

## QUESTION:

You may have gone over this before, but do you think the earliest Christians, Peter, Paul, and Mary etc. believed in the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus, or do you think they believed his “spirit” was raised from the dead? From Paul’s writing it’s hard for me to judge. I ask this because it seems easier for me to attribute the resurrection belief to “hallucinations” if they were only experiencing visions of Jesus’ spirit. Even group “hallucinations” of Jesus’ spirit seems plausible, maybe during a group’s ecstatic experience or something. On the other hand I think there’s difficulty with the idea that several people hallucinated an experiences with a seemingly physical Jesus.

## RESPONSE:

This is a great question. My view is that different early Christians had different views. Paul’s view for me is the most interesting. In a forthcoming book I’ve mapped out my understanding of that. Here’s what I say there:

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It is striking, and frequently overlooked by casual observers of the early Christian tradition, that even though it was a universal belief among the first Christians that Jesus had been raised from the dead, there was not a uniformity of belief concerning what, exactly, that meant. In particular, early Christians had long and heated debates about the nature of the resurrection, specifically, the nature of the resurrected body. Here I map out three options for what that resurrected body of Jesus actually was, as evidenced in writings from the early church. I start with our earliest recorded source, the writings of Paul, and once again with his “resurrection chapter” (1 Corinthians 15), so named because it is devoted to the question of Jesus’ resurrection and the future resurrection of believers. Here Paul stresses that Jesus rose from the dead in a “spiritual body.”

### The Raising of a Spiritual Body

Both terms are important for understanding Paul’s view of the resurrection of Jesus: Jesus was raised in the body; but it was a body that was spiritual.

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