

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Baptists under the Southern Cross.

AUSTRALIA, with a territory, geographically, of nearly three million square miles, is practically as large as North America. Australia's population, however, makes a much less boastful comparison, and it is only equal to the population of New York, or London. In the matter of settlement she has only a century and a half of history behind her and is in every respect, except geologically, a young country:

Baptists in Australia can be counted only by the thousand and not, as in America, by the million. There are more Baptists in America than the sum total of Australia's population, but they are encouraged in their comparative isolation and insignificance by the knowledge that when America was as young as Australia there were actually less Baptists in the United States than the 100,000 odd who profess the Baptist name in Australia to-day. Australia is a young, free land, with every possibility of a great future, and Baptists, with their witness for soul-liberty and freedom from state interference in matters of religion, and their passion for an evangelistic message, believe that the flowing tide is with them.

The history of Baptist work in Australia has few purple patches. It is a story of humble origin, dogged perseverance loyalty to principles, and faith in the triumph of Christ. The earliest Baptists lived in the days of convict settlement, with its degrading and callous conditions. Only men of deep conviction and heroic courage would have essayed to do what they did. Yet they wrought better than they knew.

Of worldly riches Baptists in Australia have never been able to make much boast, and unlike other denominations, have neither by endowments nor Government grants been called upon to inherit much treasure. From the beginning they have been afraid of State churches and State grants, and because of their principles had to purchase their own land for churches and schools; while other denominations are to-day enjoying great wealth from the ever-rising value of lands obtained from the State.

The comparative paucity and poverty of the pioneer Baptists during the first half-century made extension work difficult if not impossible. It has been said that endeavouring to establish a Baptist Church in Australia in the earlier years was like trying to build the walls of Jerusalem with Tobiah, Sanballat and Company hindering the laying of every brick. The scattered nature of the population and the spacious distances were serious handicaps in establishing churches. But gradually the little one

has become a host, and some 400 churches are to-day shining forth as stars in the firmament.

There are not so many stars on Australia's flag as on the Star-spangled Banner of the United States, but there is something which is not found on the American flag. It is a cross. Australians are proud of their flag because of that cross and all that it stands for, as they are proud of that other Cross under which they live, set in the heavens by Him who made of one blood all the nations which dwell upon the face of the earth, and who desires that they shall recognise each other as blood relations, and not as aliens, or positive or possible enemies.

Politically, Australia stands for what is termed a White Australia; but Australian Baptists stand for something higher and less selfish than that term denotes. While surrounded by races of differing colours from their own, their attitude toward them is as neighbourly and pacific as the ocean which laves their shores.

Actually there are six stars in the Australian flag, representing the six States comprising the Commonwealth. Similarly, each State has its Baptist Union and is a law unto itself. These State Unions correspond to the County Associations of the English Baptists. In the year 1926 the six States agreed to federate, and the Baptist Union of Australia was inaugurated in Sydney with the Rev. J. H. Goble as its first president. The State Unions meet annually, the Federal Union triennially. Efforts have been made to federate and co-ordinate the Home Mission work, the Theological Colleges for the training of ministerial students, and the Young People's Department, and Boards were set up to promote these objectives. The only definitely practical results to date are the federation of the States' Foreign Missionary interests, the creation of an Australian Baptist Publishing House, and the publication of the *Australian Baptist*, as the official weekly organ for the Commonwealth. The paper is now in its twenty-fourth year.

The Foreign Missionary interest of Australian Baptists has centred in India, with Eastern Bengal as its field of operation. This work was begun fifty-two years ago and has been staffed entirely by Australian Baptists. In this present year twenty-five missionaries are on active service. They are serving a Christian community with a church membership roll of 3,081; Sunday scholars 1,681; day scholars 2,157; native preachers and Biblemen 30; native Sunday School teachers 108. The annual income of the Foreign Mission Board averages ten shillings per head of the total Baptist membership in Australia.

Baptist work in Australia had its origin on April 27th, 1831, when the Rev. John McKaeg, an English immigrant, commenced

preaching in the long room of the "Rose & Crown" Inn, Sydney. The first baptisms took place in Woolloomooloo Bay in the same year. The first Baptist Church in Australia was erected in Bathurst Street, Sydney, and opened on September 23rd, 1836. It cost the modest sum of £1,400. After a century's history that building was in 1936 resumed by the Government and an ornate building is taking its place on a site in George Street, the main city thoroughfare. The Rev. John Saunders was the first minister of the Bathurst Street Mother Church. He was sent out by the English Baptist Missionary Society and arrived in Sydney in 1834.

The first Baptist Association, now known as the Baptist Union of New South Wales, was formed in 1869, with the Rev. Allan Webb as its first president. New South Wales was the only State where government had been set up at that time, and there was no Baptist work or Baptist minister employed beyond its coastal area. Three pioneer ministers of revered memory, the Revs. Allan Webb, Phillip Lane and Joseph Hinton, sitting on the verandah of the manse at West Maitland, conceived the idea of the first Baptist Union and brought it into being.

Victoria was the first state to hive off from New South Wales, and it was followed by South Australia, Queensland, and West Australia; but Tasmania closely shares with New South Wales the honour of precedence in Australian Baptist history, as within a year of the first church being organised in Sydney a second fellowship was formed in Hobart. The first Baptist organisation in that island was the Particular Baptist Society of Van Dieman's Land. This was succeeded in 1884 by the Baptist Union of Tasmania, with Mr. William Gibson, an honoured layman, as president. There were then eight churches with 305 members and 483 scholars in Tasmania.

It was in the year 1835 that John Batman, from Tasmania, sailed up the Yarra River and chose as a place for a settlement in Victoria what is now the site of the queenly city of Melbourne. It was bush country; but four years later the first Baptist services were being conducted by two laymen in a tent located in what is now the heart of the city. In the succeeding years the first baptisms took place on the beach that now is Port Melbourne. A year later a Scotch Baptist settled in Fitzroy to engage in dairying. He constructed a baptistery and built a church in his own garden. Collins Street Church, Melbourne, now the leading Baptist church in Victoria, was built in 1845, with the Rev. John Ham as its first minister. This church has been pastored by a succession of able ministers entirely drawn from England.

South Australian Baptist history dates from the arrival from

England in 1837 of Mr. and Mrs. W. Finlayson and Mr. David MacLaren, father of Dr. Alexander MacLaren of Manchester. Following services held in Mr. Finlayson's home a membership of thirteen was formed, and the opening services, commenced in a wooden building previously used as a banking office, were conducted by Mr. MacLaren. The Flinders Street Church in the city of Adelaide, for so long the headquarters of the denomination, has this year celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary.

Queensland was still a part of New South Wales when the first Baptist minister, the Rev. Charles Stewart, landed in Moreton Bay from an immigrant ship in 1849 and founded a United Evangelical Church. Six years later the Baptists decided to form a church of their own Communion and started services in the Police Court, and later in rooms at the Supreme Court. The first baptism took place in an open waterway where the City Markets now stand.

Western Australia was the last of the States in which Baptists established themselves. Though services had been held, no organised work was carried out until 1894. The church in Museum Street, Perth, the capital city, was opened in 1899.

Though numerically a small people, the Baptists of Australia have played their part on memorable occasions. It is something to their credit that the model Education Act of New South Wales emanated from the brain of the Rev. James Greenwood, minister at the time of the Baptist Mother Church, Sydney. The first minister of the Mother Church, the Rev. John Saunders, was also the first temperance advocate in Australia and induced the first Governor of New South Wales to sign the abstinence pledge. A Victorian Baptist layman, Mr. Peacock, was the first missionary to the aborigines.

The census returns in 1933 revealed that there are 105,614 Baptists in Australia, represented by 29,981 in New South Wales; 31,427 in Victoria; 19,081 in South Australia; 14,991 in Queensland; 5,601 in Western Australia; 4,666 in Tasmania; Federal and Northern Territory, 127. Membership returns for 1935 totalled 31,607, made up of 10,613 in New South Wales; 8,307 in Victoria; 5,119 in South Australia; 4,330 in Queensland; 1,657 in Tasmania; and 1,581 in Western Australia. Sunday School statistics for the same year showed 40,575 scholars, made up of 13,700 in New South Wales; 11,772 in Victoria; 6,338 in South Australia; 4,800 in Queensland; 2,147 in Western Australia; and 1,818 in Tasmania.

With the exception of Tasmania, each State trains its own ministers. Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland have their own colleges, working under distinguished Principals and a

capable staff of lecturers. South Australian Baptist students are trained at Parkin Congregational College, Adelaide. Victoria is the only State supporting a Baptist Secondary School, the Carey Boys' Grammar School. This flourishing institution has a fine record, and holds a high position in the educational life of Melbourne.

Scattered over a great continent, many of our local church units find it difficult to keep their home fires burning. To evoke in these farflung fellowships a Baptist consciousness that embraces the whole Commonwealth, to say nothing of that larger Baptist world across the seas, is not the work of a day. But there are indications that the horizon is widening and that the Federal spirit is growing. What the future holds for the Baptists of Australia rests upon a loyal recognition of their substantial unity in doctrine, polity and service, which it is the function of the Baptist Union of Australia to promote. As yet that Union is concerned with wisely laying foundations for the superstructure that is to follow, and erecting the necessary scaffolding. It is nine years since the Union came into being. Most of them have been lean and depressing, but they have not been idle or barren years; and the future is bright with promise.

J. A. PACKER.

Thomas Phillips, 1868-1936 (Kingsgate Press : Carey Press, Sixpence).

To know Thomas Phillips was a privilege, and to possess this intimate reminder of him is a joy. It was said as he left Rhydwylym to enter College, "He will be a great preacher or a great blackguard"; and he, having heard a leading preacher during his first year at College, entered in his diary, "If I am ever to attain such a pitch I must labour terribly." He laboured and became one of Britain's outstanding preachers, and his fame was international. This beautiful tribute to "a single-minded servant of God" is worthy of a place close at hand among those friendly books which are read and read again.