

Understanding Baptists: A Missionary Guide

What They Believe, Where We Agree, What's Missing, and How to Build Bridges | For LDS Missionaries

WHO ARE BAPTISTS?

The Basics:

- ~50 million in USA (largest Protestant group)
- Southern Baptist Convention is largest (~13 million)
- No central authority — each church is autonomous
- Wide diversity: Calvinist to Arminian, conservative to moderate
- Strong emphasis on personal salvation and Scripture

KEY INSIGHT: Unlike Calvinists (TULIP), Baptists don't have one unified doctrinal system. They have **distinctive practices** more than distinctive theology. The "BAPTISTS" acrostic captures their identity.

THE "BAPTISTS" ACROSTIC

B — **Biblical Authority:** Bible alone (Sola Scriptura)
A — **Autonomy** of the local church
P — **Priesthood** of all believers
T — **Two offices:** pastor and deacon only
I — **Individual soul liberty**
S — **Separation** of church and state
T — **Two ordinances:** baptism & Lord's Supper
S — **Saved** (regenerate) church membership

BAPTIST CORE BELIEFS

1. Sola Scriptura (Bible Alone)

They Believe:

- Bible is the *only* authority for faith and practice
- Canon is **closed** — no new revelation
- No prophets, apostles, or continuing revelation today
- Tradition, creeds, councils are guides only — not authoritative

Baptist Faith & Message: "The Holy Bible... has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter."

This is often the FIRST objection:

"Why do you need more scripture? The Bible is complete!"
"God doesn't speak through prophets anymore."

2. Salvation by Grace Through Faith Alone

They Believe:

- Salvation is God's gift — not earned by works
- Faith alone (Sola Fide) saves
- Good works are evidence of salvation, not cause
- Baptism does NOT save — purely symbolic
- Church membership doesn't save
- Sacraments/ordinances don't convey grace

Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works, lest any man should boast."

3. "Once Saved, Always Saved"

Eternal Security / Perseverance:

- True believers CANNOT lose salvation
- "If you could lose eternal life, it wouldn't be eternal"
- God keeps believers by His power
- Those who fall away "were never truly saved"

Exception: Free Will Baptists believe you CAN lose salvation

4. Believer's Baptism (Immersion)

They Believe:

- Baptism is for **believers only** — no infant baptism
- Must be by full **immersion**
- It's an **ordinance**, NOT a sacrament
- Purely **symbolic** — represents death/resurrection
- Does NOT wash away sin or convey grace
- An "outward sign of an inward change"

KEY DIFFERENCE:

Baptists: Baptism = symbol of salvation already received
LDS: Baptism = ordinance essential for salvation (with authority)

5. Priesthood of All Believers

They Believe:

- Every believer has **direct access** to God
- No human intermediary needed (priest, pope, prophet)
- No "clergy vs. laity" distinction in spiritual status
- Each person interprets Scripture for themselves
- Ordination gives no special powers or authority

Common Objection:

"Why do you need prophets and apostles? I can go directly to God!"
"We're all priests — no one has more authority than another."

6. Local Church Autonomy

They Believe:

- Each congregation is **self-governing**
- No bishops, synods, councils over churches
- Congregational vote on major decisions
- Churches cooperate voluntarily (conventions)
- Pastor is shepherd, not dictator
- Deacons are servants, not governors

7. The Trinity

They Believe:

- One God in three "persons" — Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- Co-eternal, co-equal, same essence/substance
- Traditional Nicene/Chalcedonian formulation
- God is spirit — incorporeal (no body)

Note: Many Baptists struggle to explain the Trinity. Studies show 70% of evangelicals hold views condemned as heresy at Nicaea!

8. Heaven and Hell

They Believe:

- Two destinations only: Heaven or Hell
- Hell = eternal conscious torment, lake of fire
- Heaven = eternal presence with God
- No degrees of glory
- No second chances after death
- Bodily resurrection for believers

CALVINIST VS. NON-CALVINIST BAPTISTS

Two Historical Streams:

1. Reformed/Calvinist Baptists:

- TULIP (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance)
- God predestines who will be saved
- Human will cannot resist God's grace

2. General/Free Will Baptists:

- Christ died for ALL (general atonement)
- Humans have genuine free will
- Grace can be resisted
- Some believe salvation can be lost

Most Southern Baptists = blend of both (Arminian with eternal security)

COMPARISON TABLE

Doctrine	Baptist	LDS
Scripture	Bible alone, closed canon	Bible + BoM + D&C + PoGP, open canon
Prophets	Ceased after apostles	Living prophet today
Authority	Bible + individual conscience	Priesthood keys restored
Salvation	Faith alone saves	Faith + repentance + baptism + endure
Baptism	Symbol only, no authority needed	Essential ordinance, requires authority
Eternal Security	Once saved, always saved	Must endure to the end
Godhead	Trinity (one being)	Three separate beings, one purpose
God's Body	Spirit only, incorporeal	Has glorified body of flesh
Afterlife	Heaven or Hell	Three degrees of glory
Church Structure	Autonomous congregations	Unified, hierarchical priesthood
Priesthood	All believers are priests	Specific authority restored
Ordinances	2 (baptism, communion)	Many (baptism, confirmation, temple)

WHERE WE AGREE (BUILD HERE!)

Common Ground:

- ✓ Jesus Christ is Savior and Redeemer
- ✓ The Bible is scripture, inspired by God
- ✓ Believer's baptism by immersion
- ✓ Salvation is through Christ's atonement
- ✓ Personal relationship with God matters
- ✓ Religious liberty and freedom of conscience
- ✓ Importance of prayer and scripture study
- ✓ Moral living, following commandments
- ✓ Rejection of infant baptism

WHAT'S MISSING (LDS ADDITIONS)

What the Restoration Provides:

1. Living Prophets & Revelation

Amos 3:7 — God reveals through prophets
Eph 2:20 — Church built on apostles/prophets

2. Priesthood Authority

Hebrews 5:4 — Called of God, as was Aaron
Matt 16:19 — Keys given to Peter

3. Additional Scripture

Ezek 37:16-17 — Stick of Judah + Joseph
John 10:16 — Other sheep I have

4. Baptism with Authority

Acts 19:1-6 — Re-baptism when authority matters
1 Cor 15:29 — Baptism for the dead
Mal 4:5-6 — Elijah turns hearts

6. Degrees of Glory

1 Cor 15:40-42 — Celestial, terrestrial, telestial
John 14:2 — Many mansions

7. Nature of God

Gen 1:27 — Image of God
Acts 7:55-56 — Stephen sees TWO beings

8. Plan of Salvation

Where we came from, why we're here, where we're going

ANSWERING THEIR OBJECTIONS

"The Bible is complete — no more scripture!"

- Bible doesn't say canon is closed
- Rev 22:18-19 refers to Revelation only, not whole Bible
- Similar warning in Deut 4:2 — before most of Bible written
- John 21:25 — many other things Jesus did, not written

"We don't need prophets anymore!"

- Eph 4:11-14 — apostles/prophets until we're all united
- Are we all united? No. Still needed.
- Amos 3:7 — God does nothing without revealing to prophets

"Salvation is by faith alone, not works!"

- James 2:17-20 — Faith without works is dead
- Matt 7:21 — Not everyone who says Lord, Lord...
- We agree grace saves! But obedience shows genuine faith

"Baptism is just a symbol!"

- 1 Peter 3:21 — Baptism "saves us"
- Acts 2:38 — "Be baptized for remission of sins"
- Mark 16:16 — Believes AND is baptized

CONVERSATION TIPS

DO:

- ✓ Emphasize shared love of Christ and Bible
- ✓ Testify of the Book of Mormon's witness of Christ
- ✓ Ask: "If God wanted to speak today, could He?"
- ✓ Focus on what Restoration ADDS, not criticizes
- ✓ Share how living prophets bless your life
- ✓ Invite them to pray about the Book of Mormon

DON'T:

- ✗ Attack the Bible or their sincerity
- ✗ Get caught in circular "Bible only" debates
- ✗ Argue about Trinity — show, don't tell
- ✗ Dismiss their faith experience

POWERFUL QUESTION:

"You believe the Bible because prophets and apostles wrote it. If God called prophets and apostles again today, wouldn't you want to listen to them?"

Moroni 10:4-5: "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true..."

The ultimate answer comes through prayer and the Spirit, not debate.