

A NEW ARGUMENT THAT COLLECTIVE HALLUCINATIONS DO NOT ADEQUATELY ACCOUNT FOR THE GROUP APPEARANCES OF JESUS IN THE GOSPELS

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Abstract: *The sincere belief of the Twelve that Jesus appeared to them alive after his death is widely accepted as historical bedrock by almost all scholars, so any viable hypothesis concerning the fate of Jesus must account for this fact. One naturalistic hypothesis for explaining it that has regained some popularity in recent decades is to suggest that the group appearances were collective hallucinations. In order to account for why the group appearance narratives in the Gospels do not fit with collective hallucinations, some proponents of the collective hallucination hypothesis have suggested that the original group appearance traditions resulted from hallucinations but then were modified by the time the Gospels were written. This paper makes a case against this hypothesis by showing how several themes prevalent in the Gospels' group appearance accounts cannot be accounted for well by this hypothesis; in fact, the hypothesis seems to give rise to an intractable dilemma.*

Key words: *resurrection of Jesus, group appearances, collective hallucinations, Bart Ehrman, Gerd Lüdemann*

The sincere belief of the Twelve that Jesus appeared to them alive after his death is widely accepted as historical bedrock by almost all scholars and is a key fact in what Gary Habermas calls a “minimal facts argument” for the resurrection of Jesus.¹ In 1 Cor 15:3–8, the apostle Paul quotes a creedal statement that is recognized by virtually all scholars as relaying information that he received within just a few years of the death of Jesus.² This early tradition affirms that Jesus died for the sins of humanity, was buried, was raised from the dead, and appeared to a variety of individuals and groups that includes the Twelve. Paul had contact with members of the Twelve (e.g. he mentions meeting Peter in Galatians 1–2) and could verify that they believed they saw a postmortem appearance of Jesus. Also, various appearances to the Twelve are mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew (28:16–20), Luke (24:36–49), and John (20:19–23, 26–29; 21:1–23). An appearance to the

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¹ Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 23–24. This approach argues that God raising Jesus from the dead best explains certain key facts concerning Jesus that are strongly evidenced and accepted by most scholars who study the historical Jesus.

² Even skeptical scholars like Gerd Lüdemann and Michael Goulder date it to within three years from the crucifixion. See Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 38. Michael Goulder, “The Baseless Fabric of a Vision,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered* (ed. Gavin D’Costa; Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 48.

Twelve is also foreshadowed in Mark 16:7. The fact that the disciples were willing to face martyrdom for their conviction that Jesus rose from the dead also adds great plausibility to the historicity of their sincere belief.³ Moreover, their beliefs in a dying and rising Messiah and in the resurrection of an individual to an immortal existence before the end of the world are contrary to first-century Jewish expectations and thus make it more likely that their sincere belief in the resurrection of Jesus is historical.⁴

Any viable hypothesis concerning the fate of Jesus must, therefore, account for the fact that the Twelve sincerely believed that they saw appearances of the risen Jesus. One naturalistic hypothesis for explaining this fact that has regained some popularity in recent decades is the view that collective hallucinations (henceforth “CHs”) may account for it. The atheist NT scholar Gerd Lüdemann, for example, is a prominent proponent of this view. He appeals to what he calls a “shared hallucinatory fantasy” to account for this fact.⁵ To make it more plausible that CHs may explain the group appearances of Jesus, Lüdemann and others have noted that details concerning the nature of the group appearances that count strongly against these appearances being CHs are found in the Gospels rather than in Paul. Paul, who is the earliest source who mentions group appearances and provides strong reason to believe that these appearances were part of the early Christian tradition, does not provide specific information about the nature of these appearances; however, the later Gospels indicate details that do not fit with the group appearances being CHs (e.g. Jesus eating with the disciples, touching them, etc.). This has led to the suggestion that the group appearance traditions may have originally sprung from CHs (explaining why group appearances were part of the early tradition) but that the nature of what the hallucinators allegedly saw was altered over time (explaining why the accounts of the group appearances described in the later Gospels do not fit with CHs).

This paper contends that certain themes in the group appearance narratives found in the Gospels lead to a debilitating dilemma for the CH hypothesis. This dilemma forces the CH proponent either to opt for a position that undermines what the CH hypothesis is designed to achieve (viz., to account for the well-established fact that the disciples sincerely believed that the risen Jesus appeared to them) or else to opt for a position that is implausible for multiple reasons. To achieve this, the paper will first address the nature of CHs, identifying the qualities that a CH plausibly must have if one is possible at all. This will lead into the observation that none of the group appearance narratives in the Gospels fit with the qualities of a CH. The question will then be raised as to whether a CH might still have been responsible for the disciples’ sincere belief that Jesus appeared to them,

³ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 366–73.

⁴ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (3rd ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 388, 392–94.

⁵ Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 176.

for perhaps the original group appearance traditions resulted from hallucinations but were modified by the time the Gospels were written. The article will briefly show why the traditions concerning the appearances were plausibly protected within the Christian community from significant modification prior to the writing of the Gospels; nevertheless, even if one allows for the sake of argument that the appearances to the Twelve described in the Gospels were originally CHs and that the original accounts of what the eyewitnesses experienced did get eliminated in oral tradition prior to the Gospels, the article makes the case that certain aspects of the group appearances narrated in the Gospels are problematic for the CH view. Attention will first be given to the problem that the non-recognition motif in the Gospels of Luke and John (in which Jesus is not at first recognized by those to whom he appears) poses for the CH hypothesis, and a response will be given to Bart Ehrman's suggestion for how one might reconcile this motif with hallucinations. After that the key argument of the paper will be given, revealing how the repeated themes of Jesus delivering new information to the disciples and eating with them during his postmortem appearances cannot be squared with the CH hypothesis because attempting to do so produces an intractable dilemma. This dilemma undermines the proposal that the Gospel group appearance narratives do not fit with CHs because they evolved into their final form after originally springing from CHs.

I. THE NATURE OF COLLECTIVE HALLUCINATIONS

It must be stated from the outset what is meant in this article by a CH and what qualities a CH would have if one were to occur. There is no good reason to think that CHs in which multiple people hallucinate the exact same thing (i.e. participate in one shared hallucination) at the same time are possible. Since hallucinations, like dreams, are mental experiences that have no basis in the outside world and occur only privately in one's own mind, it is widely recognized as impossible for multiple people to engage in the exact same hallucination. Peer-reviewed medical and psychological literature establishes little to no evidence that such CHs can occur.⁶

Nevertheless, some argue that it is possible for a more weakly-defined sort of CH to occur. Jake O'Connell contends that when a CH is understood as an event in which "two or more people" experience at least "similar" hallucinations at the same time and place, then there "are well-documented cases" of such CHs.⁷ He then offers six cases of this weaker type of CH that he considers to be well documented, and he identifies the following five qualities that characterize each case: (1) The visions were expected by those who saw them and not spontaneous. (2) Faint-

⁶ Joseph W. Bergeron and Gary R. Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Clinical Review of Psychiatric Hypotheses for the Biblical Story of Easter," *ITQ* 80 (2015): 157–72, esp. n. 17. Licensed clinical psychologist Gary Sibly affirms this statement. A similar affirmation from André Aleman and Frank Larøi, experts on hallucinations, is found in Licona, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 484–85 (see n. 64).

⁷ Jake O'Connell, "Jesus' Resurrection and Collective Hallucinations," *TynBul* 60 (2009): 69–105, esp. pp. 71–72.

ing is common in these cases, indicating that extreme stress—which is a common factor in hallucinations in general—was present among the group. (3) The vision is never seen by all people who are present. (4) The vision is perceived differently by those who do see it. (5) The vision never converses with the group of eyewitnesses or provides verbal information that all hear.⁸ These five qualities are not surprising, given that hallucinations occur privately in one's mind. Leonard Zusne and Warren Jones add that “emotional excitement” of some sort “is a prerequisite” if there is any chance of a CH occurring; moreover, they concur with O'Connell's first point, emphasizing that it is “expectation that plays the coordinating role” in CHs such that anyone who sees one “must be informed beforehand, at least concerning the broad outlines of the phenomenon that will constitute the collective hallucination.”⁹ Thus, like O'Connell, they recognize that a CH cannot be a matter of actually sharing in a single hallucination; rather, the experience must be coordinated within the group by shared expectations.

While one may dispute whether O'Connell's more weakly-defined CH is possible and whether the six cases he offers are convincing, this article will grant for the sake of argument that CHs of this sort are possible because that is the only type of CH that appears to be even remotely possible. Consider now whether the group appearances that are narrated in the Gospels are consistent with the five qualities of CHs identified by O'Connell. In doing so, note that, while the fact that there was *at least some* group appearance to the Twelve is widely accepted by scholars because it is supported by the early credal statement quoted by Paul in 1 Cor 15:3–8 and is multiply attested in the Gospels, it is less agreed upon *which* of the specific group appearances to the Twelve narrated in the Gospels might be historical. There is also some controversy concerning the historicity of the other two group appearances mentioned in the Gospels—the appearance to the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–35) and the group appearance to the women (Matt 28:8–10). This paper will not offer a defense of the historicity of any particular group appearance narrated in the Gospels but will instead focus on themes common to all of these narratives.¹⁰ The present point to be made is that *none* of the group appearances in the Gospels fit the qualities of CHs identified by O'Connell and those noted by Zusne and Jones.

Notice first that none of the group appearances in the Gospels meet the requirement of expectation that must play the crucial “coordinating role” in a CH. The mindset of the disciples upon seeing Jesus is consistently described as one of fear, shock, and amazement rather than the fulfillment of an expectation of seeing Jesus again (Matt 28:17; Luke 24:11–12, 36–41; John 20:9, 19, 24–25). They never

⁸ O'Connell, “Jesus' Resurrection,” 75–87.

⁹ Leonard Zusne and Warren H. Jones, *Anomalous Psychology: A Study of Extraordinary Phenomena of Behavior and Experience* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, 1982), 135.

¹⁰ Licona, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 372. Licona notes well that nearly all scholars recognize that there was an appearance to the Twelve and that the disciples sincerely believed that group appearances of Jesus occurred even though scholars are less unified about which *particular* group appearances narrated in the Gospels are historical.

expected Jesus to die and be raised from the dead even when Jesus had predicted this (Matt 16:21–22; Mark 9:9–10, 31–32; Luke 18:33–34). Likewise, the Emmaus disciples were disappointed that Jesus did not turn out to be the Messiah they were hoping he would be (Luke 24:17–25), and the women were fearful and amazed when Jesus appeared to them as a group (Matt 28:8–10). The prerequisite of emotional excitement is also missing, since those who saw the appearances were crushed after Jesus's death. There is also no hint of fainting. Moreover, there is no indication that anyone present for any of the group appearances failed to see Jesus or that what was seen and heard was perceived differently by those present, and Jesus clearly converses with all the eyewitnesses in these appearances and provides verbal information that all hear.

Although none of the group appearances in the Gospels fit with the qualities of even the more modest type of CH that O'Connell, Zusne, and Jones think is possible, O'Connell raises a key issue that must still be considered and that will be the focus of the remainder of this paper: The appearances mentioned by Paul in the early creed quoted in 1 Cor 15:3–8 are “nearly universally acknowledged as historical,” whereas there is more suspicion among scholars concerning the historical reliability of the later Gospel accounts of the resurrection and appearances of Jesus. Since no details about the nature of the appearances are given in the early creedal statement, the possibility remains that the earliest tradition about group appearances may have been “consistent with hallucinations.” Perhaps this early tradition became so significantly altered by the time the Gospels were written that the appearance narratives recorded in the Gospels were no longer consistent with CHs.¹¹ This possibility seems to be the only hope for salvaging the CH hypothesis. Lüdemann, for example, clings to this possibility. He insists that a historian must “start with the Pauline witness,” which is consistent with a “visionary experience,” and then allow that the “early tradition was later replaced by the stories” in the Gospels. He suggests that the physicality of the appearances in Luke—for example with Jesus eating in front of the disciples—was added later as a response to Gnosticism. One must utilize “source criticism and tradition criticism,” he contends, and “start with Paul,” viewing the Gospel narratives as “later developments” in which those living decades later used “their own imagination and interests” to modify the original stories.¹² This claim must be addressed if CHs are to be ruled out as a viable explanation of the group appearances.

II. EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY BEHIND THE GOSPEL APPEARANCE STORIES

Before offering an argument that reveals a key problem with the above suggestion, it must be mentioned briefly that a strong case can be made that there is

¹¹ O'Connell, “Jesus' Resurrection,” 88.

¹² Gerd Lüdemann, “First Rebuttal,” in *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Lüdemann* (ed. Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 54–55.

eyewitness testimony underlying the Gospel accounts that would preserve the traditions—especially traditions concerning the appearances of Jesus that are at the very core of the Christian movement—from drifting far from their original form in the decades between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. Richard Bauckham, in his book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, offers numerous arguments to support the claim that eyewitness testimony underlies the Gospel accounts and that history in the Gospels was not corrupted by the interests and biases of the early Christians. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a detailed discussion of Bauckham's many fine arguments, but the relevance of his work to the topic at hand makes it important to make note of his case. In brief, three of his major points include the following: (1) The Twelve served both individually and collectively as crucial eyewitnesses and guarantors who would have been central in overseeing the formulation and authorization of the traditions concerning Jesus.¹³ (2) The frequency of the various names mentioned throughout the Gospels precisely mirrors what is known about Jewish names in first-century Palestine such that these individuals almost certainly were not invented.¹⁴ (3) He rejects the claims of form criticism that the Gospels were shaped by the needs of the community without regard for historicity and spends several chapters arguing that there was a formal and controlled process for transmitting early Christian tradition.¹⁵

If Bauckham's argument has force, it becomes dubious from the outset that the group appearances of Jesus were CHs and that the group appearance stories departed so radically from the original traditions by the time they were written in the Gospels. Bauckham's case, if successful, makes it hard to believe what would have to be true for the CH hypothesis to be true—that *all* of the appearance narratives in the Gospels no longer describe what the original witnesses believe actually happened. As an oral society, the earliest Christians clearly could have preserved traditions accurately; it is simply a question of whether they felt it was important to do so. The importance of the historicity of the words and actions of Jesus to the earliest Christians is clear, and Bauckham offers much evidence that they preserved the eyewitness testimony in the Gospels. As he points out, the early Christians considered this history to be critical to their own salvation and theology, so their lives and claims were intimately tied to what happened in the past with Jesus.¹⁶ Thus one must consider whether it is plausible that the appearance narratives—which are foundational to the core of Christianity—would drift so significantly from their original form in a matter of decades.

¹³ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 93–113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84. Also, certain individuals in the Gospels are surprisingly named, and Bauckham argues that this seems to be because they are eyewitnesses whose names were attached to the stories told about them. E.g. see his comments on p. 47 concerning Cleopas and on p. 51 concerning the women at the tomb.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chaps. 10–13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 271–78.

III. THE NON-RECOGNITION MOTIF
AND COLLECTIVE HALLUCINATIONS

Even if one allows for the sake of argument that the appearances to the Twelve were CHs and that it is plausible—contrary to Bauckham—that the original accounts of the Twelve and of any other witness to a CH could become significantly modified before the Gospels were written, the case will now be made that certain themes in the group appearance stories found in the Gospels undermine this hypothesis. Consider first the non-recognition theme prevalent in two Gospels and three different group appearance accounts. Not enough has been said about how this motif does not fit with hallucinations. In two cases—the appearance to the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–32) and to the seven disciples while fishing (John 21:4–12)—this theme of witnesses not initially recognizing Jesus occurs in a group setting, and the other case is an individual appearance to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18). The non-recognition theme in the Emmaus account is also tied to an appearance to the Twelve (Luke 24:33–36) because the Emmaus disciples were explaining their experience to the Twelve when Jesus appeared to the entire group.

C. S. Lewis and others have pointed out that if those who saw Jesus in these accounts were hallucinating, then they would not have initially failed to recognize Jesus. Since hallucinations are projections of one's mind and are drawn from the content of one's mind, CHs do not explain why there is this prominent theme across multiple Gospels.¹⁷ Little, however, appears to have been said concerning this issue beyond this basic point; moreover, Bart Ehrman has recently attempted to show how this theme could possibly fit with hallucinations, and the sort of possibility that he raises requires a response. The fact that this theme is so widespread in the Gospels rightly makes Ehrman think there is something historical behind it. Although he admits that “people who have visions tend *not* to doubt what they have seen” and often “insist” with great conviction “that their visions were real,” he still thinks the non-recognition theme can be integrated with the possibility that hallucinations are responsible for the group appearances.¹⁸ He suggests that the initial hesitation of the witnesses and initial non-recognition of Jesus in these accounts may be the remnants of the fact that only certain individuals hallucinated an appearance of Jesus and were confident that they saw Jesus while others did not hallucinate and were not confident that Jesus appeared. He proposes that this could have evolved into what we find in the Gospels as the stories became altered to indicate that there was initial confusion about what everyone had seen rather than reporting more precisely what had actually taken place.¹⁹ Ehrman's suggestion, which he puts forward only as a possibility (he does not argue that hallucinations are clearly the best way to account for the appearances of Jesus), allows for two options. His proposal is consistent with there being no CHs (only individual hallu-

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 241.

¹⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 191.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

cinations) and those who by themselves hallucinated seeing Jesus convinced the others to go along with the idea of group appearances, and it is also consistent with there being CHs in which only a few present hallucinated Jesus and the others saw nothing but were influenced by those in the group who did hallucinate to go along with the idea even though they remained doubtful. The latter possibility is quite consistent with what is known of CHs and deserves consideration.

It may initially seem to make sense that the appearance traditions might have evolved in this direction. It may at first appear to be reasonable that the tensions between the experiences of those who hallucinated and those who did not might have developed into the idea that all of the disciples saw Jesus but did not initially recognize him. This would not require deception on the part of the church or the disciples, and it would not entail the acceptance of the implausible view that the original account of what happened in these appearances was not maintained by the eyewitnesses (since there was tension among the accounts from the beginning). It could merely reflect lack of unification in what was initially reported. Nevertheless, there are key difficulties with this suggestion.

A crucial point in response to this proposal is that the non-recognition theme is found in Luke and John, and both Gospel writers go out of their way to emphasize the physicality of the appearances and the fact that groups of witnesses definitely interacted with the risen Jesus. Despite initial non-recognition, no appearance account in Luke or John implies any uncertainty on the part of those who encountered Jesus in terms of whether they really interacted with him. The emphasis is always that this initial non-recognition is completely overturned by the end of the encounter with Jesus. The clear aim of both Gospel writers is to indicate that Jesus decisively did rise from the dead and appeared to various witnesses.²⁰ This makes it surprising that the initial non-recognitions were not removed from the stories in question in the interest of securing greater confidence in this goal. Since mentioning the non-recognition motif is not helpful to their obvious objective of convincing the reader of the certainty of these appearances, it is far more likely that the inclusion of this motif is simply due to the fact that it is historical. Just as the historicity of women discovering the empty tomb is made more likely because it is a difficult feature of the story that would not enhance the believability of the account to a first-century Jewish audience, the historicity of the non-recognition motif is made more plausible because it does not aid in the writers' otherwise clear objective to convince the reader that Jesus appeared.

Also standing against the sort of proposal that Ehrman suggests is Bauckham's strong case that the eyewitness testimony underlying the Gospel was preserved and that the appearance narratives would surely be among the most carefully

²⁰ The Emmaus disciples were so convinced of seeing Jesus that they made a late evening return to Jerusalem to tell the disciples (Luke 24:32–36). The seven disciples who saw Jesus while fishing “knew it was the Lord” (John 21:12) and had intimate conversations with him (John 21:15–23). Mary Magdalene, once she recognized Jesus, declared him “Rabboni” and ran to tell the disciples she had seen Jesus (John 20:16–8). Both of these Gospels also emphasize the physicality and certainty of Jesus's appearances (Luke 24:30, 39–43; John 20:24–29; 21:9, 13).

guarded of all traditions. Moreover, how could Christianity arise if there were significant doubts—significant enough, as Ehrman proposes, to find their way into the Gospel stories in the form of the non-recognition theme decades later rather than being wiped out—among the most central original eyewitnesses about whether they saw Jesus appear to them? Yet, despite the above response to the idea that the Gospel narratives may be the remnants of what began as hallucinations experienced by a few individuals who convinced the rest of what they saw, and despite the strong support that may be given to the case that the theme of non-recognition is a problem for the CH view, an even stronger case can be made that two other themes found in the Gospel group appearance stories undermine this view.

IV. AN INTRACTABLE DILEMMA FOR THE COLLECTIVE HALLUCINATION VIEW

Among the group appearances in the Gospels of Luke and John, there are the strong themes of (1) new information being given by Jesus to the witnesses of the appearances; and (2) Jesus eating in the presence of the witnesses. The prevalence of these themes cries out for some explanation—either granting that they are rooted in history or offering a plausible reason for them being added despite being unhistorical. On the CH hypothesis, neither of these themes could possibly have been present in the original appearance stories because they are contrary to the nature of hallucinations. New information unknown to the hallucinator would not be given because hallucinations are mental projections derived from the content of the hallucinator's own mind, and consuming food is impossible because hallucinations do not cause alterations to the physical world. Yet a strong case can be made that neither theme would have been invented and added later into the appearance traditions.

The first theme of new information being given by Jesus occurs in several places. In Luke, Jesus explains to the Emmaus disciples how he fulfills the OT Scriptures and how a suffering and dying Messiah—despite the messianic expectations of the time—is predicted in Scripture (Luke 24:25–32). A few verses later Jesus similarly causes all the disciples to understand how he fulfills the Scriptures (vv. 44–47). Jesus also gives new information in John when he directs the disciples to a miraculous catch of fish (John 21:6) and makes a prediction concerning two disciples' deaths that is said to have started a rumor among the disciples (John 21:18–23).

The second theme of Jesus eating in the presence of the witnesses to the group appearances is found first with the Emmaus disciples. Jesus broke bread in their presence, altering the state of the physical world (Luke 24:30). Later in Luke, he ate fish in front of all the disciples (Luke 24:41–43). In John, Jesus appeared and started a fire, cooked fish, and ate breakfast with seven disciples (John 21:9–13). Clearly such alterations to the physical world are wholly inconsistent with CHs.

It is thus evident that if the CH hypothesis is to be maintained, one must hold that these two themes which occur repeatedly in Luke and John are significant modifications to the original tradition (one allegedly springing from CHs). But the

problem is that attempting to account for the presence of these themes produces a dilemma for the proponent of the CH hypothesis, as he or she must provide a plausible answer to why these themes would emerge in the Gospels. We noted earlier that Lüdemann recognizes the need to provide an explanation for the eating theme, and he contends that it arose to combat Gnosticism.²¹ He holds that this theme became part of the tradition by the time Luke and John were written to emphasize the physicality of the risen Jesus and to offer an apologetic against Gnostic challenges to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, the best explanation that a proponent of the CH hypothesis can give for the new information theme—especially the stories in which Jesus explains how he fulfilled prophecy as a suffering and dying Messiah—is that this developed as an apologetic effort to bolster the Christian idea that a dying and rising Messiah is consistent with OT prophecy by putting it on the lips of Jesus. The Christian community needed to justify this claim, so these stories developed.²²

The difficulty that Lüdemann and other CH proponents have in explaining these themes in this way becomes evident when one takes the next step of considering why these themes would be added to serve an apologetic purpose. A dilemma quickly forms. The first possibility is that the disciples themselves originally altered the appearance accounts to achieve these apologetic goals; however, this explanation undermines their sincere belief in the resurrection appearances. Adopting this option forfeits the value that the CH hypothesis is meant to preserve by denying the well-accepted fact that the disciples truly believed that they saw Jesus and reported what they saw. If the disciples had a hallucinatory experience of Jesus but sincerely believed that he actually appeared to them, then they would not alter this account to promote a type of appearance that is different from what they experienced; that would be intentional deception on their part. Moreover, it would be an odd deception for them to create, given its un-Jewish nature (i.e. a dying Messiah who rises to an immortal existence before the end of the world).²³ Yet the other possibility—that the church (and not the disciples) invented these themes later on to serve their purposes—is equally problematic. If the Christian community modified the appearance accounts in order to uphold the belief in a dying and rising Messiah who rises to a bodily and immortal existence before the end of the world, then this raises a host of difficulties. Most crucially, one must ask: From where did these ideas originally come? This option eliminates the possibility that it came from the original teaching of the disciples, and it certainly did not come from Judaism. Also, this option entails that the church was willing to depart dramatically from the appearance traditions that the disciples—the core witnesses to the most central

²¹ Lüdemann, "First Rebuttal," 54–55.

²² Mark T. Finney, *Resurrection, Hell and the Afterlife: Body and Soul in Antiquity, Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 130. With regard to Jesus's appearance to the Emmaus disciples, John Dominic Crossan and others have suggested that the story was invented to promote the Eucharist. For a response to that claim, see Licona, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 355–58.

²³ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 388, 392–94. As discussed previously, these elements were foreign to first-century Jewish expectations.

beliefs of the church—originally taught. Why would the church do this? Also, why would they alter the traditions in this direction, promoting ideas that would be hard for Jews to accept and making it more difficult to convert Jews to Christianity?

V. CONCLUSION

This article offers a new argument against CHs. It responds to Ehrman's recent suggestion for how one might try to reconcile the non-recognition theme in the Gospels with hallucinations. It then focuses on two other themes and advances the core argument of the article, which proceeds according to the following steps. First, it identifies two themes present in multiple Gospels and multiple group appearances, noting that their prevalence means that there must be some reason that they are present—either they are historical or there is a plausible reason why they would be added despite being unhistorical. Second, it shows that these themes absolutely could not be hallucinated. Third, in agreement with Lüdemann, it points out that these themes would not be added unless they served the purposes of those adding them. Fourth, it reveals the dilemma that neither the disciples nor the later Christian community are viable candidates for adding these themes. The former option both undermines the entire purpose for which the CH hypothesis is proposed and is implausible, and the latter is perhaps even more implausible for various reasons. Fifth, since these are the only candidates for adding the themes and neither is viable, it is best to conclude that the themes are not plausibly added. Since the themes are not plausibly added and could not be hallucinated, the CH hypothesis fails. This argument, therefore, counts strongly against CHs as a viable rival hypothesis to the biblical accounts that Jesus appeared to groups of people, including the Twelve. While it is helpful to point out (as has often been done) that the disciples would probably not hallucinate un-Jewish ideas since such ideas would likely not be in their mind, this paper goes further by showing that the disciples could not possibly have hallucinated these particular elements and sets up a dilemma that either undermines all value of the CH hypothesis or forces the CH proponent to adopt a highly implausible position.