead resurrected).