

Any book that begins ‘Let’s be honest: the ascension of Jesus is weird’ gets my attention!

My friends Jonny Woodrow and Tim Chester are excited that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven and you owe it to yourself to find out why.

Why did it fill the disciples who witnessed it with praise and worship for Jesus, and why should it do the same for us? Why does the ascension explain what is going on in heaven? How is Jesus ruling over the world that so often seems hostile to him? How does the ascension establish the age of mission for the church? And what does it mean that Jesus is our man enthroned in heaven, there on our behalf, securing our salvation?

The writers show us the Bible’s answers to these questions and many more. If you have ever wondered why the ascension is critical to being a disciple of Jesus or why it wasn’t just a bad strategy by God that removed the main evidence for Christianity, you will find plenty of help here.

Marcus Honeysett

Director of Living Leadership and author of *Finding Joy*, Kent, England

During my many years as a Christian, I can recall hearing only one sermon on the Ascension of Christ. With the publication of Chester and Woodrow’s *The Ascension: Humanity in the Presence of God*, I’m grateful to be able to point others to an accessible and inspiring study of this central Christian doctrine. In reading this book, Christians will find their minds sharpened and hearts warmed. Delightfully, the book ends with an Ascension hymn. Theology leads to doxology.

Robert L. Plummer,

Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Countless books have been written about the meaning of Christ’s entrance into the world, but comparatively few about His exit. Yet the implications of the Ascension are in many



ways as staggering as those of the Incarnation. Who can say which is more wonderful – that God should descend to earth or that man should rise to heaven?

In this short book, the authors explore the climactic event of Jesus' earthly life and unlock its vital and much-neglected significance. And they do so not in abstract theological terms but in a lively, plain and accessible manner that is biblically rooted throughout.

Sceptics, young believers and longstanding Christians alike will be intrigued and challenged in turn as they come to realise the immense – and immensely practical – consequences of the Ascension. Glorious and unexpected truths are here constantly laid bare for our wonder and our joy.

Jonathan Stephen
Principal,

Wales Evangelical School of Theology (WEST), Bridgend, Wales



Tim Chester and Jonny Woodrow pull back the curtains of the true temple to disclose the glories of the on-going work of the Savior on our behalf. They powerfully reveal the Ascension as fulfillment of what all of Redemptive History foreshadows—that the Lord's own will enter his presence only through the work of the One who can go up into the very clouds of God Almighty. Along the way the seasoned churchmen teach us how to read the two Testaments with great Biblical-theological insight. Meditation upon this exposition of Christ's "going up" will strengthen all aspects of our private and corporate worship, prayer, evangelism, of public kingdom living and of gospel preaching. Chester and Woodrow have given us a gift that will lift our eyes from this temporal horizon to the steppes of eternal joys of our High Priest in heaven.



Eric C. Redmond

Executive Pastoral Assistant and Bible Professor in Residence
New Canaan Baptist Church, Washington, DC
Council Member, *The Gospel Coalition*





The Ascension

*Humanity in the
Presence of God*

TIM CHESTER

AND

JONNY WOODROW

WESTPorterbrook

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS



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Tim Chester is Associate Director of the Porterbrook Seminary, pastor of The Crowded House in Sheffield, and author of over 20 books. He is married with two daughters.

Jonny Woodrow is the European Director of the Porterbrook Network and pastor of The Crowded House in Loughborough. He is married with four children.

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Introduction



Then they [the apostles] gathered around him [Jesus] and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back



in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’
(Acts 1:6-11)

Let’s be honest: the ascension of Jesus is weird. It is the story of a man who appears to be taken up into the clouds. I remember reading the story with a friend who is not a Christian. She looked at me with pity as if to say, ‘You don’t really believe this sort of wacky stuff, do you?’ I was about to object to her unspoken accusation when I thought, ‘Yes, actually, this is pretty weird’.

The two men, who were probably angels, do not help matters. ‘Why do you stand here looking into the sky?’ they say. Surely the answer is obvious! The apostles have just seen a man taken up into the clouds. I think I’d be looking up to see what happens next. The point, of course, is that what happens next will take place on earth. Jesus is sending the Holy Spirit to empower them to be His witnesses. But at this point staring up into the sky doesn’t seem a surprising thing to do!

So the ascension *is* weird. But it can also feel a bit disappointing. You may have had conversations that went something like this:

‘If God exists then why doesn’t he make himself known? Why doesn’t he write a message in the sky? Surely he could if he were God.’

‘But he has made himself known. He sent his Son, Jesus. Jesus is God among us. He made God known.’

‘So you say. But how can I know that? Jesus died a long time ago.’

Or perhaps like this.

‘How can you be so confident there’s life after death?’

‘Because someone came back from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is key to the claims of the Christian gospel. Our faith stands or falls on this historical event.’

‘So how do you know that’s what really happened and wasn’t just a made-up story?’

‘Because the tomb was empty and because eyewitnesses saw Jesus alive. And those eyewitnesses weren’t gullible people desperate to believe. Thomas doubted the news until he saw and heard and touched Jesus for himself. And meeting the risen Jesus changed their lives. They went from hiding in fear from the authorities to boldly proclaiming the story of Jesus even when faced with persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom.’

‘Yes, but someone coming back from the dead? There’s no scientific proof for anything like that.’

Wouldn’t evangelism be a whole lot easier if Jesus was still on earth? Imagine He was still living somewhere in Palestine so that people could go to see Him. Imagine that scientists had studied Him over the years and could verify that He was over 2,000 years old. Or imagine that Jesus Himself was on tour, performing miracles and preaching the gospel.

The ascension seems a bad strategy. It removes the key piece of evidence that substantiates the claims of Christianity. It’s as if our best player by far was substituted just as the game was beginning.

In this book we want to show that the ascension is good news. In fact, there could be no salvation and no mission without the ascension. John Owen, the great

Puritan theologian, says: ‘This assumption of our Lord Jesus Christ into glory, or his glorious reception in heaven, with his state and condition therein, is a principal article of the faith of the church – the great foundation of its hope and consolation in this world ... The darkness of our faith herein is the cause of all our disconsolations, and most of our weaknesses in obedience.’¹

What was the immediate impact of the ascension event on the first disciples? ‘Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.’ (Luke 24:52-53) Worship, joy and praise. Their Lord and friend had been taken from them, but they understood enough of what had happened for it to produce in them worship, joy and praise.

More than that, Jesus says His physical absence is better for us than His continued physical presence. ‘But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.’ (John 16:7) When He meets Mary Magdalene shortly after His resurrection, He says: ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.’ (John 20:17)

As we understand the ascension, we will discover that it brings us great comfort. Diplomats and reporters sometimes talk about ‘our man in Washington’ or ‘our man in Tokyo’. For Christians Jesus is ‘our man in heaven’. He is there for us and on our behalf. He is our representative in heaven, securing our salvation by His presence.

¹ John Owen, *On the Person of Christ, Works*, ed. William H. Goold, (Banner of Truth, 1850–53, 1965), vol 1, pp. 235 and 252.



But we will also discover that the ascension is a great challenge. The ascension is the enthronement of Jesus. He receives all authority and sends us out to declare that authority to the world. The ascension is the beginning of mission.





WEST Porterbrook



The Porterbrook Network in partnership with Wales Evangelical School of theology (WEST) provides theological training for new believers through to church leaders, planters and PhD Level. The WESTPorterbrook Network connects the best of the academy to local church and church-planting contexts to deliver gospel-centred training that is biblical, missional, practical, flexible, affordable, accessible and comprehensive at its core. It offers distance learning and residential training courses through its network of learning sites and campuses. In particular the network offers

Porterbrook Learning: a course designed for all Christians to learn how to live gospel-centred lives on mission to their local context.

Porterbrook Seminary: an affordable and flexible college level course for church leaders and planters to train in the context of ministry, with the opportunity of progressing to masters and PhD training through WEST.

The WESTPorterbrook network has grown to host learning sites throughout the UK, the US, Canada, Italy, India, South Africa and Denmark. The materials for Porterbrook learning have also been translated into several foreign languages with more sites and translation in the pipeline.



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