# **The Seventh Day Baptist Denomination in Australia**

**by Rev. David H. Hill**

Seventh Day Baptists are "Seventh Day" because they consider the 'seventh day' (Saturday) as a day ordained by God for rest and worship. They are "Baptist" because they hold beliefs similar to Baptists about the supreme authority of Scripture, the church as constituted by those who have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and the importance of people having the liberty to make personal decisions about their commitments of faith.

### **History**

#### **Origins in England**

Evidence of the origins of the Sabbatarian Baptists, though still the subject of dispute, locates the movement in London sometime around the early 1650's. The origins of the Sabbatarian movement were quite independent of other early Baptists. They arose out of the controversy instigated by Nicholas Bownde's 1595 work entitled *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*; and were furthered by the preaching of John Traske and others. The writings of the Anglican priest, Theophilus Brabourne, raised public interest in the issues.

However, at several points the pioneer First and Seventh-day Baptists were known to have interacted. In 1659 Jeremiah Ives, a popular Baptist controversialist, challenged the Seventh Day Baptists to a debate to be held in the Stone Chapel beside St. Paul's Cathedral in London. In the eighteenth century, due to a lack of suitable ministers, several Seventh Day Baptist congregations were served by First-day Baptist pastors. Conversely some Sabbatarians, such as the Stennett family, served as pastors for both First and Seventh Day Baptist congregations.

Many of those early Sabbatarians suffered for the cause of the Sabbath including John Traske, who in 1618 was sentenced by the Star Chamber "to be removed from the ministry, imprisoned for life, fined £1000, whipped from the Fleet prison to Westminster and to Cheapside, pilloried in both places, and branded on the forehead with the letter J to signify that he had 'broached Jewish opinions'." Traske's wife Dorothy was also imprisoned for keeping the Sabbath, and despite her husband's recantation remained faithful, choosing rather to suffer a miserable existence in prison until her release by death in 1645. Another, Francis Bampfield, whose brother Thomas was an able defender of the Sabbath and a Speaker in the Cromwellian Parliament, organised the Particular Seventh Day Baptist Church known as Pinners Hall Seventh Day Baptist Church. Francis was arrested for preaching in violation of the Conventicle Act of 1670 and died in Newgate Prison in 1684 on account of its deplorable conditions.

Following the rapid growth of English Sabbatarian Baptist churches in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came a sudden decline that left a mere handful of adherents by the mid-nineteenth century. This demise, which began in the eighteenth century, has been attributed to a lack of organised fellowship, reliance upon endowment, reliance on first day ministers, persecution and discrimination.

#### **Establishment in America**

In 1664 Stephen Mumford and his wife who had been Sabbath-keepers in the mixed congregation of Tewkesbury Baptist Church in Gloucestershire emigrated to Newport, Rhode Island. They joined John Clarke's Baptist Church and were soon joined in their conviction of the Sabbath by several others including Samuel and Tacy Hubbard. In 1671, A seemingly irreconcilable dispute involving communion with ex-Sabbath-keepers resulted in separation and the formation of the first Seventh Day Baptist Church on American soil. New churches were subsequently founded and followed in 1696 by the establishment of yearly meetings for the purpose of inter-cooperation. In 1802 the General Conference of the Seventh Day Baptists was formed for the purpose of: providing the people with an identity, helping to define doctrine, serving as a communicating agent, providing a means for education, and initiating programs.

### **Seventh Day Baptist Beginnings In Australia**

It is impossible to speak of the history of Seventh Day Baptists in Australia without prior reference to the Seventh Day Baptists of New Zealand. The Auckland Seventh Day Baptist Church began in the 1930s with a group of ex-Adventists under the leadership of Rev. Francis Johnson. It was admitted in to the General Conference (U.S.A.) in 1940. Around the same time another group of Sabbath-keepers was gathered in Christchurch under the leadership of Rev. Edward Barrar. In 1944 the Christchurch Church was admitted into Conference.

#### **The Bundaberg Group - 1975**

In 1975 a young Seventh-day Adventist couple, Mervyn and Mavis Rudd of Bundaberg, Queensland, began to see what they termed "contradictions, inconsistencies and error" in their Adventist teachings and beliefs. Resigning their membership on 15th August, 1975 they made contact with Seventh Day Baptists in America who put them in touch with the Seventh Day Baptists in New Zealand.

As a result of further study and acceptance of Seventh Day Baptist Beliefs and Polity, the Rudds, together with Doug and Rosemary Mackenzie applied for membership into the Auckland Seventh Day Baptist Church and on 23 August 1975 they duly received the right hand of fellowship (by proxy). Pastor and Mrs. Johnson visited the nucleus of interested families (now 3) on October 27, 1975 and stayed around two weeks in which time they were able to meet with Stefan Kube, a Polish immigrant also from an Adventist background. His wife Vicky Kube who had been raised a Seventh Day Baptist in Holland had been living in Australia with her husband since April 1960. As far as is known, Vicky was the first person of Seventh Day Baptist provenance to live in Australia.

#### **The Melbourne Seventh Day Baptists - 1978**

In December 1977 an Argentinian family from Melbourne, Victoria wrote to the American Sabbath Tract Society for information. Contact was then made with Mavis Rudd in Bundaberg who, in August 1978, visited Jose and Betty Alegre and family for the occasion of the first public meeting of Seventh Day Baptists in Melbourne. Pastor Leon Lawton from the U.S.A. was also able to meet with the Alegres during his visit to Australia in 1978. The Alegre family publicised their intention to form a Seventh Day Baptist Church through posters, home visits and announcements on the Spanish newspaper and radio". So began the work in Melbourne under the leadership of Jose Alegre. Unlike most of the other Australian Seventh Day Baptists, the Alegres were not former Adventists. Their special interests lay in evangelism, particularly within their own Spanish-speaking community in Melbourne.

In May 1994 Pastor Alegre left Melbourne for Argentina in order to plant a new Seventh Day Baptist Church in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Leadership of the Melbourne Church was left to Esperanza Cardona. The Church caters for both Spanish and English speaking members and has zealously supported the establishment of the SDB Church in Argentina.

#### **Early Inter-Church Fellowship - 1977 & 1978**

Over the holiday break in the years 1977 and 1978 the families from Bundaberg met at Coffs Harbour, New South Wales with the Kube family from Sydney and Pastor Ronald Barrar from Auckland, for mutual fellowship and edification. Families from the area were also able to meet with them and in 1978 they included representatives from Sydney, Melbourne and Bundaberg. An article in the local newspaper during the 1978-79 meetings illustrates the fledgling church's struggle for recognition and acceptance in the face of the prevalent suspicion of "cults".

"Our church is new to Australia, but we aren't a group of weirdies; we have no rigid laws and don't prescribe special dietary regulations or any fancy trimmings. Basically we are the same as ordinary, conventional Baptists except we observe the Sabbath on Saturday instead of Sunday. We're really very orthodox and take the Bible as the only source."

An evangelical church, eagerly seeking converts, the Seventh-Day Baptists function in a decentralised framework. Although there is a world federation of the church which meets every four years, every congregation is fully autonomous and responsible for its own affairs.

#### **The Warrimoo Seventh Day Baptists - 1980**

The Warrimoo group under the leadership of Stephan Kube began with meetings at the Kube's home in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney.  Mervyn and Mavis Rudd moved to Sydney early in 1980 and assisted with the work there. The Kubes located a church building suitable for Sabbath meetings. Through advertising and personal witness, many contacts were made in the Sydney area including an elderly gentleman Mr. A. C. Sampson, a Sabbatarian who had for many years, been in contact with Seventh Day Baptists in New Zealand and other parts of the world but had never previously become a member. The Warrimoo Church was accepted into conference as a church in January 1990.

In 1996 the Church secured the use of the Uniting Church Hall at North Parramatta, Sydney. Since its official Opening Service March 30, 1996 it is has been known as the Sydney Seventh Day Baptist Church. Since January 1998 the Church has been led by Pastor Alegre's son Gabrielle.

#### **The Morisset Group**

Theo and Elsie Hawkins, an ex-Adventist couple living at Morisset, New South Wales, had been seeking the fellowship of like-minded Sabbatarians for some years prior to their contact with Seventh Day Baptists. The Hawkins and several others joined company with the Seventh Day Baptists around the time of the inception of the Australasian Conference in 1980. Theo had long cherished an interest in publishing and had compiled a number of polemics against certain key Adventist doctrines. Though never large in number the group was very active in the production of literature, primarily due to Theo's prolific writing on detailed theological issues.

#### **The Establishment of the Australasian Conference of Seventh Day Baptists - 1980**

In 1979 the Auckland Church extended an invitation to the Seventh Day Baptists in Australia to meet together with the New Zealand churches.  The meeting took place in July, 1980 where members of the two New Zealand churches and several Australians adopted a constitution for the purpose of forming the Australasian Conference of Seventh Day Baptists. In 1981, Conference commenced publication of its official newsletter, *Link*. The Australasian Conference of Seventh Day Baptists was accepted into the fellowship of the Baptist World Alliance by the General Council in Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 83. Through financial aid and the sponsorship of missionaries the Conference has given loyal support to its missionary outreach program in Malawi, Africa.

#### **The Australian Association Of Seventh Day Baptists**

The Australian Association of Seventh Day Baptists was formed as a result of meetings held in Brisbane on April 15, 1990. Its first camp was held March 29 - April 5 1991 at Kindillan, Redland Bay, Queensland. The Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane churches were represented and the Australasian Conference President was able to attend. The meeting celebrated the Passover/ Lord's Supper together on the Friday evening. A draft constitution was discussed. Since its inception the Association has held regular camps between Conferences in order to maintain relationships between the Australian Churches and to promote the common aims of evangelism, missions and church planting. The Association has taken a particular interest in the work in Argentina. In 1996 the Australian Association was officially accepted by the Australasian Conference of Seventh Day Baptists.

### **BELIEFS**

#### **The Australasian Conference Statement of Belief, 1988**

A new period of consolidation began with the 1988 Melbourne Conference's adoption of an Australasian Statement of Belief.

#### **Introduction**

Seventh Day Baptists consider liberty of thought, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be essential to Christian belief and practice. We therefore encourage the unhindered study and open discussion of Scripture, and uphold the individual's freedom of conscience in seeking to understand and obey the will of God. It is for this reason that we have no binding *creed.*

We hold, however, that certain beliefs and practices, having the support of Scripture, and adhered to by the followers of Christ through the centuries, are binding upon all.

With this conviction in mind, we present the following brief statement, derived from our understanding of the Bible, as an expression of our common belief.

2Cor. 3:17,18; 2Tim 2:15; 3:16,17; Rom 12:2; 10:17; Eph 4:3 6,15.

#### **We Believe**

1. God

We believe in God, the Supreme Being; personal, perfect infinite, spiritual, eternal; the Creator, Sustainer and Sovereign of the universe; our Heavenly Father who manifests a holy redeeming love towards all mankind, forgiving the repentant, condemning the unrepentant; and who desires to share His love in a personal relationship with everyone.

Gen 1:1,2; Isa 25:1 9; Ps 90:1,2; 91:2; John 4:24; 5:24; 3:16 18; I Tim 1:17; Deut 6:4 9; 1 Kings 8:27; 1 John 1:5; Acts 17:24,25,28; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; Ezek 33:11; 2 Thess 1:6 8.

1. Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, Our Saviour, Teacher and Guide who gave Himself on the Cross as a complete and final sacrifice for sin, and draws to Himself all who will come to Him in love and trustful obedience. As our risen Lord, He is the one Mediator between us and the Father.

John 1:14 18,34; 3:16; 12:32; 14:6; Heb 1:3; Rom 1:3 5; 1 John 3:16; 2:1,2; Gal 4:4 6; 1 Peter 2:24; Heb 10:10 14; 1 Cor 15:20 23; 1 Tim 2:5; Eph 1:18 23.

1. The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, God dwelling within; the Inspirer of Scripture, the Comforter, active in the hearts and minds and lives of mankind; who convicts of sin, gives spiritual rebirth, instructs in righteousness, and empowers for witnessing and service.

John 14:16,17,26; 16:7 14; Acts 1:8; Rom 5:5; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 1 Cor 12:4 11.

1. The Bible

We believe that the Bible is the inspired record of God's will for mankind  the Word of God, of which Jesus Christ is the supreme Interpreter, and that it is our final authority in matters of faith and practice.

2 Tim 3:14 17; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 3:1,2,15,16; Heb 4:12; 1:1,2; John 20:30,31; Rom 3:2; Matt 5:17 19; Ps 119:105.

1. Mankind

We believe that mankind was created in the image of God, and is therefore the noblest work of creation. We also believe that human beings have moral responsibility, and are created to enjoy both Divine and human fellowship as children of God.

Gen 1:26,27: Ps 8:3 8; Micah 6:8; Matt 5:44 48.

1. The Ten Commandments

We believe that the Ten Commandments are ten divine precepts  applications of the eternal and universal principle of love; established by God, and given to mankind at creation, written by His 'finger' at Mt. Sinai, and magnified by Jesus Christ, and shown by Him to be the moral code for all mankind.

Gen 2:2; 4:8 13; Ex 20:1 17; Matt 19:16 19; Deut 6:5,6; Matt 22:36 39; 5:28; James 2:8 12.

1. The Sabbath

We believe that the Sabbath of the Bible, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is sacred time, a gift of God, instituted at creation, affirmed in the Ten Commandments, and re affirmed by Jesus and the apostles. We also believe that, in loving response to God's grace toward us, as revealed in Christ, the Sabbath should be faithfully observed as a day of rest and worship, and that it is a reminder of God's presence in time  His pledge of eternal rest in the paradise of God.

Gen 2:2,3; Ex 16:23 30; 20:8 11; Mark 2:27,28; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14,42 44; 16:11 13; 17:2,3; 18:4 11; John 14:15; Matt 5:17 19; Isa 58:13,14; Ezek 29:19,20; Heb 4:9,10.

1. Sin and Salvation

We believe that sin is the transgression of the law and disobedience to God, and failure to live according to His will. All who refuse to repent of their sins, and receive Christ as their Saviour will be punished at the time of the final judgement. We also believe that salvation from sin and death is the gift of God by redeeming love, accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection, and is received only by repentance and faith in Him.

1John 1:3,8 10; 3:4,5; John 1:12; 3:16 18,38; 14:6; Rom 3:21 25; 5:5-19; 6:23; Eph 2:8,9; 2 Thess 1:5 9; Rev 20:11 15; Isa 59:2; Heb 9:10 14; 1 Peter 1:3; Matt 25:41:46.

1. Eternal Life

We believe that eternal life, being conditional, is available to us only through our Saviour Jesus Christ, and is granted on one's acceptance of salvation in Him who, having conquered death, will gather together, not only those who have died righteous, but also the living righteous, and will bestow upon them immortality in glorified bodies, at His return in heavenly power and glory.

John 3:14 16; 6:40; 10:27,28; 17:1 3; 14:1 3; Rom 6:23; 5:14  17,6 11; Luke 24:1 6; Matt 28:1 8; 23:12,13,30; 25:31 34,46: 1 Cor 15:20 22,42 44,53 54; 1 John 5:11 13; Col 3:1 4; 1 Thess 4:13 18; Titus 2:13.

1. Baptism

We believe the baptism of believers, by immersion, is a command of Christ, being a witness to, and the consummation of one's acceptance of Him as Saviour and Lord, and is a symbol of death to sin, and rebirth to a new life in Christ.

Matt 28:19,20; Rom 6:3,4,11; Acts 2:38 41; Col 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; Gal 3:26,27.

1. The Lord's Supper

We believe that the Lord's Supper commemorates the suffering and death of our Redeemer until He comes, and that it is a symbol of our union with Christ, and a pledge of renewed allegiance to our risen Lord.

Mark 14:22 25; 1 Cor 10:16,17; 11:23 30: Matt 26:26 29.

1. The Church

We believe that the church of God is all redeemed believers gathered together by the Holy Spirit and joined into one body, of which Christ is the Head. We also believe that the local church is a community of believers organised in covenant relationship for worship, fellowship and service, practising and proclaiming common convictions, while growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We believe in the priesthood of all believers and practise the autonomy of the local congregation, as we seek to work in association with others for more effective witness.

Acts 20:28; 2:42; 1 Cor 12:13,14,27; Col 1:18; Rom 12:4,5; 15:5 7; 1 Peter 2:4 10; Matt 18:20; Eph 2:19 22; 4:11 16; 2 Peter 3:18; Heb 10:24,25.

1. Evangelism

We believe that the church's chief aim is as Jesus commissioned us: to proclaim the Gospel of Salvation and of the Kingdom: making disciples, baptising and teaching them to observe all that He has commanded: witnessing to our faith throughout the world and to every person.

Matt 28:18 20; 24:14; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor 4:1,2,5,6; 5:17 20; Ps 96:2,3; 1 Peter 3:15,16; Eph 6:14 20; Mark 16:15.

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**Seventh Day Baptists in Australia**

Web site: [http://www.asdba.org](http://www.asdba.org/)

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The Seventh Day Baptists date from earliest days of the Baptist movement when in 1653 their first church, Mill Yard Church, Whitechapel, London was established under the leadership of the remarkable and learned royal physician, Dr Peter Chamberlin. Never strong, they had largely disappeared from England by the mid-18th century.

They appeared in the United States in 1671 with a church planted in Newport RI, and made some progress in Philadelphia and New Jersey; a General Conference, based in Wisconsin, was established in 1801, but they began losing members to the Seventh Day Adventist Church during the 19th century. (Interestingly, it was a Seventh Day Baptist, Rachel Oakes Preston, who introduced the Adventists to the concept of worship on the seventh day.) By the mid-1940s, numbers had fallen to less than 7,000. The General Conference is also a member of the Baptist World Alliance. Last official BWA figures indicated a membership of 4,500 in 88 churches.

This group differed from other Baptists mainly on their attitude to the day of worship. They included people of both Arminian and Calvinistic convictions in their ranks and strongly emphasised the freedom of each congregation to govern itself and the absence of binding creeds. Some of early English Seventh Day Baptists were associated with radical millenarians who flourished in the turbulent times of the mid-17th century; one of their number, John James was hung drawn and quartered in 1661 for preaching radical eschatological views. During the 19th century, Seventh Day Baptists in USA opposed alcoholism, slavery and secret societies.

**Australia and New Zealand**

The Australasian Conference, which joined the Baptist World Alliance in 1983, consists of churches in Australia and New Zealand. The work in NZ, consisting of three churches which affiliated with the General Conference in USA, commenced in Auckland and Christchurch in the 1930s amongst former Seventh Day Adventists. These NZ churches were committed to missionary work, with fields in Malawi, Nigeria and India. They were also involved in the formation of churches in Australia.

The first fellowship in Australia was formed in August, 1975 in Bundaberg, Qld. when, with assistance from USA and NZ, some former Adventists living there became members of the Auckland church. (The church was formally constituted after a time in abeyance on 6 Nov 1983). About the same time, another church was formed in the Blue Mountains area west of Sydney, NSW at Warrimoo by a Seventh Day Baptist immigrant from the Netherlands, and her Polish husband. (This church was not accepted into the Conference until 1990.) A Spanish speaking church was formed in Melbourne in 1978 by people with Argentinian backgrounds.

During the 1980s, a number of fellowships and churches were formed: Morisset, NSW, 1980;Regents Park, Sydney 1983; Adelaide, 1984; Brisbane, 1984; Melbourne (English language work) 1985-87; Whyalla SA, 1984; Canberra, ACT 1984; Clayton, Vic (Spanish), 1985; Frankston, Vic 1985-9; Baulkham Hills, NSW - briefly during 1985; Taree, Bega and Grafton, NSW 1986. Some of this activity was connected with reform movements in the Seventh Day Adventist church at the time.

A Conference of the Australian and New Zealand churches was established in 1980. Even though it had encountered some difficulties through loss of officers and members, by 1988 it reported 134 members in 6 churches and 1 fellowship. It held biennial meetings and its official journal, Link, was published from 1981 until 2009.

In a major development towards better local unity, an Australian (Association) Fellowship of Churches was created at Easter 1985 to allow more fellowship without the need for international travel. However, there were differences of opinion, mostly in respect to structure and leadership, between the Australasian Conference and the Australian Fellowship. These differences were serious enough to cause some organizational division leading to some Australian churches withdrawing their membership from the Australasian Conference in 1985. These included Regents Park Church, the Adelaide Fellowship and the Bundaberg Church. The Regents Park Church dissolved itself in 1987. These developments were a turning point in the denomination, with churches dropping in number from 13 to 5 in a year. Some consolidation began to take place in the years that followed, especially with the adoption of an Australasian Statement of Belief in 1988.

Since then other churches have been formed at Beenleigh south of Brisbane (1989), Brisbane Northside fellowship (1990) which later incorporated members from the Morisset church, and North Parramatta, NSW (1996).

A new Australian Association of Seventh Day Baptists was formed as a result of meetings held in Brisbane on April 15, 1990. For a time it had its own theological journal, Christian Credo, but it soon became an independent publication. This Association has taken a particular interest in the work in Argentina, and it was officially accepted by the Australasian Conference in 1996. During the late 1990s/early 2000s the Australasian Conference ceased meeting.

The Australian Association began to play a more active role in drawing the Australian churches together. Over the past decade there have been number of fellowships started in various areas of the country. Some have dissolved and some have shifted with their members. There has been a recent emphasis by the Association on growth and connecting with the many families and individuals around the country who have expressed interest in SDB ideas.

There are 4 official churches, Beenleigh and Marsden (Samoan) in Queensland, Sydney and Melbourne, comprising about 100 members. There are also a number of cell groups in other parts of the country which are developing towards becoming branch churches.

**Logo:**

Some members of the churches in Australia and New Zealand feel that the symbol of the cross has a tainted meaning because of its past use in non-Christian, and even pagan, contexts. Because of this, in the interests of unity and not causing others to stumble, the cross was left off the logos of the Australasian Conference and the Australian Association.

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