

A Brief History of the Branch-Davidian

Seventh-day Adventists

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Introduction

This document attempts to briefly set down the history of the Branch-Davidian Seventh-day Adventist movement. I write this for two main reasons. First, I write this in the interests of accuracy. Second, certain past developments are crucial to an understand of the present BDSDA leader Vernon Wayne Howell (n.k.a. David Koresh).

As one might suspect with a cult, many developments surrounding this cult are theologically based. Rather than becoming bogged down in the cult's various theological justifications, however, I will simply state the cult's theological beliefs when important.

I will give one brief example of what I mean by theological justification. Using the eleventh chapter of Daniel, BDSDA followers believe that World War II is not truly over. Rather than explain the justification for this absurd belief, I will simply state it and supply documentation later. I do this for the sake of brevity.

Having said this about theological justifications, I will end this introduction by providing some background regarding myself, so the reader will know that I am in a position to document this cult's history. I will also list the important fundamental theological beliefs of the cult in point form because these beliefs have a direct bearing on the mindset of cult followers.

I am a former member of the sect and one of Vernon Howell 's best friends during the years of 1986 to 1989. I was a very highly placed member of the cult even to the point that the term "member of the hierarchy" is accurate. I joined primarily to help with the ministry

designed to carry the last message of salvation to a dying world.

I was fully and completely brainwashed by Mr. Howell and have only myself to blame. In late 1989, I broke out of the cult experiencing a phenomenon known as "snapping." Snapping describes a phenomenon common to brainwashed persons in which they literally snap out of it. It is as if they wake up.

During my tenure with the cult I witnessed many horrible actions. While I did not deem them horrible at the time, thinking them based on the express will of God, I see now that they were actions which should not be tolerated in a free society. I will, of course, detail these actions later.

As for the fundamental theological beliefs of the BDSDA cult, they are as follows.

1. Vernon Wayne Howell (n.k.a. David Koresh) is the Son of God. He is Jesus Christ reincarnate. When Jesus came nearly 2,000 years ago he was sinless. Consequently he cannot truly judge mankind because he has never experienced sin and evil. So the Father sent Jesus Christ to earth again, in the person of Vernon Howell, to experience sin so that he can more fully judge a sinful world. Howell sees himself as a sinful Messiah.
2. Howell is the king of God's kingdom. God's kingdom will destroy all other kingdoms and Vernon will rule the entire world. A time frame for this happening is hard to fix, since Vernon frequently changes his position on this.
3. As Jesus, or the son of God, Vernon Howell owns everything and everyone. This includes all women, whether married or otherwise. When we acquire any possessions such as cars or television sets or even wives, Vernon sees this as theft since these things belong to him.
4. Only the cult leader, Vernon Howell, is able to correctly interpret Bible prophecy. This

is especially true of the seven seals of the book of Revelation.

5. Unless one can positively interpret the seven seals of Revelation, they do not have the right to teach or even read the Bible.

Table of Churches

Seventh-day Adventists	1863
Davidian Seventh-day Adventists	1931
Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists	1955

Chronology of Important Historical Events

1863	Seventh-day Adventists are officially born. They become a recognized organization.
1929/1930	Victor Houteff, in Los Angeles California first begins to preach a message which would later cause his disfellowship from the Seventh-day Adventist church.
1930/1931	Victor Houteff writes a book entitled <i>The Shepherd's Rod</i> . After being disfellowshipped from the Seventh-day Adventist church. Houteff forms his own organization called the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. Because of his book, however, his organization is more popularly known as The Shepherd's Rod.
1938	With headquarters already established at what is now

known as Old Mount Carmel in Waco. Houteff begins to teach that God will establish a literal kingdom in Israel ruled over by Jesus Christ and his lieutenant which Houteff terms as the " Antitypical David. " This is perhaps the most important crucial theological development of the sect. It appears that he and his followers believed he was the Antitypical David.

1939-1955

The group confines its recruitment activities to the Seventh-day Adventist church membership. The Shepherd' s Rod becomes one of the most notable thorns in the Seventh-day Adventist's side.

1955

Death of Victor Houteff. With Houteff out of the way, the Davidians look for a new leader. Houteff's widow, Florence Houteff assume the office of Vice President and initiates a three and a half year prophecy which culminates in a literal divine slaughter of wicked Seventh-day Adventists, the resurrection of her late husband Victor Houteff , and the establishment of God's earthly kingdom. This begins a massive and somewhat successful recruitment drive.

1955

At the same time, Benjamin Roden first proclaims that God has inspired him to take the mantle of leadership vacated by Victor Houteff. Ben Roden condemns Florence Houteff saying that the actual slaughter etc., will take place in 1960, not 1959 as she predicted.

1955-1959

Ben Roden founds a movement called the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. He tries to recruit Davidian Seventh-day Adventists to his cause. Other splinter groups emerge as well, but Roden's is the most successful of these.

1959

At the appointed time predicted by Florence Houteff, many Davidians gather at New Mount Carmel centre (presently run by Branch Davidians) ready for translation. When her prediction fails the movement founded by Victor Houteff begins to disintegrate.

17 August 1959

Birth of Vernon Wayne Howell.

1962

After a long legal battle, Ben Roden and his followers are allowed to occupy New Mount Carmel centre provided they buy out the shares of all the Davidians. This is eventually accomplished and the Branch Davidians take possession of New Mount Carmel centre. The Davidians scatter and never arise again as a cohesive entity. Of all the splinter groups, Ben Roden's is the largest.

1962-1977

Ben Roden teaches that he is the Antitypical David, the king of Israel. He teaches that Christians must observe the various Hebrew feast days including Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles. The last "feast" to be introduced is something called the daily which consists of a twice a day, one hour long worship service. The daily has since been abandoned for all

practical purposes.

- 1977 Ben Roden's wife Lois claims to have a vision from God in which she sees that the Holy Spirit is the feminine aspect of the trinity.
- 1978 Death of Ben Roden. Lois Roden assumes the presidency of the organization but a few dissatisfied Australians leave the movement at this time.
- 1978-1983 Lois Roden's message concerning the Holy Spirit attracts many believers. She travels widely and is interviewed by a number of talk shows and news agencies. The BDSDA organization launches a magazine called the Shekainah Magazine which has contributors from many people, mostly comprised of non-Branch members.
- 1979 Vernon Howell is baptized into the Tyler Seventh-day Adventist church in Texas.
- 1981 After getting the pastor's daughter pregnant, Vernon is disfellowshipped from the Seventh-day Adventist church. He arrives at Mount Carmel centre which, at this time, is under Lois Roden's leadership. He becomes the handy man at Mount Carmel.
- 1983 Vernon Howell first claims divine inspiration. He convinces Lois Roden, through Isaiah chapter 8, that he must have sexual relations with her and the two begin to cohabit. This generates open friction between Vernon and

Lois's son George B. Roden. George begins to claim inspiration.

1984 A conference of Branch Davidians take place in which a number of would-be prophets say their piece. The invitation is sent originally by Lois Roden and Vernon Howell to come and here the "truth." Nothing is accomplished and the group begins to fragment.

1984 George Roden eventually forces Vernon and his followers off of the Mount Carmel property at gun point. Vernon and his band wonder through various towns in Texas, one of which is Mexia Texas.

1984 According to Vernon Howell, God tells him he is free from any responsibility to Lois Roden. God tells Vernon to marry one Rachael Jones, daughter of long time Branch minister Perry Jones. She is only 13 years old at the time and Rachael becomes Vernon's legal wife.

1984/85 Vernon acquires a property in Palestine Texas where he and his followers settle.

1985 Vernon Howell receives a major revelation from God in Israel. He is shown that he is the Antitypical Cyrus and the Antitypical David.[1] Vernon attends the 1985 General Conference session of Seventh-day Adventists in New Orleans. Through a weird combination of his rejection there, and the Animals song: "House of the Rising Sun," Vernon sees this as the official beginning of

his ministry and the beginning of the "time of the end."

Vernon begins to formulate a ten year prophecy after which, Christ will appear again.

February 1986

I join the group. Vernon also recruits a number of Melbourne Australia residents who belonged to the old Branch Davidians under Ben and Lois Roden.

March 1986

Vernon first sleeps with one Karen Doyle, aged 13 at the time. He claims her as his "second wife." Her father, a former Australian, is in Melbourne at the time and knows nothing of this.

June 1986

A number of persons from Honolulu Hawaii join Vernon's group thanks to me. I wish I never recruited them now.

June 1986

Vernon first teaches that he is a second intercessor for mankind and that Christ only died for those before the cross.

July/August 1986

Vernon secretly begins sleeping with Michele Jones. Rachael's youngest sister. Michele is only 12 at the time.

August 1986

Recruitment drive in Wisconsin meets with initial success but eventually fails. Thank God for that.

September 1986

I argue with Vernon over his doctrine that Christ did not die for our sins. He appears to change his mind but I am tricked. About this time, Vernon first begins to teach that he is entitled to 140 wives, sixty women as queens, and

80 as concubines. Vernon uses the biblical book of the Song of Solomon to teach this.

December 1986 People from Hawaii begin settling in Palestine Texas.

December 1986 Sherri Jewell, Kiri's mother introduced into the group.

Early 1987 Robyn Bunds joins Vernon's Harem.

31 August 1987 Dana Okimoto joins Vernon's Harem.

September 1987 Sherri Jewell joins Vernon's Harem.

3 November 1987 Shootout with George Roden at the Mount Carmel property (Route 7 box 471-B Waco Texas). This results in the arrest of eight of Vernon's followers including Vernon himself.

Early 1988 After a trial, seven of the eight are acquitted. The jury vote is hung 9-3 in favour of Vernon Howell's acquittal. The State decides to drop charges against Vernon.

March-May 1988 George Roden goes to prison on unrelated contempt of court charges. This leaves the door open for Vernon to take over the Mount Carmel property. He moves in. An elderly couple pays the \$68,000 back taxes owing on the property thus allowing Vernon and his group to move on to the Mount Carmel property.

1988 Several more women join Howell's Harem including Lisa Farris, Ruth Ottoman (Canada), and Nicole Gent (Australia).

July 1988 Nicole Gent recruited and soon after joins Howell's

Harem.

10 September 1988 Dana Okimoto's child whom Vernon names Sky Born Okimoto, is born. Sky is Vernon's first child born from a woman other than his legal wife Rachael.[2]

November 1988 Robyn Bunds' child Shaun (originally named Wisdom by Vernon) is born.

Early 1989 Friction between Vernon and I begins to develop. Nicole leaves for Australia to have her and Vernon's baby. Nicole's visa is due to run out and Vernon wants her to have their baby in a secluded place.

April 1989 Vernon makes the now infamous dream tape (audio tape). This tape contains damaging evidence against Vernon Howell.

28 April 1989 Elizabeth and I are married.

May 1989 Elizabeth returns to Australia and I await my migrant's visa to join her. I make preparations to leave the group for Australia. I try to reconcile myself to Vernon one last time. For a time, it works.

5 August 1989 Vernon teaches all women belong to him and only he has the right to procreate.

September 1989 I leave Vernon's group, never to return. Praise God for that decision.

29 September 1989 I arrive in Australia.

29 Sept. - June 1990 The Battle for Australia begins in earnest. Eventually, by

June 1990, most Australians break from Vernon leaving only a few who still follow him. Although the New Zealand membership of the cult is small, that battle is almost as fierce and eventually, some New Zealanders break away from Vernon. Most, continued to follow Vernon.

October 1989

Vernon makes his "Foundation" tape and sends it to Australia in an effort to scare Australian defectors into staying faithful to him. **This tape contains the most damaging hard core evidence against Vernon.**

June 1990

I fly to Waco Texas where I first alert Waco Police to cult's activities. I am ignored and treated rudely by the Waco Police department.

Mid June 1990

Enough Australians break away from Vernon to begin a united effort to alert the authorities. Geoff Hossack is introduced to this situation.

July/August 1990

Robyn Bunds, one of Vernon's women, breaks from Vernon. This provides Australians with more ammunition and the approach to the authorities begins at this time.

July/August 1990

Two raids by the La Verne Police Department, La Verne California yields results. According to private investigator, La Verne issues three warrants against Vernon for statutory rape. These warrants have since disappeared. Perhaps there was a misunderstanding of sorts.

October 1990	Steve Schneider visits Australia in a last effort to convince defectors to return to the Vernon fold. It fails.
October 1990 - June 1991	Stalemate with American authorities.
June 1991	First confirmation of Kiri Jewell's danger. First rescue attempt fails. We tried to convince Kiri's grandmother to take action.
September 1991	First contact with Hinch program. Pamela Graham is the reporter assigned to the story.
September 1991	Both Jeannine Bunds and Doreen Saipaia (USA and New Zealand respectively), leave Vernon. Doreen claims that she was locked and confined in a house for nearly four months, repeatedly assaulted by Vernon and others, as well as sexually molested by Stan Sylvia, one of Vernon's followers. Doreen makes both a written and a taped statement to the authorities in San Francisco and Texas. Nothing, however is done and no investigation is made.
22 October 1991	Hinch broadcast on Australian TV channel 7.
October 1991	Channel 9's <i>A Current Affair</i> shows interest in story and begins research.
1 November 1991	With the help of the local Seventh-day Adventist church, we are able to track down Mr. David Jewell of Niles Michigan to warn him of his daughter's situation. David Jewell suspects something is wrong with his ex-wife and daughter but is unaware of the gravity of the situation

until we contact them.

November 1991 - February 1992 Preparations for the custody case are done in secret, without Vernon's knowledge. Evidence is gathered and affidavits are prepared.

28 December 1991 Kiri Jewell travels to Michigan from Anaheim California, to visit her father. She is then ten years old. David Jewell obtains a temporary custody order granting him temporary custody of his child until the full custody hearing which is set for 24 February 1992.

30 December 1991 *A Current Affair* interviews the Australians involved. Reporter Martin King is assigned the story. He does an excellent job.

5 January 1992 *A Current Affair* visits and interviews Vernon Howell at Mount Carmel. An interview with Robyn Bunds is also conducted in California.

7 January 1992 The Vernonites, including Sherri Jewell first receive official notification of the temporary custody order. Sorry guys, Kiri ain't coming back to Vernon.

January 1992 - February 1992 Final preparations for court case.

16 Feb. 1992 Jean Smith, Elizabeth and I travel to Niles Michigan to testify in court. Along the way, we notify the Hawaii media, specifically, KGMB TV reporter Rob Simpson.

20 Feb. 1992 Finally arrive in Niles Michigan. Court date postponed from 24 to 25 Feb.

25 -27 Feb. 1992

Court case. After two days of our testimony, with much more to come, the Vernonites concede defeat and full custody is awarded to the child's father Mr. David Jewell. The judge, shocked at the atrocities detailed, forbids Kiri to have any contact, either direct or indirect, with any member of the cult save her mother Sherri. Visitation rights are strictly supervised. The judge goes on further to state that any violation of this order will be dealt with strictly, and that he will personally continue to monitor this case. This decision was rendered by Judge Taylor of the St. Joseph courts. The case is Jewell vs. Jewell.

20 Feb. - 6 Mar.

We learn about the suicide/martyrdom from five independent sources. These are mostly family of cult members, and also a cult member who flees in panic after the death notices are issued by Vernon.

6 Mar. - 15 Apr.

Further information confirming that for some reason, cult members think they will die shortly. Fears of a mass suicide/martyrdom escalate.

15 Apr. - 18 Apr.

Intensive media coverage by both Channel 9 and the Herald-Sun. This coverage, along with some American coverage, seems to have caused Vernon to back down. Event seems to have been called off. For now.

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- [1]. Cyrus the Great ruled Persian from approximately 559 to 536 B.C., conquering the Babylonian kingdom. The book of Revelation names the last apostate antichristian power as Babylon. Hence, Vernon as Cyrus, was seen as the deliver from, and destroyer of Babylon. He believed that he was a modern day Cyrus who would destroy the wicked world.
- [2]. Previous to Vernon's calling from God, he fathered another child. This child is unrelated to this case as far as I am aware.