

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 4-21-13 PM NOTES  
"AN OVERVIEW OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST"  
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES  
#12 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through Revelation"

**Revelation 20:4b-6 (NKJV)** "4 And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

**Isaiah 9:6-7 (NKJV)** "6 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

**Isaiah 11:4-9 (NKJV)** "4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist. 6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

**Micah 4:3-4 (NKJV)** "3 He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. 4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make *them* afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken."

Three Main Views of the Return of Christ:

Postmillennialism

Amillennialism

Premillennialism

I. The Promise of the Return of Christ

**John 14:1-3 (NKJV)** "1 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also."

**Acts 1:9-11 (NKJV)** "9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'"

**Titus 2:13 (NKJV)** "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NKJV)** "16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words."

II. The Phases of the Return of Christ

**Revelation 1:7a (NKJV)** "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him..."

**Revelation 16:15a (NKJV)** "Behold, I am coming as a thief."

“But it does not say, as so many infer, that all shall see Him at the same time, in the same place, in the same manner, and with the same feeling. There will be some who will see Him when He comes as a thief to steal away His jewels. Then, there are others who will see Him as the terrible lightning breaks the bosom of the sky. There are two acts in this great, final, climactic drama. He is coming as a thief to steal away His people. He is also coming as lightning, brilliant upon the throne of His glory and of His judgment. But all must someday look upon the face of the Lord Jesus.” —Dr. W. A. Criswell

**Revelation 3:10 (NKJV)** “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

### III. The Particulars of the Secret Return of Christ

**1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (NKJV)** “<sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

**Revelation 4:1b (NKJV)** “Come up here...”

**1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NKJV)** “<sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

A. The Posttribulational View

B. The Midtribulational View

C. The Pretribulational View

Immanent—Hanging over one’s head, ready to befall or overtake one; close at hand in its incidence (Oxford Dictionary)

**James 5:8 (NKJV)** “You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

**Philippians 4:5 (NKJV)** “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.”

**Hebrews 10:25 (NKJV)** “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

### V. The Purpose of the Immanent Return of Christ

A. Purity

**1 John 3:2-3 (NKJV)** “<sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

**1 John 2:28 (NASB)** “Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”

**Romans 13:11-13 (NKJV)** “<sup>11</sup> And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup> Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”

B. Perspective

**Romans 8:18 (NKJV)** “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

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As we prepare to go into a section of Revelation that is called “the great tribulation”, I think it is time to step back and look at an overview of the events leading up to and culminating in Christ returning to the earth with His church to rule and reign in a literal thousand year earthly kingdom. After this message, you may feel like you’ve been drinking from a fire hydrant because we are going to be covering so much material, but I want you to get an overview so that when we come back to Revelation in four weeks after the Life Action Summit, you will have a sense of where things are going. To put it another way, tonight we will see the big picture and then come back to Revelation in four weeks and start filling in the details.

To introduce the message tonight, I want to go over the three main approaches to the study of the Second Coming of Christ. Let me be clear that there are godly Bible scholars that believe and teach each of these three approaches. I have a STRONG belief as to which of these three approaches is correct (you won’t have any doubts as to which one I am going to teach after I get through with this introduction). But let me be quick to say that the essential fundamental of the faith when it comes to the second coming of Christ is that one believes that Jesus is literally, bodily, returning to the earth. Proponents of all three of these approaches would affirm that fundamental belief concerning Christ’s coming. I want to make it clear the while our approach to the second coming is very important, it is not a test of fellowship among believers. We can passionately believe which one is the most Biblical without demonizing others that see it differently. I am going to use some big words in laying out these three approaches to Christ’s return, but I am going to define them. All three of these views of the second coming of Christ have the word “millennium” in them. The word “millennium” means 1,000 years. **Revelation 20:4b-6 (NKJV)** <sup>4</sup> “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” This kingdom rule by Christ on the earth was promised to Israel in multiple books in the Old Testament. An example is **Isaiah 9:6-7 (NKJV)** <sup>6</sup> “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” Also in Isaiah we read about the curse on the earth being lifted in this earthly kingdom ruled over by Israel’s Messiah. **Isaiah 11:4-9 (NKJV)** <sup>4</sup> “But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist. <sup>6</sup> The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea.” The prophet Micah describes this earthly kingdom ruled over by the Messiah in **Micah 4:3-4 (NKJV)** <sup>3</sup> “He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. <sup>4</sup> But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make *them* afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.” Most all of the prophets after warning of a coming judgment end their book with the hope of a Kingdom where the Messiah, the descendent of David will reign.

There are three main views of the return of Christ and the millennial kingdom:  
**Postmillennialism** – This is the view that the church will conquer with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bring in the triumphant millennial age on earth. At the end of that millennial age that the church brings in by means of the proclamation of the Gospel, Jesus Christ will return to earth. Many postmillennials don’t believe that

the thousand years will be literal. This was the position taken by Martin Luther and many of the reformers. The main group during the reformation that did not take the postmillennial view was the Anabaptists. The problem with this postmillennial view is that the world is not getting better and better. The Bible says that as we get closer and closer to the return of Christ, things will get worse, not better (2 Timothy 3:1-7).

**Amillennialism** – That word literally means, “No millennium”. The amillennialists believe that there is no literal thousand year reign. They see the millennium as being symbolic. Actually, in their view Christ is reigning now through His church. Satan is bound by Christ now, and there is no literal earthly reign coming. The amillennialists believe that all of the promises to the Jews related to the Messiah returning and reigning are fulfilled through the church. Most amillennialists believe that God has no special plan for the ethnic Jews. The only kingdom that will ever exist is the church. Like postmillennialism, amillennialism spiritualizes many of the promises of Scripture related to Christ’s return.

**Premillennialism** – This is the more literal approach to the return of Christ and the events surrounding His return. This view interprets the events of Revelation 6-20 as future and mostly literal. There will be a literal 7 year period of great tribulation like the world has never known and at the end of that 7 years, Jesus will return in glory and slay the armies of His enemy called the antichrist who is energized by Satan, bind Satan for 1,000 years, lift the Genesis 3 curse on the earth and rule in absolute power and righteousness. The Anabaptists of the reformation era held this view. Also, many of the church fathers in the very early days of Christianity held this premillennial view. This approach avoids what I believe is the over-spiritualizing of biblical texts and maintains that God still has plans for the ethnic Jews. If you can’t tell from what I have already said, this is the view I take toward the second coming of Christ.

With that introduction, let’s look at an overview of the second coming of Christ.

## I. The Promise of the Return of Christ

Someone has counted that one of every twenty five verses in the New Testament deals with the second coming of Christ. For each time the first coming of Christ is mentioned in the New Testament, the second coming is mentioned eight times [John MacArthur, *The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, Study Notes*, Page 1]. Let me just share four of those passages from the New Testament.

A. **John 14:1-3 (NKJV)** <sup>1</sup> "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup> In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again** and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also." This is the promise Jesus gave to His grieving disciples the night before He was crucified. This promise should have given them hope for the future.

B. **Acts 1:9-11 (NKJV)** <sup>9</sup> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, <sup>11</sup> who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’" When He is taken up the immediate promise is that He will return.

C. **Titus 2:13 (NKJV)** “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”. The promise of His literal bodily return was designed to give the church hope in the midst of tough times.

D. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NKJV)** <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.” We will be focusing on this passage as we look at some of the details of the return of Christ.

## II. The Phases of the Return of Christ

As we look at the New Testament promises of the return of Christ, there seems at first glance to be a contradiction. Any time the Bible seems to contradict itself, look more closely, because there are no contradictions in the Scripture. **Revelation 1:7a (NKJV)** “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and **every eye will see Him**, even they who pierced Him.” The coming of Christ will be open and visible to all to see. **Revelation 16:15a (NKJV)** "Behold, I am coming as a thief." Those are just two examples; there are many

verses that speak of His coming as being spectacular and visible to all and yet there are multiple passages that say His coming will be like a thief that slips in unnoticed. How do we explain this seeming contradiction? Listen to this quote from one of the greatest Bible scholars in the last 100 years of our denomination, Dr. W. A. Criswell. After quoting Revelation 1:7, Criswell says: “But it does not say, as so many infer, that all shall see Him at the same time, in the same place, in the same manner, and with the same feeling. There will be some who will see Him when He comes as a thief to steal away His jewels. Then, there are others who will see Him as the terrible lightning breaks the bosom of the sky. There are two acts in this great, final, climactic drama. He is coming as a thief to steal away His people. He is also coming as lightning, brilliant upon the throne of His glory and of His judgment. But all must someday look upon the face of the Lord Jesus.” [Dr. W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on the Book of Revelation*, Page 108-109]. These two phases of the second coming of Christ have been called, “The Secret Coming” and “The Open Coming”. The secret coming can be at any time, but the open coming waits on certain events to take place. The book of Revelation deals primarily with the open coming of Christ. The secret coming is assumed, but not detailed. For instance, we assume that the church is gone in chapter 6-18 because it is not mentioned. Also we saw a promise to the church of Philadelphia in **Revelation 3:10 (NKJV)** “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” The fact that the church is in Heaven in Revelation 4-5 certainly implies the secret coming of Christ for His church has happened. But one of the basic principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) is that the clear, more detailed passages on a subject take precedence over the sketchy less clear passages. That is why we will look to another book of the New Testament to make clear what is somewhat sketchy in Revelation.

To summarize the two phases of Christ’s coming, the secret coming is Christ coming in the air for His saints and the open coming is Christ coming to the earth with His saints who are now glorified and ready to rule and reign with Christ.

### III. The Particulars of the Secret Return of Christ

Perhaps the passage that gives us the most detail about the secret coming of Christ is **1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (NKJV)** “<sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

The word translated “shout” refers to a military command. This is not a shout like someone would give at a ballgame; it is an authoritative command. What will the returning Lord Jesus say? It will likely be a call like the one He gave John in **Revelation 4:1b (NKJV)** “And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here...’” When Jesus gives that command, the dead in Christ will rise from the dead with resurrection bodies like His resurrection body. Verse 17 tells us that those who are alive when He comes in the air for His saints will be “caught up” to be with Him. They will be immediately changed and receive resurrection bodies like Christ’s resurrection body without dying **1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NKJV)** “<sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

I don’t want to get too detailed, but there are three views among premillennialists as to when this catching up of the church will happen. I emphasize that differing on these details is not a test of fellowship with one another, but it is important.

A. The Posttribulational View – This view says that the church goes through the whole seven years of tribulation detailed in Revelation 6-18. In other words, the catching up of the church and the open appearing of Christ are at the same time. This causes a problem with all the passages about the secret coming of Christ like a thief in the night.

B. The Midtribulational View – This view says that the church will be caught up after the first 3 ½ years of the tribulation when the antichrist sets himself up to be worshipped. Most people with this view only call the

last 3 ½ years the great tribulation. Though I see where the proponents of this view are coming from, I must reject it. I'll tell you why in just a moment.

C. The Pretribulational View – This view says the church is caught up to be with the Lord and then the great tribulation begins. This is the view I believe is best evidenced in Scripture. I could give several reasons I must reject a Posttribulational and a Midtribulational catching up of the church, but there is one overarching reason that I believe in a Pretribulational catching up of the church. It is the only view of those three that maintains the immanence of Christ's return. The Amillennial view also teaches the immanence of His return, but we have already dealt with why I feel we must reject that view.

What do we mean when we refer to the immanence of Christ's return? The word immanence comes from a Latin word which means to overhang or project. The Oxford dictionary defines "immanent" as, "hanging over one's head, ready to befall or overtake one; close at hand in its incidence." An immanent event is one that is always hanging overhead or is always close at hand in the sense that it **could happen** at any moment. Let me be really clear here. Although an immanent event **can** happen at any time, it does not have to happen immediately. Someone put it this way: "Immanence refers to potential immediacy, not to necessary immediacy." [Quoted in Renald Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View*, Page 200]. Anytime we say that something must happen before the secret coming of the Lord for His church, we have negated the immanency of His return. Both the Posttribulational and the Midtribulational views say that several observable things must happen before Christ comes for His church. In other words, Jesus Christ cannot come today. Immanency does not refer to Christ's open appearing. Certainly the events of Revelation 6-18 must take place before the open visible to all coming, but nothing hinders His secret coming for His church today. The early Christians believed that the coming of Christ would be at anytime. Were they wrong? No! That is the way the Lord expects it to be. There is to be that constant looking for His return. There is nothing that must happen before Christ can come for His church to catch us up to be with Him. Immanence is really important! I don't believe that we should ever accept a view of His coming that does away with immanence.

Let's look at some verses that focus on the immanency of Christ's return. **James 5:8 (NKJV)** "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." **Philippians 4:5 (NKJV)** "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand." **Hebrews 10:25 (NKJV)** "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." The Apostle Paul obviously expected the return of Christ in his lifetime. In the verses we read earlier in 1 Thessalonians 4, we see the personal pronouns. **1 Thessalonians 4:15 (NKJV)** For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that **we** who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep." **1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV)** Then **we** who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus **we** shall always be with the Lord." Was Paul mistaken? No! The Father planned that the return of His son be immanent for those in every generation.

#### IV. The Purpose of the Immanent Return of Christ

Why is the immanence of His return so important? We see the answer to this question when we see the effects of a consuming belief in the immanent return of Christ.

##### A. Purity

A belief in the immanent return of Christ motivates us to pure living. **1 John 3:2-3 (NKJV)** "<sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." The knowledge of the immanence of Christ's secret coming for His own is a major motivator to pure, holy living. We are told the same thing in **1 John 2:28 (NASB)** "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." The apostle Paul used this same argument in **Romans 13:11-13 (NKJV)** "<sup>11</sup> And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup> Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy." Do you see the urgency, the immanency of His return and that we live pure lives in light of that?

## B. Perspective

When I believe the return of Christ is immanent, it puts things in perspective. My trials are put in perspective. **Romans 8:18 (NKJV)** “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” When will this glory be revealed? When He comes for us or we go to be with Him! My priorities are put in perspective by the immanence of His return. Why would I want to store up wealth here when I am convinced that His coming is immanent? Given the immanence of His return, how important is a hobby or sports that consume us compared to making disciples who will be ready for His return?

### CONCLUSION

The study of the return of Christ is not a neat little hobby. It affects how we approach life, how we deal with trials and how we deal with personal sin. As we study the tribulation coming on the earth after Christ’s secret return, may it motivate us to be ready – always ready for that command – come up here”.