

Praise for *It Must Be Finished*

Samuel Whitefield has once again set a whole new standard for preaching and teaching what the Bible has to say on the topic of the "End Times." His new book *It Must Be Finished* is a wonderful treatment of a host of biblical texts that need to be read, understood, and taught afresh in these final days before our Lord returns. Readers will not be disappointed by this book nor will it treat this subject in a wearisome and hackneyed way: rather, it will produce a whole new set of understandings that unfortunately have all too often lain dormant in the church for far too long. I urge the church along with its pastors and teachers to quickly get a copy and begin the conversation and action demanded by our Lord to meet the coming days of the End Times.

Dr. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Samuel Whitefield has successfully anchored the story and the message of the "end times" within the larger story of God's glorious plan of redemption. Sadly, far too many Christians feel as though the subjects of the return of Jesus and the end times are too confusing, because they've never understood the larger story of the Bible itself. By following the consistent threads of God's covenants, promises, and plans, Samuel has made the conclusion of the narrative and its profound implications so much easier to grasp. The closer we get to the end of the tale that we find ourselves in, the more important it is that we understand it. This book will greatly help any Christian who desires, not only to understand the broader biblical message, but also to fulfill their role within that story as it unfolds. I cannot more highly recommend *It Must Be Finished*.

Joel Richardson, *New York Times* best-selling author, speaker, and filmmaker

It Must Be Finished is a strong and insightful read that will stir and inspire your heart for the return of Jesus Christ. Samuel has a way of "connecting the dots" in the mind of the reader about God's grand story line while simultaneously stirring vision for the church in the coming days. With so much hypothesis and speculation about the end times

being propagated in our generation, it is refreshing to have a book like this that helps to anchor our hearts in the Word of God while equipping us to mentor and disciple others in these things.

Jim Stern, Lead Pastor, Destiny Church, St. Louis

Samuel Whitefield is proving to be a very capable theological thinker. It is wonderful to add him to the ranks of those who interpret the Bible in a straight forward manner according to the original context and literary genre. May God speed the acceptance of this book and its influence.

Dr. Daniel Juster, Author and Founder, Tikkun International

God is raising up “Shepherds according to His heart who will feed people on knowledge and understanding” so that hearts will be strengthened and minds will have clarity to understand what God is doing in the earth in these days. Samuel Whitefield is one of the shepherds who God is using to bring understanding of His heart and plans. The subject of the end times is so much more than graphs, charts, and timelines. It is ultimately a story, and when your heart connects to this story it causes faith, hope, and love to explode in your heart and mind. I’ve known Samuel Whitefield for ten years, and I can attest to his tireless labor to see the subject of the end times go from a topic only scholars understand to a subject the whole body of Christ can engage with.

Corey Russell, Senior Leadership Team, International House of Prayer of Kansas City, MO

Samuel Whitefield has been studying the Scriptures relating to the end times for many years now, praying for insight and digging deep into the plain sense of the text. In doing so, he challenges us to dive into these texts with him, also challenging us to ask: How does this apply to me today? You will be stirred and sobered and encouraged as you study along with Samuel.

Dr. Michael L. Brown, President, FIRE School of Ministry; author; speaker; and host of *The Line of Fire* broadcast.

Once again Samuel has written passionately and plainly about Jesus’ grand redemptive plan for Israel and the nations which climaxed on

Calvary and will culminate with Jesus' second coming. In this book, Samuel helps readers navigate redemptive history with a clear meta-narrative undergirded by biblical reasons for Jesus' coming. *It Must Be Finished* is refreshing and helpful to anyone who desires to understand biblical eschatology and missiology.

Daniel Lim, Director, Center for Biblical End-Time Studies; CEO, International House of Prayer of Kansas City, MO

IT MUST BE FINISHED
MAKING SENSE OF THE RETURN OF JESUS

SAMUEL WHITEFIELD



It Must Be Finished—Making Sense of the Return of Jesus
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Dedicated to all those who tirelessly pastor, teach, and serve the body of Jesus that she might become a pure and spotless bride prepared for the return of her Bridegroom.

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INTRODUCTION

When Jesus died on the cross, He cried out, “It is finished!”¹ In His death, Jesus did what previously seemed to be impossible. He secured the redemption of humanity and of the cosmos. Perhaps because of Jesus’ well-known phrase, many people assume the cross fulfilled all of God’s promises, but this is not what the Bible teaches.

Biblically speaking, the cross did not fulfill all the promises of God—it secured them.

Tragically, we have neglected much of what the Bible says about the fulfillment of God’s promises. However, the full magnitude of what the cross accomplished is revealed in both what was fulfilled when Jesus died and what will be fulfilled in the events we refer to as the “end times.”

God has staked His honor on His ability to fulfill specific promises, and the plan of redemption is not completed until these promises are fulfilled. According to Paul, we cannot even imagine what is coming with the fulfillment of all God’s promises:

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

The atonement was finished at the cross, but there is more to the story. *It must be finished.*

God Is Deeply Involved in History

History is not aimless. The Bible tells us God is deeply involved in human history. He is leading humanity, from generation to generation,

¹ John 19:30.

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through a redemptive narrative towards a predetermined conclusion. *God is a master storyteller, and the plan of redemption is the most masterful story ever created.* Like all great stories, it climaxes at the end, but the end—what we call the “end times”—can become a confusing subject if you do not understand the overarching story. However, when you grasp the story of redemption through the lens of key promises and covenants, the end times become a glorious conclusion to God’s plan in this age.

The notable men and women of the Bible were motivated to deep sacrifice and heroic faith by their longing for the day when God fulfills His promises and concludes the story. *The Bible’s prediction of the end of the story should have the same effect on us as it did the saints who have gone before.* It is the hope set before us, but far too often we fail to live with a biblical hope and expectation of the end because we are disconnected from the story.

Like any good story, the end is the most important part; however, many find the end difficult to grasp. The reason is typically because we may know individuals and events in the Bible, but we struggle to connect them to the main elements that are driving the biblical story. *When we do not understand the key elements of the story, the end becomes confusing.* However, when we grasp the main elements of the story, the end is simply the logical conclusion of the story and to fully grasp the gospel we need to understand the end of the story.

Many people assume the cross fulfilled all of God’s promises, but this is not true. *The cross secured all of God’s promises, but it did not fulfill them all.* Therefore, to understand what is coming and to recognize God’s activity in the earth, we need to know what He has set into motion that He must bring to completion. God’s promises and covenants are the main elements of the story driving history towards His conclusion. When we recognize how they drive history we can better understand God’s redemptive work and the role we play in the unfolding of the story.

An Unprecedented Moment

We live in an unprecedented moment in human history. *We live in the first possible generation that could give witness of the gospel to every tribe, nation, and tongue.* Fifty years ago, we did not know how many people groups lived in the earth much less where they were all located. At the time of this writing, we now know where every people group lives, and

church leaders are beginning to strategically focus on reaching each one of them. There is no guarantee the mission will be fulfilled in our generation, but for the first time in human history, it is possible. This is an incredible milestone because the Bible predicts this witness must be given before the end will come.²

Additionally, we live in the first generation in human history where Israel has become a global controversy. Although Israel was always a central figure in the biblical narrative, during biblical times the vast majority of the earth was not even aware Israel existed. Today, for the first time in history, Israel has become a global issue affecting the nations.

This global focus on Israel, and particularly Jerusalem, does not make sense according to human logic. Jerusalem is not a center of world finance or global business. It does not produce natural resources that drive the global economy. There are far greater humanitarian challenges in the earth than Israel's complex relationship with the Palestinians. Though the issues surrounding Israel are important, there are much bigger conflicts in the earth. These other conflicts only receive a fraction of the attention Israel receives.³ The global focus on Israel simply does not make sense apart from what the Bible says about a final conflict over the salvation of Israel.

Living in a time when either of these events were occurring would be momentous in and of itself, but we live in a time when both events are occurring simultaneously for the first time in history. This is unparalleled and unprecedented. While we must avoid unbiblical attempts to predict the return of Jesus, the New Testament instructs us to understand the times and seasons in the earth.⁴ *Therefore, as we see the times and*

² See Matthew 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:6–8; Revelation 5:9; 7:9.

³ For example, in 2017 the United Nations (UN) adopted twenty resolutions on Israel and six on the rest of the world. In 2016 the UN also adopted twenty resolutions on Israel and six on the rest of the world, and in 2015 it adopted twenty resolutions on Israel and three on the rest of the world. See UN Watch. <https://www.unwatch.org/2017-unga-resolutions-singling-israel/>, <https://www.unwatch.org/unga-adopts-20-resolutions-israel-4-rest-world-combined/>, <https://www.unwatch.org/un-to-adopt-20-resolutions-against-israel-3-on-rest-of-the-world/> (Accessed December 15, 2017).

⁴ See Matthew 24:32–33; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6.

seasons shifting, we want to understand God's redemptive plan so that we can recognize His activity in the earth and fully engage in His mission.

The Story—The Key to the End

We cannot understand the end times by only focusing on the end times. That is like trying to understand a movie by only watching the final ten minutes. *The key to understanding the main themes of the end times is to know the foundations of the biblical story and how they set up the end of the story.*

When you watch a movie, the end of the movie is the logical conclusion to the story. It may contain a few surprises, but the ending makes sense if you understood the beginning of the movie. The story prepares you for the dramatic conclusion. In the same way, the conclusion makes sense of everything that has gone before. In a way, the conclusion is the most critical part of the film because it resolves the conflict and reveals, perhaps, what the entire story has been about. The same is true of redemptive history.

Too often, the end times seem confusing and strange because we do not understand the redemptive story—the biblical story. Therefore, it's critical for us to see the end times as the logical conclusion to that story. We need to know the story of God's redemptive plan and how He advances His plan through key events in history.

Different views of the end times have led to many books being written on the subject, but the majority of these books describe end-time details without connecting them to the redemptive story. The result is that many believers have heard descriptions of end-time events but have very little understanding of why these events must happen and what role they play in the redemptive story. *Understanding how the events of the end times relate to the story of the Bible is required to fully comprehend the return of Jesus.*

The return of Jesus can seem complex and complicated when we do not understand how it is connected to the biblical story. Because some believers do not understand the story, they avoid the subject of Jesus' return altogether, even though Jesus' return is a core component of the gospel. Other believers approach the end times primarily as a puzzle and become so lost in the details of the end of the age that they focus more on charts and graphs than how the end times relate to the mission of God happening now. The answer in each case is to anchor

the return of Jesus in the overarching story of the Bible by putting end-time events in the context of the biblical story.

When we fail to see Jesus' return as part of the biblical story, the end times become a subject that is more trivial than missional. However, the Bible is written as an unfolding story, a great drama, that is building in intensity, where each part of the story leads to the next and the details of that drama are given to provoke us to participate in God's mission. We are invited to join God in the resolution of His redemptive plan, and therefore, the church cannot fully understand its role without understanding His story.

Books written on the details of the end times are helpful, but it's not enough to know what happens in the future; we need to know what is propelling those specific events and why this age must conclude the way it will. *We must connect the main themes of the beginning of the biblical story and discover how they set up the end of the story.* That is what we will do in this book.

The Old Testament Sets the Stage

One of the most important parts of comprehending the plan of God is the way we perceive the Old Testament. Many believers think the Old Testament has been done away with, but the reality is not that simple. The Old Testament was the Bible the apostles preached from. *Our ability to fully grasp the redemptive story depends on our knowledge and understanding of the promises and foundations of the Old Testament.* Once we understand those foundations, we need to know how Jesus fulfills God's redemptive plan, how we are to live in light of what has been fulfilled, and what remains to be fulfilled.

When we study the Bible, or hear sermons on Sunday, we tend to spend most of our time on Paul, then study Jesus, and very rarely study the Old Testament. When we do hear messages based on Old Testament passages, it is usually to illustrate a New Testament truth or to serve as the subject of a topical sermon. Although Paul's letters to the churches are very practical and key for New Testament Christianity, he and the other New Testament authors assumed their audience had a solid foundation in the Old Testament that most modern believers are missing. As a result, many believers have become familiar with the lan-

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guage of Paul, and some of the story of Jesus, but do not understand the majority of Scripture.⁵

The Old Testament is the foundation of the redemptive story. While portions of it have been fulfilled, its key promises remain unfulfilled and continue to undergird the redemptive plan in our day. *God's promises are not only part of the past, they are part of our future.* To understand the story of God, then, we have to study the plan of God in its natural order. This means understanding the foundation of the Old Testament, the work of Jesus in His first and second coming, and finally how that is applied in a New Testament context.

When we learn the story in the right sequence, the plan of God becomes much easier to understand. In this book, we will make the foundations of the Old Testament straightforward and show how they continue to drive the redemptive story.

The coming of Jesus was a radical part of God's story, but it did not replace what God had begun. Jesus' coming did not replace the Old Testament promises; it secured them. Rather than redefining God's mission, Jesus' coming expanded it in a way that no one anticipated. As we will soon see, the promises spoken will still be fulfilled, but they will be fulfilled in a way that is far beyond anything we could ever imagine.

An Overview of Each Section

Before we jump headlong into the main text, here is a quick overview of each part of this book to help you see where we are going:

- In “Part 1: Why Study Jesus' Return,” we look at the importance of studying the return of Jesus.
- In “Part 2: The Promises That Must Be Fulfilled,” we will review the key promises of the Old Testament that have not yet been fulfilled but must be fulfilled. Jesus' first coming secured these promises but did not fulfill them. His second coming must fulfill them.
- In “Part 3: What Must Be Resolved—The Crisis of the Covenant,” we concentrate on the crisis created by the Mosaic covenant regarding the fulfillment of the promises and how the

⁵Based on the number of words in the original languages, the Old Testament is about 77 percent of the Bible.

crisis continues to affect the nations to this day. We will examine how the first and second comings of Jesus are necessary to resolve finally and permanently the crisis of the Mosaic covenant so that the promises can be fulfilled.

- In “Part 4: God’s Plan for the Nations,” we will examine what the Bible says about the nations and how the promise made to Abraham about the nations will be fulfilled in a victorious end-time church.
- In “Part 5: The End-Time Conflict—War Over the Promises,” we will examine how the fulfillment of God’s promises sets the stage for the end-time conflict. We will also examine why Israel is so central in end-time events and how the nations are connected to those events. Finally, we will look at how understanding the end times is a missional issue for the church, not simply a theological one.