

History and Beliefs of the Branch Davidians

A basic understanding of the relevant beliefs of the Branch Davidian (“Davidian”) faith provides a valuable context that helps to explain why the Davidians acted in the self-destructive manner that they did. To ascertain the core beliefs of the Davidian faith, the Office of Special Counsel conducted voluntary interviews with Davidian survivors,¹ religious experts² and former residents of the Davidian complex.³ The Office of Special Counsel relied on scholarly research as well. The investigation revealed that, although the Davidian faith began as a protest movement within the Seventh Day Adventist Church (“SDA”) in the late 1920s, Davidians who were followers of David Koresh distinguished their faith as separate, special and unique, and all aspects of Davidian life revolved around the teachings of Koresh. These teachings, which centered in large part upon a violent confrontation with the United States, led to the deaths of the Davidians on April 19, 1993.

¹Davidian survivors who consented to OSC interviews include Graeme Craddock, October 15, 1999; Clive Doyle, October 13, 1999; Misty Ferguson, January 26, 2000; Derek Lovelock, February 14, 2000; David Thibodeau, October 14, 1999; and Marjorie Thomas, February 10, 2000. Survivors Renos Avraam, Jamie Castillo and Ruth Riddle declined our requests for an interview.

²Dr. J. Phillip Arnold, Founder of Reunion Institute, Houston, Texas, December 28, 1999; Dr. Glenn O. Hilburn, Professor of Religion, Baylor University, May 18, 2000; Dr. William L. Pitts Jr., Professor of Religion, Baylor University, June 23, 2000; and Dr. James D. Tabor, Professor of Religion, University of North Carolina-Charlotte, December 21-22, 1999.

³Davidians who left the complex during siege and consented to an OSC interview include Livingston Fagan, October 14, 1999; Sheila Martin, March 5, 2000; Gladys Ottman, March 7, 2000; Anetta Richards, March 28, 2000; Rita Faye Riddle, January 26, 2000; Kathryn Schroeder, February 2, 2000; and Kevin Whitecliff, February 3, 2000. Davidians who left the complex during siege and refused our requests for interview include Oliver Gyarfaz Jr., Margaret Lawson, Catherine Matteson, and Ofelia Santoyo.

The Origin of Davidian Faith

The Davidian church was formed in 1929, by Victor Houteff,⁴ as an off-shoot of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (“SDA”).⁵ Houteff, a self-proclaimed prophet, called for a renewed focus on Biblical scriptures and “pure” living.⁶ He intended to purify the SDA by recruiting 144,000 SDA believers whom he would lead to the “ancient land of Israel” where they would meet Christ upon his return.⁷ In 1935, Victor Houteff moved to central Texas with about 12 followers and established the Mount Carmel community.⁸ This group embraced the teachings that Christ’s return to earth was imminent,⁹ that Davidians were God’s specially chosen church

⁴Interview with Pitts. Pitts, Jr., William L., “Davidians and Branch Davidians 1929-1987” in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, edited by Stuart A. Wright, p. 20 (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995).

⁵Interviews with Arnold and Tabor. The eight-million-member Seventh Day Adventist Church is well known for its belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ to earth, retention of Saturday as the Sabbath and strict dietary restrictions. SDA believes that it is God’s chosen church and that God sends visions through its spiritual leaders to communicate with its members. Reavis, Dick J., *The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation*, pp. 51-57 (Syracuse University Press, New York, 1998).

⁶Tabor, James D. with Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco?: Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*, p.34 (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995). Houteff placed great value on the prophetic work of nineteenth century SDA leader Ellen G. White. Thibodeau, David, *A Place Called Waco: A Survivor’s Story*, p. 34 (Public Affairs, New York, 1999).

⁷Houteff taught that the Kingdom of God, i.e. heaven, would be “a literal, physical, millennial rule on earth, centered in Palestine.” Tabor and Gallagher, p. 35.

⁸This area, seven miles northwest of Waco, Texas, was named after the ancient site where the prophet Elijah contended with devotees of the pagan god Baal. Thibodeau, p. 34. “The name wasn’t merely honorific. It described the place where its residents thought they were and who they believed their leader would be.” Reavis, p. 59.

⁹According to Pitts, the belief in the imminent return of Christ was first put forth by Adventist William Miller in the 1830s and 1840s. Miller incorrectly predicted the second coming of Christ in 1844. “The expectation of the second advent is the cornerstone on which the

and that God communicated with Davidians through Houteff.

In February 1955, Houteff died at the age of sixty-nine.¹⁰ Houteff did not name a successor,¹¹ and his followers split into factions. Houteff's wife, Florence Houteff, attempted to lead the Davidians, but was opposed by fellow Davidian Ben Roden.¹² After some dispute, Florence Houteff took control of the original Davidian group. Ben Roden took control of a Davidian faction that he named the Living Waters Branch, based on a revelation he claimed to have received from God.¹³ After Florence Houteff erroneously claimed that the world would end on Wednesday, April 22, 1959, she lost her following to Davidian Ben Roden.¹⁴

Roden renamed his movement the Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventist Church.¹⁵ In

new Seventh-Day Adventist denomination was created. In the millenarian tradition, the Davidians eagerly anticipated prophetic voices and apocalyptic visions, a pattern that would persist throughout their history." Pitts, p. 22. Although Miller's prediction did not come true, it has had a lasting impact of American religion. "[I]t turned a school of Christians, searching to decipher the New Testament, back towards clues in the record of the Jewish past." Reavis, p. 52.

¹⁰Bromley, David G. and Silver, Edward D., "The Davidian Tradition: From Patronal Clan to Prophetic Movement" in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, edited by Stuart A. Wright, p. 49 (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995).

¹¹Thibodeau, p. 35.

¹²Thibodeau, p. 35.

¹³Roden chose the name also on the basis of Christ's pronouncement to his disciples in John 15:1-3: "I am the vine, and you are the branches." Thibodeau, p. 35. Tabor and Gallagher, p. 39.

¹⁴Florence Houteff moved to California and became an inactive Davidian. Tabor and Gallagher, p. 39.

¹⁵The term "Branch" was chosen again by Roden to signify a separate identity within the Davidian movement. Branch is a Biblical reference found also in Isaiah 11:1: "a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Pitts, p. 32.

the early 1960s, this new denomination won a series of court battles to control what was by then the 77 acres called Mount Carmel.¹⁶ It was still a relatively small movement, however; by the mid-1960s, fewer than 50 people lived year-round at the complex.¹⁷

After Ben Roden died in 1978, his wife, Lois Roden, took over the Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventist Church. Lois Roden claimed that she received visions that God is both male and female.¹⁸ She taught that the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, is female,¹⁹ and that Christ will take the form of a woman at his/her second coming.²⁰

Vernon Howell Joins the Davidians

In 1981, Vernon Howell, who would later change his name to David Koresh, joined the Davidians. He enjoyed a very close relationship with Davidian leader Lois Roden. In 1983, Howell traveled to Israel with Lois Roden.²¹ It is there, according to Koresh, that he had his first vision from God. In 1984, Howell married 14 year old Rachel Jones. Shortly thereafter, George Roden (Lois Roden's son) forced Howell to leave Mount Carmel. Howell left Mount Carmel with his wife and a few followers and moved to the City of Waco. In early 1985, Howell returned to Israel, traveling this time with his wife.²² During that visit to Israel, Howell claimed

¹⁶Tabor and Gallagher, p. 39.

¹⁷Tabor and Gallagher, p. 39.

¹⁸Tabor and Gallagher, p. 40.

¹⁹Bromley and Silver, p. 52. Tabor and Gallagher, p. 40.

²⁰Bromley and Silver, p. 49. Tabor and Gallagher, p. 40.

²¹Interview with Tabor.

²²Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

the same spirit that came upon Jesus Christ at his baptism came upon him.²³ At that point, Howell claimed that he ceased being an ordinary human being and became the Christ.²⁴

In the spring of 1985, Howell returned to Texas, and settled in a town called Palestine with Rachel and a small group of Davidians.²⁵ He soon began to acquire additional “wives” from amongst his followers. In 1986, he took 14 year old Karen Doyle as his second wife, and 12 year old Michelle Jones as his third wife.²⁶ Then, in 1987, 17 year old Robyn Bunds and 20 year old Dana Okimoto became his fourth and fifth wives.²⁷

The longstanding rivalry between Howell and George Roden erupted in a shootout at Mount Carmel in November 1987. No one was killed, but Howell and his followers were indicted and tried for attempted murder. Howell was acquitted at trial. Later that month, Lois Roden died of natural causes and Howell assumed power. He changed his name to David Koresh in 1990. Koresh meant “death.”²⁸

The Davidians Believed that Koresh’s Teachings were the Word of God

The Branch Davidians followed Koresh’s teachings and believed that he was the Second

²³Koresh taught that the anointing of the Christ Spirit happened in 1985 while Koresh was in Jerusalem. A Messianic level anointing is what Koresh received. All believers, Koresh taught, received a simple anointing. In other words, Koresh felt he was born an ordinary man but received the anointing later on. Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

²⁴Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

²⁵Interview with Tabor.

²⁶Interview with Tabor.

²⁷Interview with Tabor.

²⁸Koresh preached that his name meant “Cyrus” in Hebrew and that another meaning of the word Koresh was “death.” Breault, Marc A., “Vernon Howell and the Seven Seals,” www.ozemail.com.au/mbreault/bdseals (1992).

Coming of Christ. Koresh taught that Davidians were God's chosen people, comprising God's chosen church.²⁹ He taught that God communicated directly with the Davidian church through him,³⁰ and that he was "The Messenger of God."³¹ He claimed that the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth descended from heaven in 1985 to occupy his body for the remainder of his life on earth.³² He claimed to receive special guidance from God through prophecies.³³ To his followers, Koresh's pronouncements were equal to what is written in the Bible.³⁴ Koresh taught that divine communication enabled him to "update" and build upon what had been written in the Bible.³⁵

The Davidians looked to Koresh to guide them through Biblical scriptures and lead them through

²⁹Davidians looked forward to their earthly death, the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. Davidians believed that they had to continue to prepare and purify themselves before their entrance into the Promised Land. They believed that there could be no Second Coming of Christ, however, if there was no spiritual purification among God's people. Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Schroeder, Tabor, Thibodeau, and Thomas.

³⁰Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Rita Riddle, Schroeder, Tabor, Thibodeau, and Thomas.

³¹Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, Thibodeau, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

³²Koresh taught his believers that the body of Jesus of Nazareth died two thousand years ago and would not rise again. Koresh taught that the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth ascended to heaven upon Jesus' physical death and remained in heaven until 1985. Koresh taught that the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth descended from heaven in 1985 to occupy his body. He taught that Jesus Christ's death provided salvation only for those who died before 32 C.E. Koresh taught that individuals born thereafter could only be saved through his activities. In short, Koresh advocated that mainline Christianity was misguided for expecting and waiting for Jesus to come again. Koresh impressed upon the Davidians that he was the Second Coming of Christ. Interviews with Arnold, Ottman, Rita Riddle, Schroeder, and Tabor.

³³Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Ottman, Rita Riddle, Schroeder, Tabor, and Whitecliff.

³⁴Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Schroeder, and Tabor.

³⁵Interviews with Arnold, Doyle, Ottman, Schroeder, and Tabor.

life.³⁶ Koresh preached that he was the seventh and final prophet.³⁷

Koresh Focused on the Seven Seals

The Seven Seals referenced in the Book of Revelation were a focal point of Koresh's teachings. Koresh claimed that his status as Savior of God's people was foretold in the Seven Seals.³⁸ According to Koresh, the Bible stated that only the "Lamb of God" can open the Seven Seals.³⁹ He was the Lamb, able to open, interpret and reveal the messages contained within the Seven Seals.⁴⁰ Koresh taught that the Seven Seals outlined the sequence of the end of time on earth, Judgment Day and eternal life,⁴¹ and that he would open all Seven Seals and trigger the

³⁶Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Rita Riddle, Schroeder, Tabor, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

³⁷Davidians believed that the first and second prophet was Miller. The third prophet was Ellen White. The fourth prophet was Victor Houteff. The fifth prophet was Ben Roden. The sixth prophet was Lois Roden. Interviews with Arnold, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

³⁸The Seven Seals was a Biblical reference to a book or scroll found in the right hand of God, sealed with seven seals. According to Koresh, the contents of the book were totally hidden from view, and the prophecies, according to the Bible, were to remain sealed until the end of time. Interviews with Arnold, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Rita Riddle, Tabor, Thibodeau, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

³⁹Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, Thibodeau, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

⁴⁰Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Richards, Schroeder, Tabor, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

⁴¹Koresh taught that the Seven Seals were a combination of the Book of Revelation and the Old Testament. Koresh taught that the Book of Revelation was a synopsis of the Bible and that to understand the Seven Seals, one had to look at the larger picture. Interviews with Arnold, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

events that would bring about the end of the world.⁴²

According to Koresh, the First Seal was the revelation that he was Christ and leader of God's people, the Davidians.⁴³ Koresh taught that the First Coming of Christ was as a lamb,⁴⁴ the Second Coming of Christ was with a sword.⁴⁵ He, the Christ of the last days, was full of sin just like all of the people he had come to save.⁴⁶ He sometimes referred to himself as the Sinful Messiah.⁴⁷ Under the First Seal, Koresh also claimed that he was entitled to have many wives.⁴⁸

⁴²Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

⁴³Breault. Revelation 6:1-2.

Koresh revealed to the Davidians more specifically that the First Seal was about a man on a white horse, with a bow and crown, who went forth to conquer. Koresh revealed that he was the man on the white horse, the messenger, the king, the "Anointed One," the Christ, and the final messiah who appeared on earth during its last days. Koresh taught that he was born an ordinary man, but the Christ spirit remade him and completely inhabited his body. Koresh preached that although he had the Christ spirit within, he was not, and could not be, Jesus, the Christ of two thousand years ago. For example, Koresh taught that the "Word" became flesh a second time. The "Word," according to Koresh, was the prophecies that Jesus gave. Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

⁴⁴Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder and Tabor.

⁴⁵Koresh revealed that he was the second revelation of Christ who had come to fulfill the scriptures. As the Christ of the last days, he taught, he possessed the same spirit that occupied the body of Jesus when he physically walked the earth. Koresh taught that there was one spirit, but two incarnations. Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder and Tabor.

⁴⁶Interviews with Arnold, Craddock and Tabor.

⁴⁷ Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas. Koresh stated that his proof was Psalm 40:12: "My sins are more than the hairs on my head." Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

⁴⁸ Interview with Ottman. Koresh taught that Psalm 45 and the Epistle to the Hebrews supported his polygamist lifestyle. He called his views on sex the "New Light" doctrine. According to Koresh, the New Light doctrine meant that all Davidians were married to the Church, and all Davidian women were married to Koresh. Koresh preached that men and women had to live apart, and husbands and wives had to abstain from any and all sexual relations. Interviews with Arnold, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

Koresh taught that the Second Seal was the revelation that he and the Davidians would be at the center of a great war.⁴⁹ This war would be fought in 1995, in or near Israel, and would lead to the end of the world.⁵⁰ Koresh would either start the war or be the war's focus.⁵¹ He predicted that the "wicked world" would learn of his many wives and fight against him out of jealousy and fear that he would seduce other women.⁵²

The Third Seal, according to Koresh, included the revelation that he and the Davidians

Koresh revealed that he was to "conquer" by getting many women pregnant. He said that he was to father 24 children who would become elders in the Church. Sex for him, he stated, was for procreation and not for pleasure. He taught that his sexual actions did not equate to fornication or adultery because he was married to each woman. Interviews with Arnold, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

Koresh revealed to the Davidians that another message of the First Seal was that only his children were righteous. He revealed that it was God's plan to destroy all the wicked children on earth and to populate the world with Koresh's children. Koresh revealed, in Adventist Ellen White's tradition, that the Holy Spirit was female. Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder and Tabor.

Koresh taught that if the Davidians followed him, the prophet, and were wrong, blood would be on the hands of their enemies. He taught that if the Davidians did not follow him, the prophet, blood would be on their hands. Interview with Schroeder.

Koresh revealed to the Davidians that the messages of the First Seal were found in Revelation 6:1-2; Psalm 8, 45, 60, 92; Isaiah 13; Psalm 137, 149; Jeremiah 50, 51; Joel 2; Revelation 19. Breault.

⁴⁹Breault. Revelation 6:3-4. Koresh revealed to the Davidians more specifically that the Second Seal was about a man on a red horse with a sword who takes peace from the earth. He told the Davidians that he was the man on the red horse. Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder, and Tabor.

⁵⁰Interviews with Arnold, Rita Riddle, Schroeder, and Tabor.

⁵¹Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder and Tabor.

⁵²Koresh revealed to the Davidians that another message of the Second Seal was that he was the Messiah whose teachings bring peace. He taught that "the sword" meant "truth." Koresh explained that the "jealousy" and "fear" of the "wicked world" would take peace from earth. He preached that the Davidians would win such war and slaughter all the wicked. Koresh revealed to the Davidians that the messages of the Second Seal were found in Revelation 6:3-4; Zechariah 1-4; Ezekiel 13; 1 Corinthians 7; Job 31; Luke 14:26-33. Breault.

had the authority to deceive others.⁵³ Koresh taught the Davidians that God deceives people, and that he, Koresh, was also allowed to deceive others.⁵⁴ He explained that he was allowed to lie or cheat whenever he deemed it necessary for the salvation of his followers.⁵⁵ Davidians were entitled to lie as long as they were not lying to hurt someone else.⁵⁶

Koresh taught that the Fourth Seal was the revelation that he and the Davidians had the authority to kill their enemies.⁵⁷ He referred to the enemy as “Babylon” and the “Beast.”⁵⁸

⁵³Breault. Revelation 6:5-6.

Koresh preached that the Third Seal more specifically was about God on a black horse with a pair of balances in his hands. Koresh revealed to the Davidians that the messages of the Third Seal were found in Revelation 5:5-6; Ezekiel 27,28; Revelation 18; Psalm 83; and Zechariah 14:1. Breault.

⁵⁴Interview with Schroeder. Ms. Schroeder contended that the Fourth Seal gave Koresh the authority to deceive. She stated that Koresh taught that it was permissible for Davidians to lie as long as the lies were not told to hurt anyone. She stated that Koresh taught that one had to look at the end result to evaluate whether the lie could be justified.

⁵⁵Interview with Schroeder.

⁵⁶Koresh taught that Davidians should look at the end result when it comes to lying. He advocated that Davidians should have a “wolves in sheep’s clothing” attitude. That deception, he believed, was to be used against “Babylon.” Interview with Schroeder.

Koresh revealed to the Davidians that another message of the Third Seal was that there was in existence a grand conspiracy of one world, one world government, one economic system, and one monetary system anchored by the United Nations, United States Government, Catholic Church, SDA, and the “merchants of the earth.” Interview with Schroeder.

⁵⁷Breault. Revelation 6:7-8.

Koresh revealed to the Davidians more specifically that the Fourth Seal was about a man called Death on a pale horse. Koresh revealed to the Davidians that the message of the Fourth Seal was that he, Koresh, was the man called Death on a pale horse. He preached that “Koresh” meant “Cyrus” in Hebrew and that another meaning of the word “Koresh” was “Death.”

⁵⁸Interviews with Schroeder, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

Often, this enemy, the “Beast” or “Babylon” was the United States government.⁵⁹

In Koresh’s teachings, the Fifth Seal was the revelation that the Davidians would be attacked and slain by the Babylonians because of their religious views.⁶⁰ There would be an initial attack where God would allow some of his people, Davidians, to be slain.⁶¹ Koresh preached that God would then tell the Davidian faithful to “rest yet for a little season” after which time the rest of God’s people will be slain by the enemy.⁶² Another message of the Fifth

⁵⁹Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Lovelock, Schroeder, Tabor, Thibodeau, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

Koresh taught that another message of the Fourth Seal was that the Davidian diet should consist of barley, wheat and grapes. Koresh revealed to the Davidians that the messages of the Fourth Seal were found in Revelation 6:7-8; Zechariah 6; Ezekiel 7-12; and Isaiah 45. Breault.

⁶⁰Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

Revelation 6:9-11: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of god, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them, and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they [were], should be fulfilled.”

Schroeder stated that the prophesies of the Fifth Seal began to unfold during the summer of 1992. She stated that Koresh taught that the summer of 1992 would be their last summer on earth and that the American government would soon raid the Complex. She stated that Koresh preached that the raid would be with tanks and that Davidian souls would be slain for God. She said that during that time, Koresh started buying go-carts and other luxuries on credit cards to “live it up.” She stated that many Davidians applied for as much credit as possible, mostly taking cash advances and purchasing goods for the Mount Carmel Center. She stated that the Davidians would only make the minimum required payments.

⁶¹Breault.

⁶²Koresh revealed that 144,000 people would be “sealed” during the waiting period. That is, 144,000 people would have to be converted to the Davidian faith before God’s prophecies could be fulfilled. Koresh taught that the 144,000 converted Davidians would gather in Jerusalem at Mount Zion to await the end. He taught that he had traveled to Mount Zion to measure where the 144,000 will appear. He told the Davidians that Mount Zion was not big enough to hold 144,000 people, but that he had seen a scripture where Jerusalem would be lifted

Seal was that the Davidians must be willing to fight, suffer and die for God and Koresh.⁶³

In accordance with the Fifth Seal, Koresh told the Davidians that they must be prepared for the inevitable attack on the Davidian complex.⁶⁴ During Bible studies, he taught all adults how to load and operate the weapons that he had amassed,⁶⁵ and taught the younger Davidians how to load ammunition magazines.⁶⁶ He preached that every man and woman must have a gun prior to the attack.⁶⁷ For years before the events of Waco, he taught that the U.S. government, or evil Babylonians, would attack with chariots, which Koresh interpreted to mean tanks,⁶⁸ and that the men at the complex, the “Mighty Men,” must protect the property, women and children when attacked.⁶⁹

Consistent with Koresh’s teachings of the Fifth Seal, the majority of Davidians appeared to expect, and want, the standoff to end in their deaths.⁷⁰ Davidian Joan Vaega, a child released on March 5, 1993, had a note pinned to her that said Joan’s mother would be dead by the time

up, making the placement of the 144,000 possible. Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

⁶³Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

⁶⁴Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder, Tabor and Thomas.

⁶⁵Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

⁶⁶Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁶⁷Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁶⁸Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

⁶⁹Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

⁷⁰Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

other relatives read the note.⁷¹ Dr. Bruce Perry, a child psychiatrist who interviewed Davidian children released from the complex, stated that the children acted as though they had a secret.⁷² They spoke of their parents as though they were dead, even though they were aware that they had at least one live parent when they left the complex.⁷³ According to Dr. Perry, some of the parents told their children: “You’ll never see us again,” or “This is the last time I’ll see you.”⁷⁴ When the children were told about the fire and deaths at the complex, many cried but some acted as if what had occurred was expected.⁷⁵ Davidian Kathy Schroeder stated that the Davidians were “disappointed” that the ATF retreated on February 28, 1993, since they expected to die during the initial confrontation.⁷⁶ One surviving Davidian remembers that Koresh taught it was honorable for a fighting Davidian to die during “battle” by: (1) fire, (2) a gunshot wound from an enemy or a gunshot wound from another Davidian during a mercy killing, or (3) a shot from an enemy tank.⁷⁷ Koresh preached that even though he and the Davidians would lose the “battle” in accordance with prophecy, the Davidians would be resurrected, or “transcended,” soon thereafter

⁷¹FBI “Suicide References,” March 28, 1993.

⁷²Interview with Dr. Bruce Perry, St. Louis, Missouri, January 19, 2000.

⁷³Interview with Perry.

⁷⁴Perry stated that the children were prepared for the end of time. He stated that the children referred to a group of “mighty men” who believed in Koresh’s teachings and were willing to die. Interview with Perry.

⁷⁵Interview with Perry. Craddock, Doyle, Fagan, Ferguson, Lovelock, Martin, Ottman, Richards, Rita Riddle, and Whitecliff stated that no such suicide plans existed.

⁷⁶Interview with Schroeder.

⁷⁷Interview with Thomas.

and rule the earth.⁷⁸

Koresh taught that the Sixth Seal would be opened upon his return to earth, in “glory,” to rescue the saints and destroy the wicked, marking the beginning of Judgment Day.⁷⁹ Finally, the Seventh Seal was the revelation that the end would come in hail and fire mixed with blood.⁸⁰

Koresh Taught Death by Suicide

Koresh preached to his followers, and told negotiators throughout the standoff, that suicide was inconsistent with the Davidian faith, but many of his teachings actually contradicted this position.⁸¹ In fact, Koresh not only taught that suicide was permissible, he also taught Davidians how to take their own lives and actually planned group suicides. Several Davidians

⁷⁸Interviews with Arnold, Schroeder, Tabor, and Thomas.

⁷⁹According to Koresh, the Sixth Seal was the revelation that the Christ spirit will return to destroy the wicked. He revealed that the Sixth Seal was about the coming of the Lord and the setting up of His kingdom on earth. Koresh predicted that he would return to earth after being transcended to heaven. He taught that he would need to return to earth to open the Sixth Seal. On this day, he said, he would return to lead a great battle in Jerusalem involving 144,000 people. He told the Davidians that the opening of the Sixth Seal would result in earthquakes, stars falling and the sun darkening. The whole world would know that Koresh had returned, he taught. Koresh revealed that the messages of the Sixth Seal were found in Revelation 6:12-17. Breault. Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

Ottman stated that in the Sixth Seal, Koresh would return to earth as Michael the Archangel, and Revelation 19 would be fulfilled.

⁸⁰Interview with Schroeder. Koresh taught that when the Seventh Seal was opened, the 144,000 would be sealed. The sealing, he taught, would protect believers from the wrath of the Lamb. He taught that the 144,000 would be in Jerusalem. Only one-tenth of the population would remain, he predicted. That one-tenth remaining, he taught, would go to heaven. Koresh taught that the end was near. He revealed to the Davidians that the messages of the Seventh Seal were found in Revelation 8:1 through the end of the Book of Revelation. Breault. Interviews with Arnold and Tabor.

⁸¹Interviews with Arnold, Craddock, Doyle, Lovelock, Ottman, Schroeder, Tabor, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

recalled that Koresh taught it was permissible to take your own life if you were trapped in a burning car and knew that you were going to die.⁸² During Bible studies, Koresh taught the Davidians how to kill themselves when trapped in a corner, and showed his followers how to stick a gun in their mouths and pull the trigger.⁸³ He also taught some of his followers how to use hand grenades to kill themselves during battle when all hope is lost.⁸⁴ In accordance with his religious prophecy that the Davidians would die during a confrontation with federal agents,⁸⁵ Koresh discussed plans to bring about circumstances that would force the government agents to open fire on the Davidians (sometimes referred to as “suicide by cop”). Davidians Marjorie Thomas and Kathy Schroeder stated that there were two plans discussed by Koresh during the 51-day standoff.⁸⁶ The first plan was for the Davidians to carry Koresh out of the complex on a stretcher.⁸⁷ When federal agents approached, a signal was to be given and the Davidians were to shoot as many agents as possible.⁸⁸ Thomas and Schroeder stated that they knew that the agents would return fire and kill them all.⁸⁹ They stated that at that point, the Davidians would be

⁸²Interviews with Craddock, Schroeder, Thomas, and Whitecliff.

⁸³Interview with Craddock.

⁸⁴Interviews with Craddock, Schroeder and Thomas.

⁸⁵Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁸⁶Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁸⁷Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁸⁸Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁸⁹Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

“transcended” together.⁹⁰

According to Thomas and Schroeder, the second plan was for Davidian women to kill themselves using hand grenades.⁹¹ The women were to get into small circles and pull the pin, activating the hand grenade, and they would be “transcended” together.⁹² Schroeder added that the men had a buddy system and that they were to work it out amongst themselves as to how they were going to kill each other.⁹³

Davidian Victorine Hollingsworth told the Office of Special Counsel that, on day three of the standoff when Koresh indicated he would surrender, his true plan was to blow himself up with a grenade.⁹⁴ All or most of the remaining people, she stated, would have also killed themselves.⁹⁵ These plans conceived by Koresh were very similar to his plan prior to February 28, 1993, to have the Davidians spark a shootout at McDonald’s in downtown Waco in order to

⁹⁰Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁹¹Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁹²Ms. Thomas and Ms. Schroeder stated that this plan did not go forward because David Koresh told them to wait. Interviews with Schroeder and Thomas.

⁹³Ms. Schroeder stated that she is convinced that if there had been a “second attack,” the Davidians would have “gone down fighting.” Interview with Schroeder.

⁹⁴FBI “Suicide References,” March 28, 1993.

⁹⁵Ms. Hollingsworth stated that the Davidians prayed about this and David Koresh changed his mind saying God still had work for him to do “down here.” Ms. Hollingsworth’s statement is quite similar to those of Ms. Thomas and Ms. Schroeder.

On March 8, 1993, Koresh told negotiators, “I’m not worried about the judicial system, we’re not going to commit suicide, my God told me to wait and that’s what I’m doing.” Koresh told negotiators on March 15, 1993, “If we have to die, we will. We are not going to commit suicide, we are to fight back.” On March 19, 1993, Koresh told negotiators, “...I am not going to kill myself.”

get the police to shoot them down.

When suicide by cop did not lead to death, Davidian-inflicted gunshot wounds were authorized. Kathy Schroeder stated that following the initial confrontation, Koresh gave permission for Perry Jones to be killed by gunshot.⁹⁶ Injured Davidian Peter Hipsman was shot in the head by Davidian Neal Vaega after Steve Schneider gave approval.⁹⁷ A Davidian, possibly Koresh, was recorded early in the standoff saying, "I'd said my work was finished... I've been over and over it... I'll just push em back.... had my thumb on the trigger... fix my mind on a Psalms... take this thing right here and burn it I mean... they're coming."⁹⁸ Mr. Craddock stated that as he escaped the burning complex on April 19, 1993, he heard what sounded like gunshots

⁹⁶See Appendix J. Dr. Graham, the OSC forensic pathologist, confirmed that Jones sustained one gunshot wound to the mouth at contact or close range. He stated that the gunshot wound could have been self-inflicted or administered by another person. There were no other injuries identified.

Schroeder stated in her interview with OSC that Davidian Greg Summer requested permission from Koresh to "finish off" Jones. Schroeder stated that Koresh initially said "no." She stated that Jones was crying so loudly and in so much pain, that finally Koresh gave permission to "finish off" Jones. Interview with Schroeder.

Thibodeau stated that following the initial confrontation, Schroeder claimed that Neal Vaega killed the badly injured Jones as an act of mercy and that she heard Koresh give permission for the mercy killing. Interview with Thibodeau.

Schroeder's statements appear to contradict the postmortem findings, in that, the autopsy failed to reveal any wound or other physical condition that would prompt a need or desire for someone to "finish off" Jones. Only one wound was present and was recieved with the muzzle of the gun in the oral cavity when it was discharged.

⁹⁷Thibodeau, pp. 177-178. See Appendix J.

⁹⁸Title III tape SA65 #24 March 16, 1993. The Office of Special Counsel's expert forensic phonetician, Mrs. Elizabeth McClelland, agreed that, on an auditory-phonetic basis, some features of the recorded voices matched known speech samples from Davidians, including Koresh. McClelland cautioned, however, that instrument analysis of the speech signals on the Title III recordings did not produce results from which a forensic speaker identification could be achieved with certainty.

coming from the dining room area of the complex. Craddock said that it crossed his mind that the Davidians may have been engaging in mercy killings. The Davidians considered their self-inflicted and Davidian-inflicted gunshots to be reasonable actions leading to eternal life.⁹⁹

Koresh Prophesied Death by Fire

Davidian survivors Marjorie Thomas and Graeme Craddock specifically recalled Koresh teaching that fire was an acceptable means of death for Davidians.¹⁰⁰ According to Thomas, Koresh preached in Bible studies that fire was a means by which Davidians could be transcended to heaven during “battle” with “Babylon.”¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Davidian Kathy Schroeder told the Office of Special Counsel that shortly after the confrontation on February 28, 1993, Koresh told the Davidians that he had a dream that the Davidians would be burned in a great fire; their skin would be burned off; and they would be transcended to heaven.¹⁰² Just one day before the fire, a Davidian, possibly Steve Schneider, was recorded saying that becoming a “charcoal briquette” was part of Koresh’s prophecy,¹⁰³ much like “you know Joel 2 and Isaiah 13... whose faces are

⁹⁹Interview with Thomas.

¹⁰⁰Interviews with Craddock and Thomas.

¹⁰¹Interview with Thomas.

¹⁰²Interview with Schroeder. Although Ottman denied that the Davidians would ever set fire to the complex to be transcended to heaven, she stated that she saw Koresh’s spirit being lifted from the flames as she watched the burning complex on television.

¹⁰³Title III tape SA72 #28, Sunday, April 18, 1993. Title III tape SA65 #24 March 16, 1993. An Office of Special Counsel investigator identified Steve Schneider’s voice on the intercepts based on an extensive review of known samples of Schneider speaking. The investigator’s voice identification confirmed a prior voice identification made by an FBI Title III monitor who also became familiar with Koresh’s voice while monitoring Title III recordings throughout the standoff. The Office of Special Counsel’s expert forensic phonetician, Mrs. Elizabeth McClelland, agreed that, on an auditory-phonetic basis, some features of the recorded

like flames.”¹⁰⁴ A Davidian was even recorded two days prior to the fire explaining that they could “bring the fire trucks and they couldn’t even get near us.”¹⁰⁵

Dr. J. Phillip Arnold of Houston’s Reunion Institute theorizes that when the tanks “came into” the Davidian complex, Koresh may have concluded that he could not write the Seven Seals as God wanted because the world was “too wicked” to receive the Seven Seals.¹⁰⁶ Dr. Arnold speculated that Koresh may have ordered the fires as protection,¹⁰⁷ citing as an example Zechariah 2:1-5.¹⁰⁸ Koresh may have believed that the fire would offer a wall of protection from intruders and similar protection is found in the Book of Daniel, with the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace.¹⁰⁹ According to Arnold, Koresh and the Davidians would not have run from the fire, but rather may have viewed the fire as a fulfillment of prophecy.¹¹⁰

voices matched known speech samples from Davidians, including Schneider. McClelland cautioned, however, that instrument analysis of the speech signals on the Title III recordings did not produce results from which a forensic speaker identification could be achieved with certainty.

¹⁰⁴Title III tape SA72 #28, Sunday, April 18, 1993.

¹⁰⁵Title III tape SA 25 #72, Saturday, April 17, 1993.

¹⁰⁶Interview with Arnold.

¹⁰⁷Interview with Arnold.

¹⁰⁸Interview with Arnold.

¹⁰⁹Interview with Arnold.

¹¹⁰Arnold stated that Koresh used the Book of Nahum, Chapter 2, to describe the events of the final days. Tabor stated that he does not believe the FBI started the fire. Tabor stated that the Davidians “could have caused the fire” and “may have been disillusioned.” The Davidians may have thought, he speculated, that if they started the fire, they would not be burned. Tabor stated that this would be consistent with a scripture from the Book of Zechariah.

The Office of Special Counsel believes that the Davidians may well have thought that fire

Whether the fire was set by the Davidians intentionally to cause their deaths because they believed it would allow them to transcend into heaven, or whether it was set in an attempt to create a shield of fire, once the fire was set, it became a fulfillment of Koresh's prophecy, and, in accordance with his religious teachings, was an acceptable and even desirable way of dying for the Davidians. Davidian Ruth Riddle, wanting to die, attempted to run back into the burning complex, but was stopped by an FBI agent. Davidian Rita Riddle was not at the complex on the day of the fire, but said when the fire began that "they'll never come out."¹¹¹ As the fire raged, Rita Riddle said, "God I wish I was in there with them."¹¹²

Whether or not Koresh believed what he taught and preached, Koresh's followers clearly believed in Koresh's religious teachings. The Davidians willingly adopted his religious ideology in all aspects of their lives. Eventually, the deeply-held religious convictions of the Davidians led them and their families down a path of self-destruction.

would protect them from the "evil Babylonians." The Bible contains some references to fire protecting God's people from non-believers. It must be noted, however, that no surviving Davidian nor ex-Davidian could recall Koresh teaching such prophecy of fire as protection.

¹¹¹Interview with Deputy U.S. Marshal Parnell McNamara, Waco, Texas, March 1, 2000.

¹¹²Interview with Parnell McNamara. Interview with Deputy U.S. Marshal Mike McNamara, Waco, Texas, March 1, 2000.