

# DENOMINATIONS: Baptist/Anabaptist

**Religion:** the belief in a god

**Denomination:** a religious grouping where congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices

**Synod:** Greek for “walking together.” Congregations voluntarily choose to belong to a synod, which is a group of congregations that are in agreement with each other.

## **Basic History of Christian Denominations:**

1054: “Great Schism” (Split of Orthodox and Rome)

1530: Protestant Reformation

- Lutheranism
- Calvinism
- Anglicanism
- Anabaptism

## **The Lutheran Vantage Point**

In this study we examine denominations from a Lutheran point of view. But we always attempt to describe their systems of teaching fairly.

When the beliefs of these non-Lutheran systems disagree with Scripture, we shall point out why such teachings cannot be considered acceptable.

On the other hand, we shall note with pleasure those teachings that emphasize beliefs also found in the Lutheran Confessions, those teachings often make applications to Christian life, etc., from which Lutherans can gladly learn.

## **General Anabaptist History:**

Unlike their Reformation-era counterparts, the Anabaptists do not follow the teachings of a particular individual. Rather, the Anabaptists are primarily the followers of an idea. The name *Anabaptist* means “against Baptism” or “re-baptizers.” The several different Anabaptist groups of the 16th century (and following) all have one teaching in common: they do not baptize infants.

The refusal to baptize infants has at its core a specific understanding about Baptism (and for that matter, the Lord’s Supper) that makes Anabaptists different from most other Christians. Anabaptists do not baptize babies because they believe Baptism is a human act, rather than a divine miracle.

Likewise, they believe the Lord’s Supper is a human act rather than a divine miracle.

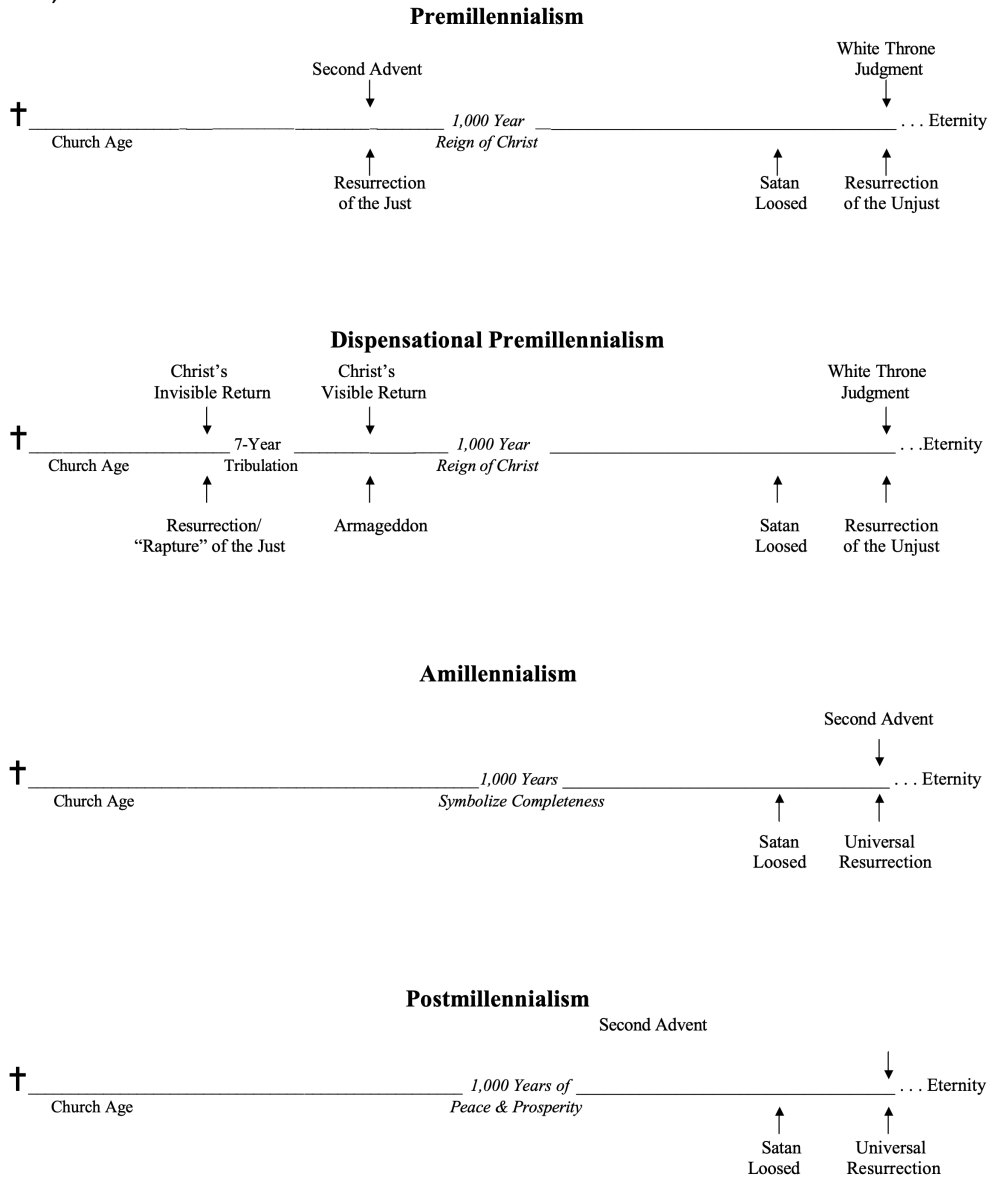
Since, infants cannot personally accept Jesus as Lord and confess the faith, the Anabaptists reason, no infant should ever be baptized. According to Anabaptist thinking, a person should only be baptized when he or she finally accepts God’s will and makes a commitment to be a Christian.

Resistance to infant Baptism fits with another central idea among Anabaptists that, for a lack of a better term, might be called “anti-creedalism.” That is to say, Anabaptists feel a general aversion to any sort of creed or unifying statement of belief. While a particular Anabaptist might not have any argument with what is confessed in the Apostles’, Nicene, or Athanasian Creed, that person would not want to be bound to any of the creeds because the creeds themselves are not spelled out in the Bible. A popular Anabaptist slogan is “No creeds but Christ.”

While there are many different Anabaptist groups, each with its own history, the three main groups stand out: the Mennonites (followers of Menno Simons), the Baptists (an ironic name for those who take exception to infant Baptism), and the Seventh-Day Adventists (a group that highlights millennialism, another popular teaching accepted by many Anabaptists).

# DISPENSATIONALISM (PRE-MILLENNIALISM)

Dispensationalism developed in the 1830s with the teachings of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and later became popular among the Baptists in the United States. Charles Henry Mackintosh popularized this view through his Bible commentaries. Dwight L. Moody (Moody Bible Institute) helped spread it. The Scofield Reference Bible (1909) was the first to publish dispensational notes. Today, these views are popular among non-denominational churches, Baptists, Pentecostal, and Charismatics.



## Millennium

“A thousand years” appears in the Bible only three times: Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8; and Revelation 20:4. In the first two passages the phrase refers to God’s timelessness. But what does “a thousand years” mean in the latter verse? Should it be interpreted literally? The answer to that question determines how other Bible prophecies are interpreted.

There is an interpretation of Revelation 20:4 that agrees with other Bible passages, early Christian teaching, and Reformation theology: Amillennialism (a-millennial means no-millennium). In this view, Christ’s victory on the cross defeated and bound Satan. The “millennial” reign of Christ has already commenced—Christ reigns upon the earth through His church. Yet Christ’s victorious saints still fight against evil, including what John calls “the spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:3). When God has accomplished His gracious purposes in Christ, Satan will be loosed. At that time the Antichrist will appear. Satan’s rebellion will be cut off by Christ’s glorious return. Then all the dead will rise for Judgment Day. Amillennialism is much simpler than other theories concerning Revelation 20:4, and corresponds better with other Bible passages (particularly Jesus’ rejection of an earthly kingdom in John 18:36). It also agrees with the historic Christian creeds. Amillennialism is taught by a majority of Christians, including the Lutheran church.

Other interpretations of Revelation 20:4 include post-millennialism, premillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism. The latter is perhaps the most popular. According to this view, Christ will return and rapture living adult believers, along with those who have not reached an “age of accountability,” into heaven. Immediately, a seven-year tribulation period will commence for those on earth. The Antichrist will appear. Christ will return and establish a literal earthly kingdom for 1,000 years. During this time Satan will be bound and certain martyred saints will be resurrected and reign with Christ. After 1,000 years, Satan will lead the nations against God’s people in the Battle of Armageddon. Christ will defeat the devil, raise the dead and pronounce final judgment. Millennial theories such as dispensational premillennialism are not supported by the Bible.

## The Rapture

According to the Bible, the word rapture (Greek: “caught up”), refers to event when living believers (along with those who have died in the faith) are united with their returning Lord on the Last Day:

*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together [raptured] with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18).*

Sadly, this passage has been twisted into a scary teaching of a “secret rapture” involving jetliner and automobile crashes and a host of other disasters. In this scheme, Christ rescues adult believers and children under an “age of accountability” from a seven-year tribulation. This unbiblical teaching has been popularized in the Left Behind series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.

The secret rapture theory errs in several ways: (1) It twists Paul’s words, and other Scripture passages, out of context; (2) It denies the unmistakable return of Christ who, though He arrives suddenly (5:2–4), comes with a “loud command” and a “trumpet call” (4:16); (3) It denies original sin by maintaining that persons will join Christ in heaven without faith; (4) It promises a chance for repentance following Christ’s return; and (5) It robs joy from the Christian by focusing on frightening—and somewhat fictional—imagery.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul reassures believers by stating that the souls of those who die in faith are with the Lord, and that when Christ irrefutably returns on the Last Day they will be reunited with their transformed earthly bodies. Those who are alive also will be transformed, and will join Christ and all the saints to live forever in His kingdom. Instead of frightening believers by teaching a “secret rapture,” Paul urges us to “encourage one another with these words.”

## The Baptists

**Our Focus:** In Christ, we have a sure salvation; eternal life with Him is certain. The biggest difference between Lutherans and Baptists is on baptism. Baptists teach that infants should not be baptized. This teaching robs you of certainty by calling upon you to “make your decision” or “personal commitment” in order to be called God’s child through Baptism.

**Baptist Theology:** The keynote of Baptist theology is the freedom of individual belief. That is to say, the most important ideal for Baptists is that individual Christians have the right and ability to choose what they believe. This focus on the individual has led to a general dislike for creedal statements among Baptists. It is not that a Baptist would necessarily disagree with the Apostles’ or the Nicene Creed; it is just that the Baptists insist so strongly on the personal freedom of belief that they see no need for a creed that speaks the unity of the faith. This focus has led to many divisions with Baptists as some hold to a Calvinistic (Reformed-like) theology while others have an Arminian (Methodist-like) theology.

The common threads that keep Baptists together are:

- (a) Refusal to baptize infants
- (b) Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not Means of Grace for us, but our actions of love and obedience toward God.

The main Baptist churches that we know today trace their history to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and early 17<sup>th</sup>

century England. These earliest Baptists were known as English Separatists, as they separated themselves from the Church of England (Anglican Church) for a number of reasons, including the rejection of infant baptism. This separation led to persecution by the Church of England and emigration followed as they sought religious freedom in America.

Calvinism	Arminianism
Total Depravity of Man	Man is not totally depraved, but has a free will.
Unconditional Election	Election is God’s response to you personal decision to follow Him.
Limited Atonement	Christ died potentially for everyone, so long as you decide to accept Him.
Irresistible Grace	Grace is completely resistible and is based on personal choice.
Perseverance of the Saints	You can walk away from salvation any time you like.

**From the Lutheran Confessions:**  
*“Concerning Baptism, our churches teach that Baptism is necessary for salvation [Mark 16:6] and that God’s grace is offered through Baptism [Titus 3:4-7]. They teach that children are to be baptized [Acts 2:38-39]. Being offered to God through Baptism, they are received into God’s grace.”*  
 - Augsburg Confession IX 1

### Discussion Questions:

Baptists believe that baptism is not a miracle God performs in you, but a powerless human act you perform for God.

1. In what way do the following Bible verses show that Baptism is God's powerful act and not merely a human act of obedience?
  - a. John 3:1-5
  - b. Titus 3:4-7
  - c. 1 Peter 3:21-22
2. Do the above Bible verses mean to suggest that there is no human activity at all in Baptism?
3. How do the following Bible verses give you reason to think that even newborn infants should be Baptized?
  - a. Matthew 28:19-20
  - b. Luke 18:15-17
  - c. Acts 2:38-39
4. Is Baptism an act of magic – like a *get into heaven free card* – that you can receive in infancy and then forget about for the rest of your life? (Is it possible to miss out on the benefits God gave you in your Baptism?)
5. What certainties and assurances do Baptists lose when they refuse to believe in the divine power of Baptism?

*The refusal to baptize infants rests on the assumption that infants do not have the ability to believe. Therefore, a child must wait until he or she is old enough to decide or make a commitment to Christ.*

1. If faith something you give to God or something that God gives to you? (See: Romans 10:17; Ephesians 2:1, 8-9)
2. What do the following Bible verses say about infant faith?
  - a. Luke 1:15
  - b. Luke 1:39-45
  - c. Matthew 18:6

### **Baptists/Anabaptists**

**SOURCE OF DOCTRINE:** Scripture is viewed as the source for belief. Most Baptist churches establish their own statement of faith that serves as an expression of beliefs that members must agree to in order to join the church.

**ROLE OF CHRIST/WAY OF SALVATION:** Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense, salvation includes regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Salvation is a gift from God granted to the “elect.” those chosen by God for salvation, but man plays a conscious role in “accepting” faith.

**SACRAMENTS:** Baptists hold that believer's immersion is the only proper form of Baptism. It is to be a believer's Baptism, used by a believer to express the person's faith symbolically. Thus, if one was an unbeliever at the time, it was an invalid Baptism. No infant can be a believer. They believe infant baptism is useless, immoral, and unnecessary. Baptists understand Baptism and the Lord's Supper simply as symbols, but as necessary symbols.

**THE LAST DAY:** Pre-millennial view of the end times.

**OTHER:** Often Baptists forbid things that God does not, such as abstinence from alcohol.

## COMPARING THE CHURCH BODIES:

### **Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)**



**Origin and History:** The Southern Baptist Convention came into being the years leading up to the American Civil War. The issue of slavery directly led to its formation. Specifically, the issue whether slaveholders could be accepted as foreign missionaries. The SBC traces its origins to the *General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of American for Foreign Missions*. The mission board, located in Boston, refused to send slaveholders into the mission field, and in May 1845, the denomination split in two. The northern group became the American Baptist Missionary Union (later called Northern Baptist Convention, and now known as the American Baptist Churches in the USA) and the southern group became known as the Southern Baptist Convention.

Along with the rest of the South, the SBC suffered great losses during the war. Homes, schools, churches, the livelihood of citizens were destroyed, which had a devastating effect on the church. Membership continued to decline when former slaves withdrew to form their own churches. But the recovery of the SBC was impressive that by 1890, there were more than 1 million members.

On June 20, 1995, the SBC adopted a resolution to renounce its racist origins and to apologize for its founders' defense of slavery. As of 2000, nearly 2 thousand SBC congregations were predominantly black.

The SBC's Life-Way Christian Resources (formerly the Sunday School Board) is the world's largest publisher of religious materials.

Today, the SBC is the largest Protestant church in the United States with a membership of 16,136,044 as of 2012.

**Source of Doctrine:** The SBC affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

**Role of Christ/Way of Salvation:** Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer.

**Sacraments/Ordinances:** SBC understands Baptism and the Lord's Supper simply as symbols, but as necessary symbols.

**Eschatology:** Pre-millennial view of the end times.

**Life Issues:** The SBC affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible, which is pro-life.

**Sexual Identity:** The SBC does not condone same-sex marriages.

**Role of Women:** The SBC does not ordain women.

#### **Our Lutheran response to SBC:**

The difference in belief surround the purpose and form of Baptism serves as a major obstacle when approaching Baptist believers. A mutual understanding of the Scriptures would be a neutral ground from which to engage the Baptist believer in conversation.

## National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC):



**Origin and History:** The NBCUSA is the largest body of black Baptists in the United States. It shares a common history with the National Baptist Convention of America throughout its formative years. The two were together until a disagreement over the control of the publishing house in 1915. With the division, the National Baptist Convention of America took control of the publishing house, and the National Baptist Convention of the USA assumed control of foreign missions.

For most of its history, the NBCUSA has steered clear of political and social involvements. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was originally a part of this church body, but chose to leave the denomination, since it would not support King's tactics, such as civil disobedience. As a result, the church had a schism to form the Progressive National Baptist Convention, which had as its focus civil rights causes and voter registration drives. Since the schism, the NBCUSA has been active in civil rights.

**Source of Doctrine:** The NBCUSA affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

**Role of Christ/Way of Salvation:** Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer.

**Sacraments/Ordinances:** NBCUSA understands Baptism and the Lord's Supper simply as symbols, but as necessary symbols.

**Eschatology:** Pre-millennial view of the end times.

**Life Issues:** The ECC is pro-life.

**Sexual Identity:** The NBCUSA opposes same-sex marriage, but it has no official position with regard to ordination of gay or lesbian people in the ministry.

**Role of Women:** The NBCUSA allows for the ordination of women.

### Our Lutheran response to NBCUSA:

The difference in belief surround the purpose and form of Baptism serves as a major obstacle when approaching Baptist believers. A mutual understanding of the Scriptures would be a neutral ground from which to engage the Baptist believer in conversation.

## National Missionary Baptist Convention of America (NMBCA):



**Origin:** The National Missionary Baptist Convention of America began with the departure of several congregations from the National Baptist Convention of America in 1988. The issue was the control of several agencies including the National Baptist Publishing Board. Most of the membership came with the departure of NBCA congregations in California and Texas. This is one of the newest primary black Baptist denominations and it does not have any doctrinal differences of practice from the other main black Baptist denominations.

Motto: "To edify our member churches, the nation, and the world through the wise use of our spiritual gifts, intellectual ability, and financial resources for the glory of God."

**Source of Doctrine:** The NMBCA affirms the inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

**Role of Christ/Way of Salvation:** Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer.

**Sacraments/Ordinances:** NMBCA understands Baptism and the Lord’s Supper simply as symbols, but as necessary symbols.

**Eschatology:** Pre-millennial view of the end times.

**Life Issues:** The NMBCA is pro-life.

**Sexual Identity:** The NMBCA opposes same-sex marriage.

**Role of Women:** The NMBCA offers a women’s auxiliary groups.

**Our Lutheran response to the NMBCA:**  
 The difference in belief surround the purpose and form of Baptism serves as a major obstacle when approaching Baptist believers. A mutual understanding of the Scriptures would be a neutral ground

Synod	Southern Baptist Convention	National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.	National Missionary Baptist Convention of America	Baptist General Convention of Texas	American Baptist Churches in the USA (ABCUSA)	Converge Worldwide (Baptist General Conference)
Membership	16,136,044 (2012)	5,000,000 (2012)	2,500,000 (2012)	2,440,815 (2016)	1,240,000 (2015)	260,000 (2016)
Scripture	Inerrant	Inerrant	Inerrant	Inerrant	Inerrant	Inerrant
Creeds & Confessions	None, but the Bible.	None, but the Bible.	None, but the Bible	None, but Bible.	None, but Bible.	None, but Bible.
Lord’s Supper	Necessary Symbol	Necessary Symbol	Necessary Symbol	Necessary Symbol	Necessary Symbol	Necessary Symbol
Life Issues	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life
LGBTQIA+	Sin	Sin	Sin	Sin*	Sin*	Sin

**Sources:**

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