

**Some Background on the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Movement
from 1955 to the Early Part of 1991**

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Victor Houteff, founder of the Shepherd's Rod, died in 1955. In order to keep the organization cohesive, and together, the leadership role was assumed by the late Mr. Houteff's wife Florence Houteff.

Prior to Victor Houteff's death, the Shepherd's Rod had drafted a constitution. In this constitution, provision was made for an executive committee consisting of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. While the latter three offices were usually elected ones, that is to say, elected by the people, the President had a large say in filling these offices.

According to the Rod's constitution, the President had to be directly appointed by God. This worked well enough for the Shepherd's Rod since Mr. Houteff claimed to be appointed a prophet by God. Thus, during his life time, there was no quarrel as to who should fill the office of Davidian President.

Unfortunately for the Rod, this constitution was rather shortsighted since, upon Mr. Houteff's death, the office of President could only be filled by another prophet. The reason for this shortsightedness was due to the fact that most Rod members, including most probably Mr. Houteff himself, believed that he would be the prophet which would see things out to the second coming of Christ. In fact, the Rod's constitution stated that the President's job would be to hand the leadership over to Christ upon his coming. Although I believe that Mr. Houteff probably believed he would be the leader when Christ came, the constitution did provide for the possibility of successive presidents. I must also point out here that the last president, the one present at Christ's second coming, was known among Rod members as the Antitypical

David, the king foretold in the prophecies who would hand his kingship over to Christ upon his glorious appearing. The role of Antitypical David plays a prominent role in Rod/Branch History.

So it happened that upon Mr. Houteff's unexpected death in 1955, there was a need for another president. Although Mrs. Houteff assumed the leadership role, she remained as vice President, leaving the presidency vacant. Apparently she believed and taught that Victor Houteff would be resurrected to take up the president's mantle once again. She gave a three and a half year prophecy which would end in 1959. She stated that at the end of this three and a half year period, God would execute Ezekiel 9 upon the unbelieving Seventh-day Adventists. It is possible that some believed this would coincide with the setting up of God's kingdom and Mr. Houteff's resurrection. In fact, I think it would be safe to say that the vast majority believed this.

The following is a rough chronological list of Rod eschatology as I believe they understood it at the time.[1] I stress that this is what I believe their understanding was.

1. After three and a half years God would execute Ezekiel 9 on the unbelieving (non-Rod) Seventh-day Adventists.
2. Ezekiel 9 would be a literal slaughtering of the "wicked." The "purge" or "refinement" would leave the believing Seventh-day Adventists, as well as those who were previously unacquainted with the Rod or who were favourable but who could not "come forward" due to circumstances beyond their control.
3. Shortly after this slaughter (which was seen also as the destruction of the tares spoken of in Matthew 13), God would exalt the Rod members.
4. God would translate the "faithful" to the state of Israel in which God would establish an earthly kingdom.
5. Victor Houteff would be resurrected, along with a few other faithful.
6. The state of Jerusalem would be the headquarters from which the loud cry of the third angel would then be given to the world.[2]

It has been alleged that the Rod believed that they themselves would literally carry out the slaughter of Ezekiel 9. From my research on the subject, I believe that Mr. Houteff himself did not believe this but that upon his death, this understanding sprang up.

In the years from 1955 to 1959, the Rod proclaimed their message most zealously. In fact, they were probably more zealous during that period than during Mr. Houteff's ministry. In 1955 Mrs. Houteff sold the Old Mount Carmel property to a real estate company. She saw the amount of money involved and did not wish the assets to be so bound up in property. With part of the money, she purchased New Mount Carmel. This property also lay in Waco Texas and consisted of around 400 acres. Eventually, bits and pieces were sold off until now, there are only 77 acres of the original 400 which have anything to do with the organization. (The 77 acres belongs to the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventist organization). Today, the property which was Old Mount Carmel houses many of the wealthy residents of Waco and the land is worth millions. It presently has no affiliation with any Davidian organization. Indeed, I doubt that those living on that property even know there was once such an organization.

In 1959 over 1000 Davidians met at New Mount Carmel to await the execution of Ezekiel 9 and their deliverance into God's kingdom. Many of these Davidians gave up their homes, and jobs, in order to be on the property when God wrought his deliverance. There were some Seventh-day Adventist ministers among the crowd as well, who endeavored to show the Davidians the error of their ways, and to persuade them to give up their reckless course.

Also there that day was one Ben L. Roden, who believed that God had called him to warn the Davidians that they were following a foolish course. Mr. Roden had arranged matters with the Israeli government so that the Israeli government gave him (and any who would follow) a grant of land in the northern part of Israel. Therefore Mr. Roden informed the Davidians that they were not going to be miraculously delivered on this day in 1959, but that they needed to immigrate to Israel, where they could be present in the land itself. Mr. Roden believed that deliverance would come to God's people in Israel. The Davidians declined his invitation to

move to Israel, and continued to hope that Mrs. Houteff's prophecy would come true. I believe there are still some Branch members living on that land in Israel today.

Mrs. Houteff's prophecy failed and the organization soon broke apart. Since that time, many splinter groups have emerged, but these have for all practical purposes, dissolved into two main ones: The Branch, and the Gilead movement. This discussion is concerned only with the Branch aspect of this story.

As I have shown above, the presidency, according to the Davidian constitution, demanded a prophet or inspired figure. Thus, with these, at first, numerous splinter groups, came numerous prophets.

One of these, as I have mentioned, was Ben Roden. He founded the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventist organization, beginning in 1955. He died in 1978.

Only after the fiasco of 1959 did he merit serious consideration among Davidian members. It was under his administration that New Mount Carmel was acquired. I will hereafter refer to New Mount Carmel simply as Mount Carmel. The property is located at postal address: Rt. 7 Box 471-B Waco, TX 76705. But don't show up unexpectedly because an armed guard patrols the front gate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Although it was actually Mrs. Houteff who purchased the New Mount Carmel property, the courts soon had jurisdiction because the Davidian organization eventually became insolvent. It thus became unclear as to who had rights to the property. Ben Roden was forced to stake his claim in court. He lost his bid and was told that the only way he could use Mount Carmel as his headquarters was to purchase it from other Davidian members. So Mr. Roden sent out a plea to all who followed him to contribute in buying out everyone else's shares. This was eventually accomplished at a cost of approximately \$75,000. This done, Mr. Roden established the property as his headquarters. Only now there were two differences. First, the new headquarters occupied only 77 acres of land, the rest had been sold off. Second, no longer was the organization known as the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, but the Branch Davidian

Seventh-day Adventists.

It was Ben Roden who introduced the concept that the people of God needed also to keep the feast days: namely Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. He began teaching this doctrine in 1964, nine years after he began his ministry. He did not believe sacrifices were necessary but that the feasts should be kept in a Christian context. Ben Roden's message dealt mainly with these feast days, and the harvest motifs of Scripture.

Mr. Houteff had taught that the 144,000 would be Seventh-day Adventists left over from the slaughter of Ezekiel 9. They would be the first fruits who would evangelize the secondfruits and so on. Mr. Roden broke things down even further and went into detail regarding the various offerings given at the various feasts etc.

I must digress here and point out that there was one statement made by Victor Houteff which really characterizes Branch theology. That statement is simply reads as follows.

He makes wise the simple and confounds the prudent by showing that where there is **no type** there is **no truth**.^[3]

Because of this statement Branch theology was based entirely on types. This has been carried to ridiculous excesses.

Isaiah 8 provides a good example. In Mr. Roden's *Fall of Assyria* letter, as well as other literature, he describes

1. The antitypical Assyrian.USA
2. Antitypical SyriaUSA first phase
3. Antitypical ten tribes.SDA^[4]
4. Antitypical two tribesBranch
5. Antitypical butter and honeyTruth
6. Antitypical cowSpirit of Prophecy writings^[5]
7. Antitypical two sheep.Old and New Testament
8. Antitypical ImmanuelAntitypical David

All this from Isaiah 8.[6] The land was, however, seen as literal Jerusalem.

Mr. Roden also believed that God's people should immigrate to Israel. He managed to acquire land in Israel and there were even a few who moved there. I believe the land is still occupied today by Branch members.

Despite general antipathy toward Mr. Roden among Seventh-day Adventists, Mr. Roden himself seems to have been sincere. He seems also to have had an honest nature and was quite gentle. Although I never met him, my research indicates that he tended to allow himself to be ruled by other more ambitious persons. He himself, seems to have been a decent human being.

Finally, Mr. Roden concentrated mainly on reaching Davidians and Seventh-day Adventists. Although the Branch, as it was known, was the largest splinter group of Davidians, it did not boast too many members.

In 1977, his wife, Lois I. Roden claimed to have had divine inspiration. She claimed that while praying one day she saw an angel move by her window with silver wings. From this (I don't quite know her logic in this), she deduced that the Holy Spirit was the feminine part of the Godhead. Actually, she had tried to teach this as early as 1974 but that doctrine was rejected among Branch members.

Ironically, the main opponent to her 1977 "vision" was her husband Ben Roden. By this time he was sick and it was generally expected that he would die. Despite the fact that the vision had come to his wife, Mr. Roden opposed the doctrine of the femininity of the Holy spirit.

Upon Mr. Roden's death, Mrs. Roden assumed the presidency of the Branch. She did so quickly because she had the "prophetic gift" which qualified her. Of course, some did not see things her way and some left the organization.

Here I must point out a very important point. There are many people who believe in the femininity of the Holy Ghost but they **do not** believe she is a woman. Rather they believe that

one cannot put God into a form. When they speak of the femininity of the Holy Ghost, they mean that the Holy Ghost can be seen as Mother, just like Jesus is shown as Son, and just as the Bible speaks of our Father.

My purpose here is not to discuss the merits of this doctrine but I do believe it is important to realize that many who hold this doctrine, and there are many outside of Branch circles, do not believe the Holy Spirit has been incarnated in any way. They simply see the trinity as a family unit. Father, Mother, and Son. Christ's bride is, of course, the Church. Many see the Roman Catholic emphasis on the Virgin Mary as a counterfeit of the true Mother, the Holy spirit.

Unfortunately for the main body of Branches, this important distinction was not made and the Holy Spirit was seen as incarnate in Mrs. Roden herself. This doctrine did not originate at first, but developed over time.

Mrs. Roden's ministry saw a new era for the Branch. Her message about the Holy Spirit caught on among feminist groups and she decided to publish a magazine entitled SHEKAINA. This magazine was designed to serve as a forum for anyone Branch or otherwise, who believed that the Holy Spirit was best seen in a feminine light. Thus, the magazine boasted quite a varied number of contributors who had nothing to do with Mrs. Roden's organization. Indeed, many articles are quite fascinating and they are often worth reading. This particular magazine was meant for circulation among the general public, and did not sport any other aspects of Branch Theology.

To the Branch members, however, Mrs. Roden published tracts detailing her beliefs. The femininity of the Holy Ghost was just one of them. Again, it is not my intention to provide a detailed sketch of her doctrines, although I may do so in a later document.

There is one doctrinal introduction that bears notice, however. In addition to the feast days, Mrs. Roden believed that people needed to observe the daily ritual at both the third and ninth hour of the day. This corresponds to 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. each day.

This ritual consisted of partaking of the bread and wine, footwashing, and an hour long study. This doctrine was significant because it led to the centralization of Mount Carmel. Naturally, working people cannot afford such a practice so many were forced to move to Mount Carmel. This placed a financial strain on the organization.

By this time, Branch members were paying three tithes. Although they claim biblical support for 30% tithes (that's a contradiction in terms but what else can I say), I have never personally found any biblical justification for this doctrine.

Mrs. Roden's ministry gained notable publicity. She was featured in many articles and television interviews. She traveled as far as the Philippines. She started attending high class Christian functions not associated with Seventh-day Adventism, such as Christian music awards ceremonies etc.

In the late 70's, "fundamentalism" was on the rise and this was the golden era for the Moral Majority. Thus, there was plenty of room for Mrs. Roden's brand of doctrine. Even such notable persons as Keith Green (who rejected the femininity of the Holy Spirit outright) and Sandy Patty (who also rejected the notion) were reached. But that gives you an idea of the circles the Branch was moving in.

Mrs. Roden's right hand man was Perry D. Jones, a long time member of the Branch. Mr. Jones is now unfortunately caught up in a mess. But at the time he was a good speaker and was quite fervent in his efforts to introduce the Sabbath, and the need to keep church and state separate to the right people. It was through him that Jimmy Swaggart received a "recommended copy" of *The Great Controversy*.^[7] I'm sure many have sent Mr. Swaggart copies through the mail, but this one was recommended by a reporter (I believe) whom Mr. Jones contacted.

Mr. Jones also contacted Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, and even Gerry Falwell. Whenever Mr. Jones acted alone, apart from the Branch, he was quite amazing. He spoke to many reporters and journalists. Remember that during this time, church and state was an important

issue.

The Branch might actually have gained considerable amounts of influence were it not for massive internal strife which rocked the movement beginning in 1983.

The trouble came in the form of one Vernon Wayne Howell who offered a direct challenge to the leadership of the Branch movement. Mr. Howell arrived at Mount Carmel in 1981. He had been kicked out of the Seventh-day Adventist church but was interested in religious matters still.

His aunt had mentioned Mrs. Roden to him and he decided to investigate. He was converted to the Branch and worked in the kitchens at Mount Carmel for nothing save room and board.

Mr. Howell is a ninth grade drop out who had difficulty holding down a job. He is a competent mechanic, however, and he soon became the handy man of the Mount Carmel property.

In 1983 Mr. Howell claimed that God had revealed truth to him. Mr. Howell, then 24 years of age began to teach in the twice a day meetings.

This aroused the animosity of Mrs. Roden's oldest son George B. Roden, who believed that he would be the next prophet. He especially became upset when Mr. Howell and Mrs. Roden began living together using the infamous Isaiah 8 as their justification for doing so.

George Roden claims that Vernon raped his mother, although in all honesty it should be pointed out that Mrs. Roden consented to a relationship with Mr. Howell, despite their 40 year age difference.

Countering Mr. Howell, George Roden claimed that God was inspiring him. But more so, he wished to be the trustee of the property. He passed a document proclaiming him as president of the association, wishing all to sign.

You will, of course, appreciate what the title of president meant. Even though Mr. Roden couched his document in nonreligious terminology, proclaiming him president would,

according to the Branch and Davidian constitutions, admit his divine inspiration. To give you an idea of just how powerful the president of the Branch was, or would be, I include the following statement:

Therefore as members of the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association, the membership appoints (Hosea 1:11) the president Ben L. Roden, as holding in his sole possession all legal, moral, and Scriptural ownership and rights of the Association, all its assets and holdings, and to operate the same for the furtherance of the Association's work at home and abroad: to execute and administrate the entire balances of the Association, to judge and make final judgment in all matters concerning the Association's works, assets, and holdings, and to be its chief and sole administrator.[8]

The feud between George Roden and Vernon Howell erupted into violence when Mr. Roden forced people off the property at gunpoint. All those who did not sign his document were literally pushed off the property. Shots were even fired at some people.

Vernon, and his little band, acquired a property (illegally I might add) in PalestineTexas.[9] In all fairness, they did purchase the property and they were in desperate need of somewhere to go.

The feud between Mr. Howell and George also caused a falling out between Mrs. Roden and Vernon. They split, and Vernon wasted no time in legally marrying Mr. Jones' daughter Rachael who was only 13 years old at the time.

From 1984 to 1986, the feud between Vernon and George was mainly a war of words. In 1986, Mrs. Roden died and the property at Mount Carmel soon fell into ruins. George wasn't exactly a good caretaker.

The central hub of the Branch movement was dead. The Branches abroad were left without a headquarters, unless they chose to follow George Roden. And less and less people decided to do that.

Mr. Howell's Group

Vernon Howell is the current leader of the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. Its central headquarters is again Mount Carmel and its membership consists of people from the United States, New Zealand, Canada and England.

You might wonder at this state of affairs presently, considering the mess the Branch was in at the beginning of 1986. Although I believe Mr. Howell is very dangerous (my reasons will become clear shortly), I must say that he is quite charismatic. He is also quite a dynamic speaker.

His right hand man is Steve Schneider, who is an excellent speaker and has real talent in interesting people.

At first, Vernon followed after Lois Roden's early theology. There was still a twice a day meeting. Mr. Howell believed that there were really seven angels' messages and that he was the seventh and last. Because of his actions with Mrs. Roden, however, Vernon had problems convincing many Branches who did not reside at Carmel.

Vernon was also a young man and he decided to start up a musical band. This is the context in which I met him. Not knowing what went before, Vernon gave the impression of a sincere and talented young man. Indeed, he is quite a talented guitar player and musician. He is also an excellent song writer.

It soon became apparent that many Branch, and some SDA doctrines were choking the evangelist efforts of his organization so these were dropped.

Vernon believed he was divinely inspired. He believed he was the antitypical David who would lead the people until Christ's coming. (What else was new. Ben Roden believed that, and so did George).

He claimed that in 1985, he had received a vision from God in Israel (he was in the state of Israel at that time) informing him that he was Cyrus. The Scriptures were "opened up" to

him at this time. He paralleled Cyrus with Eliakim of Isaiah 22 and it is from this, that the name Eliakim arose. I believe he is the Eliakim of your tracts.[10] But his main title was Cyrus.

That all may sound innocent enough and it most likely was at first, despite the events related above. But consider the following verse in the King James Bible.

ISA 45: 13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct **all his ways**: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts. (KJV)[11]

The reason I have bolded the three words "all his ways" is because these innocent three words (which are better rendered "make straight all his paths, 45:2), have led the current organization into almost unbelievable cultism bordering Jim Jones's People's Temple.[12]

I think the reason is obvious. Since Vernon felt he was Cyrus, he would naturally think that God would make everything "all his ways" he did inspired.[13] Vernon, as antitypical Cyrus soon came to believe that everything he said, did, and thought, was inspired by God.

He soon attached many titles to himself. At present, he claims to be

1. Antitypical Cyrus
2. Antitypical David
3. Antitypical Eliakim
4. Antitypical Elijah
5. The angel that ascends from the east (Revelation 7:1).
6. The Lamb
7. Jesus Christ incarnate

These latter two probably alarm you as well they should. It is particularly with these two latter titles that the rest of this narrative is concerned.

The Disaster

In mid to late 1986, Vernon began to teach that he was the protagonist of Song of Solomon. As the protagonist, he would be entitled to 140 wives, as set forth in that book.

SOL 6:8 There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. (KJV)[14]

I should point out here that Mr. Howell did not simply point to a verse in Scripture and say: "This is what it means." In fact, Mr. Howell is fond of giving extremely long studies, sometimes lasting for 16 hours at a time. In short, he employs classic brainwashing techniques. Here, I am summarizing how the Branch came to be in the mess it is in today. (Of course I realize I haven't yet spelled that out).

Vernon also used the following texts to back up this amazing assertion.

ISA 52:11 Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean {thing}; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. (KJV)

ISA 22:24 And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. (KJV)

2CO 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. (KJV)[15]

In Isaiah 52:11 those bearing the vessels of the Lord were seen as women. They were bearing little vessels. Just who were these women? And who were these vessels? Obviously, these women were his wives, and the babies were their children by him.

This was Mr. Howell's basic scenario of things.

1. He gives his message

The message of antitypical Cyrus, the seventh angel's message. This dealt with the kingdom in Israel, the feast days, the femininity of the Holy Spirit and himself.

2. He goes to Israel after which war breaks out.

Scriptures used were many, but Zechariah 14 and Isaiah 50-54 were chief among them.

3. They find out about his wives.

The American army invades and destroys Israel. They find him and hate him for all his 140 wives so they crucify him just as they crucified Christ.

4. He gets resurrected and God's kingdom established.

5. He destroys the wicked and saves the righteous.

In accordance with his views, Vernon began to sleep with other women. He felt that as soon as a man makes love to a woman, they are married in the eyes of God. Hence, any woman with whom he copulated was, in his eyes, his new wife. This is how he navigated around the necessity of an actual marriage. He was aware that polygamy is illegal in the United States.

Unfortunately, some of these women were very young, ranging from 12 years of age to the 30's. At first, Vernon believed that one of his wives would eventually marry Jesus Christ. This was before he thought he was Jesus Christ.

The scriptural justification for this was Psalm 45.

Because God supposedly directed all of his ways, he assumed tight control over the people. They could only eat certain foods and only when he gave permission. People could not go out to eat. They could not buy anything without his permission. And of course, people

were not allowed to disclose his sexual activities with other women. In addition to this, people were not allowed to marry without his consent.

In November of 1987, Mr. Howell was involved in a gun fight with George Roden. Mr. Roden finally challenged Vernon to a test of prophethood. Mr. Roden dug up a corpse in the Mount Carmel cemetery and challenged anyone to resurrect the corpse. Whoever could manage this miracle was the true prophet of the Branch.

Vernon declined the challenge. However, corpse abuse is a crime and he saw, in this, a way to oust George from the Mount Carmel property. He, and eight other men went on the property to take pictures of the corpse, in order to prove corpse abuse.

They went armed. As I have mentioned before, George did shoot at people to get them off the property so they armed themselves mainly to protect themselves.

They were caught while trying to take pictures. George Roden caught them and a gun fight ensued. Eight of the nine men were arrested and placed in custody with bond set at an average of \$50,000 each. One escaped unnoticed. This is why the men became known as the Rodenville eight even though there were actually nine Branch members present.

For the record, I was not involved in that incident although I did fly to Waco afterwards to see, first hand, what was taking place. By this time, preparations were already being made for the trial. The incident generated quite a bit of media attention and the program A Current Affair broadcast a special segment on the whole thing. It was entitled, *The Holy War In Waco*. We have a video tape of that broadcast, but it has been converted to Australian format. Perhaps if you write to the program, care of the Fox network, you will be able to obtain a tape of that broadcast. The actual gun fight took place on 3 November 1987 and the broadcast was shown shortly after that.

The case went to trial and seven of the eight men were acquitted while Vernon fell victim to a hung jury. The State decided to drop the case against Mr. Howell and all eight walked free.

Later George Roden was put in jail for burglary and then for murder. I have just received word, however, that George Roden was acquitted and I am not precisely certain of what is happening with respect to him. The murder he was accused of, however, was a brutal one to say the least. Since he was apparently acquitted, I can only assume George Roden was innocent.

The Mount Carmel property, as I have said, had lagged under George's care and \$68,000 in back taxes was owed on the property. By this time, Vernon had converted a rich couple from Hawaii into the group and they footed the bill, thus placing the property into Vernon's hands. Vernon asked them for more money to renovate the property. About \$500,000, and four years later, the property is still without running water and proper sanitation facilities although it has electricity. Despite this lack of normal services on the property, Vernon owns several automobiles (including a 1967 Corvette for which he allegedly paid \$25,000 cash), and a speedboat.

By way of explanation, I should point out that George had renamed the Mount Carmel property Rodenville. It has since been changed back to Mount Carmel.

In 1988 Vernon began to stress that he was the Lamb of Revelation 4 and 5. At this point, he taught that the Lamb (himself) was someone other than Jesus Christ.

In 1988, Steve Schneider, Vernon's right hand man, went to England and, strange as it may seem, converted quite a number of Newbold students.[16] Among these converts were three ministers, or prospective ministers. They, in turn, told other people in the area about the "new light" and soon quite a number of people from England were caught up in the whole affair.

Because Vernon taught that he was the Lamb, this eventually led to the doctrine that no one else had any right to interpret the Scriptures save for himself. Indeed, some of the books of the Bible, like Lamentations and Job, were forbidden because they contained things "too deep" for anyone else save himself.

The apocryphal book 2 Esdras was then inserted into the Branch canon mostly because of references to babies dancing and speaking at three months of age. Vernon taught that these would be his children. Vernon also believed that this book taught that prophets were hire forms of humanity. They were not like the rest of mankind, but were given special treatment by God.

By this time, Vernon had a sizeable collection of wives, about 14 or so. These women were and still are convinced that they would be queens in heaven. By this time, too, the idea that one of his women would marry Jesus Christ had disappeared. Instead, they would have him for eternity. He, Cyrus, David would be the best and ultimate person throughout eternity.

Psalm 45 was reinterpreted so that the protagonist was himself. The passage:

PSA 45:7 Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. (KJV)

was interpreted to mean that he would have more women than anyone else. Through a long, circular theology, Vernon arrived at the equation: oil = women's secretions during sex. In fact, a whole doctrine was built around this equation.

Thus, he taught that he would have more women than anyone else and that he would be the most good looking etc.

In August of 1989 Vernon suddenly became the owner of all women. Now all women, married or otherwise, were obligated to be his. As the Lamb, he alone was worthy. Everyone was going to hell and only through him, could anyone attain salvation. Anyone's attempts to study or read Scripture were futile because he alone had the true interpretation. He even had the nerve to "use" Ellen White's writings to back himself.[19]

By this time, the people had become so institutionalized and brainwashed (I mentioned that Vernon often gave long studies) that they genuinely feared for their lives. Vernon convinced them, through hours and hours of repetitious bombardment, that anyone who

disobeyed him would go to hell. On top of that, anyone who left the group and divulged any of its secrets could expect to be hunted down and killed. A number of persons were threatened physically and Vernon even went so far as to send spies after those who were out on the fringe. These actions caused immense fear to many, because by this time, Vernon owned many guns, including an AK-47 assault rifle. Several persons also owned guns.

I must point out here that there were several people who were not centralized at Mount Carmel. Some were only marginally acquainted with what was going on while other sincere persons favourable to the Branch had absolutely no idea any of this was going on. For myself, I was attending Loma Linda University during most of this time period. I happened to be an actual eyewitness to Vernon's study in which he first taught that he owned all the women. That revelation, along with the other things that went with it, came as a shock to me.

When I tried to speak out against such nonsense, I was threatened. So I left deciding that it would be more prudent to alert those on the fringe as to the current situation.

My wife is a citizen of Australia so that seemed a logical place to start. Mr. Howell had visited Australia twice before and had managed to convert a few people here.

I will not detail all the circumstances of events here in Australia. Indeed, one could write a rather lengthy book on the subject. Suffice it to say that all the Australians broke away from the movement and Vernon has given up any attempts to evangelize in Australia. Before that happened, however, the Seventh-day Adventist church was rocked badly here in Melbourne, and there was even trouble in Brisbane, more than 2,000 miles from Melbourne.[18]

About 60 people were either converted or semi-converted by Vernon's teachings. Thirty-five of these were from Brisbane Australia, and 25 were from Melbourne.

When Vernon realized that anyone who listened to sane points of view (the Bible and Mrs. White's writings) would break from him, he immediately imposed a communications ban on anyone opposing himself.

At present, I have been unable to contact people in England, and Canada. They simply do

not have dealings with anyone opposing Vernon. They do not even listen to other points of view. I never thought I would meet any group of people worse than the Jehovah's witnesses in this regard, but these take the cake.

Numerous letters and appeals, not only from myself, but from concerned Seventh-day Adventist brethren, have met with no response, not a scrap.

Of the believers in New Zealand, half are for Vernon, while half have broken away. He is also effectively cut off from New Zealand in terms of evangelism. There, Vernon is taking his losses.

We have also been unable to reach anyone in Canada but this is because we have been unable to find their addresses. They may listen to reason. There are about 100 followers in the US. Of these, only 10 have managed to break away. Most of them broke away in 1990. When they were finally able to talk about the ordeal, they all had horror stories to tell including the following:

1. Brutal child beatings
2. Beating up disobedient members.
3. Spanking young children with a boat paddle.
4. One girl had a loaded gun pointed to her head and was told that God would not be angry with Vernon if she were killed there on the spot. The one who pointed the gun was Vernon himself.
5. Severe food deprivation.
6. Holes in the ground, filled nearly to the top with raw sewage with no provision for cleanup.
7. People forced to cut relations with their families.
8. People suddenly disappearing.

9. A number of married women now part of Vernon's harem.
10. Bible studies solely dominated with fear. These would begin at early evening, and continue night after night for hours until the people were too exhausted to care.
11. Threats of physical death to any opposing him.
12. One woman was threatened with her child's murder right in front of her eyes.
13. One woman's child was kidnapped when she tried to break away.

These are just a few of the things described by those who have broken away.

Vernon's Doctrine

Vernon's present doctrine is quite simple

1. 2000 years ago, God sent Jesus Christ into the world. He was a sinless Messiah who prevailed. But he was not able to really judge humanity because he had never sinned. So, 2000 years later, the Father sent him back into this world in the person of Vernon Howell. He stripped away his memory so that he would not know who he was. Now Vernon is Jesus Christ incarnate and he is now a sinful Messiah. This will enable him to judge properly.

For proof of this incredible doctrine, I offer these quotations. Unless otherwise indicated in a separate footnote, all quotations which follow are taken from a taped study Vernon sent to his Australian followers in an attempt to prevent them from leaving his group.

God in the flesh! Do you know who I am? God in the flesh! The Word of God in the book has been shown to you. The most powerful of all prophets, the prophet that's found in the books. Lo, in the volume of the book it is written of me, Psalms 40, I come to do thy will Oh God.

Thy law, prophecy, is within my heart. Now what better sinner can know a sinner than a godly sinner? Huh?[19]

And the spirit came to me and says that in me all things are possible. And I desired that highest position. I desired Christ to be in me, that feminine entity, that Spirit of reception, and God gave me Christ. God says, you are my Son. And I declared to the woman of the flesh my position and they rejected it! But then God says you are that Christ, and in you hides the hidden mystery. I labored without light, walking in the light of darkness, God's word that said I will lead them through paths of darkness and will not forsake them. I will make darkness light for them and will not forsake them. And then I heard her voice, the glory in me, the truth, the true light, the true Spirit. She only comforted me, she kept me in company when there were none to uphold my soul. She is my reward, she is God's word, she is God's truth that shines in darkness but the darkness comprehends it not. She is my own soul, she is what I shall be, she is that perfect image, the light clothed in the wedding garment. I shall win Christ and she shall come forth from my side as bright beams, and I will have her because she has been mine since I first heard that word, let their be light. When I took hold of the mind of God I saw the wisdom of God, but I didn't know she was so intimate with me. I didn't know she was the great reward of the sons of light. You didn't either did you?

Only the Lamb is to be given the job to raise up the seed of the house of David isn't he? Isn't he? You know that in the prophecies, Psalms 45.

JOB 31:1) I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?
(KJV)[20]

—'s note: He sees that the Lamb has the only right to a maid.

This verse is also cross referenced to the following verse:

(1 CO 7:29) But this I say, brethren, the time {is} short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; (KJV)

And that is not the end of it:

(JOB 31:10) {Then} let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her. (KJV)

—'s note: Let them rape her.

(JOB 31:11) For this {is} an heinous crime: yea, it {is} an iniquity {to be punished by} the judges [24 elders]. (KJV)

—'s note: He wants the Lamb to have his wife.

2. He is the only one worthy. Therefore, everyone owes him (God) their money, wives and even children.

The blasphemy continues:

God says His heart has indicted a good matter. No wonder Psalms 108, the Lamb, who knows all mysteries, says my heart is fixed. If God's heart be for me, who is my heart, that it should condemn God? If God has elected me, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth, I have put my Spirit upon Him, If God has declared, who am I to judge God unworthy?!!

I could not see it. Isaiah testifies that I'm blind. They heard the truth. I didn't have ears to hear it. I did it for their sake. There is no other light in the world that shines as bright. Do you understand what it means when your own body and mind will not comprehend the light because God says, who is blind but my servant or is deaf as the messenger that I have sent. Who is blind but he that is perfect? As blind as the Lord's servant. Opening the ears, but he heareth not. Opening your eyes but he, he, he, heseeth not. The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness sake. He will magnify the law. The law! Magnify the law?!?! Isaiah 51. For a law shall proceed forth from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light to the people. Oh! You mean the law where it says look to the rock whereby you are hewed. Compare it to the pit from whence you were digged. What law? The law of prophecy? The law that says no man can open the book but the Lamb? That's God's word. God can't lie! That's the word! It's the law, law of prophecy! God has a rainbow. He cannot lie! I'm perfect. Every sin that Isaiah

says I'm guilty of, I agree. I'm perfect to give you this message. I have been chosen of God, and God says His word is what I will be.

Judge me will you? Judge me, make me prove I'm the Lamb, will you? Huh? Judge my Father.

Psalms 45! The man on the white horse! Nobody can reveal these things God says, but the Lamb! I'll prove who I am, by showing you who God is.

Psalms 110. The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. In other words, my Father said unto my Mother, Sit down sweetheart, your the Woman of Revelation 12, your the Wisdom of God, your the Mother of Cyrus, your the Mother of the Lamb, the Root of David, the life source.[23]

These are the two major doctrines at present. There are, of course, other side-doctrines. If you want to know what Mr. Howell thinks about any scriptural passage, all you have to do is remember one simple rule. Anything good applies to him; anything bad applies to everyone else.

Who Would Believe Such Doctrine

After reading all of the above, you might well ask: "How can these people be dangerous? Who would believe such garbage?" As I said earlier, both Vernon and Steve are quite dynamic. Vernon appeals to young people through music and through a show of knowledge in the Scriptures. Unfortunately, the SDA church is dead in many places. Vernon exploits this fact. He also teaches that Christ's coming is near, just a few years away. So any sacrifices made will only be for a short time. In God's kingdom, people will obtain their perfect mates and be eternally happy. Vernon is good at describing such happiness. He is also good at describing hell.

Thus, young people are most vulnerable. They don't know about the guns, the beatings

etc., until they are too far into to have the resources to say no. By that time, they are so afraid of going to hell for disobeying his every whim, that they cannot break out.

Vernon also strips them of money and other resources. Most quit work or school to come live at Mount Carmel or other scattered locations. Thus, even if they wished too, they have no money, and people are usually too embarrassed to call relatives.

In one woman's case, her child was used as a literal hostage. When the spectre of the police was raised, however, Vernon immediately gave in and relinquished the child and the woman has managed to break away more or less completely.

Targets which these people like are Adventist colleges.

Amidst all of this evil, however, it is surprising to note that there are some sincere people who really know very little of what is happening. Most of these are old and frail and don't have much to do with all the bad business that goes on. These people are being exploited.

Present Facts

This movement is currently situated in England, and the US, with followers from New Zealand and Canada. I'd say the total number of followers is about 160 not including children.

There are three locations in Texas. One in Waco, one in Palestine, and one in Dallas. I have been unable to locate the exact address in Dallas. The one in Palestine is mostly abandoned and need not concern anyone.

There are two known locations in California. There might be a third. One is in Pomona California, while the other is in La Verne California. I have an address in Carlton Nottingham England which seems to be a location.

One of the tactics used by the group, to allow foreign members to stay at Mount Carmel is to marry them off the members who are United States citizens. There are four such marriages known to have occurred. Because the situation is quite delicate, I can only say that certain government agencies are looking into the activities of this organization.

The majority of Vernon's followers are people in trouble. Many want out but are unable physically and spiritually to make the break. The few bad apples are really bad.

This whole business shows one thing clearly. Adventists should know their Bibles. I believe SDA schools are pitifully inadequate to this task. Most Bible classes are a joke and people do not take them seriously. More importantly, however, parents should teach their children good solid Scripture. This should be the main focus in the life rather than cable television, the latest video, or latest heavy metal album.

I hope that, if nothing else, this document will impress these facts clearly. May God clean up this mess soon.

Final Remarks

The mind boggles at how anyone could actually believe such doctrine. What makes matters even more unbelievable is that most members of this organization are ex-Seventh-day Adventists. Among the members are a lawyer who graduated from Harvard Law School, a computer programmer, nurses and a number of other college graduates.

So far the major obstacle in rescuing these people has been Vernon's communications ban. But when people do communicate there is only one approach which has worked: the Bible. Rather than expressing horror and shock at such doctrines, and "turning away," it is much better to biblical show where Mr. Howell (who has legally changed his name to David Koresh) is incorrect.[22]

You can imagine that Ellen White is held in little or no esteem by these people and Mr. Howell (Koresh) is desperately trying to relegate the Bible to the same revolting status. But he has not yet managed to do this. So long as he has not, members can still be reached through the most powerful weapon on earth, the Scriptures.

An unfortunate side effect of a group like this is that it discourages persons from exploring the Bible in order to find new truths. After all, what if those truths lead one to another cult

similar to the one described in this document? This sort of group can cause an established and well-meaning denomination to become very institutionalized, afraid to expand its understanding of God, relying instead on the same beliefs and practices without any thought to the changing times or to the inborn desire of man to learn more.

I believe the solution to this dilemma is found in the following passage in Romans.

(Romans 1:16-21 KJV)

(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (17) For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

(18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; (19) Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed {it} unto them. (20) For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, {even} his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (21) Because that, when they knew God, they glorified {him} not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

How does idolatry begin? What caused the first man to bow down to an image? From Paul's account above, it seems to have been because man knew who and what God was. But they were not happy with this Revelation. Instead, they allowed their imagination to conjure up more about God than God had revealed of Himself. In attempting to be wise, man became foolish.

This is exactly what the Vernonites, have done. Mr. Howell was not happy with the plain statements of scripture, and the plain truths of the gospel. Thus began his quest for a newer, higher understanding of God. But there are some bounds which God has forbidden us to pass.

GAL 1:8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than

that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (KJV)

Exploring God's word can be both enjoyable and rewarding. So long as one adheres to the boundaries, set up by that Word, he need have no fear of straying into an organization such as the Branch Davidian movement. Do not allow your imagination to become vain. Indeed, truth which is based on one's imagination is not worthy to be called truth.

Studying God's word is much like climbing a mountain. There are certain rules, and safety precautions which one should follow. Ignore those, and you are in danger of losing your life. If you become too comfortable, and sit in one place, you will never reach your goal. So by all means, climb the mountain. Just make sure your ropes are securely in place.

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- [1]. Eschatology is a theological term which refers to the study of apocalyptic or last day events.
- [2]. The term "third angel" is often used in Seventh-day Adventist circles to denote the last, or one of the last, messages which God's people will give to the world before Christ's second coming. The term derives from Revelation 14:6-12 which shows three angels, each proclaiming a message. These are, in brief: The hour of God's judgment is come, Babylon is fallen, and a warning not to worship the beast. At present, however, the Branch Davidian splinter groups believe that there are from four to seven angels' messages to be given to the world. Those who presently work from Branch Davidian headquarters (Waco Texas) believe that there are seven messages, and that they have the seventh or last. The main body of Seventh-day Adventists, that is to say, the official Seventh-day Adventist denomination, believes that there are three angels' message. The reader can appreciate the variety of differing beliefs in this area.
- [3]. Victor T. Houteff, The Shepherd's Rod, vol. 2 (General Association of Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists: 1932) p. 10. The General Association of Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists no longer exists. The bolded portions of this quotation are actually found in Mr. Houteff's manuscript. A type is defined as either an historical event, or a religious ritual which foreshadows a future event. An antitype is that future event itself. The best example of a type, antitype relationship is found in the sacrificial rituals of the Old Testament, which met their fulfillment in the death of Christ on the cross.
- [4]. SDA is a commonly used abbreviation for Seventh-day Adventists.
- [5]. This is another term used in Adventist circles. The term denotes those writings considered to be inspired, but which do not belong to the Bible. The main body of Seventh-day Adventists often refer to Ellen White's writings as "the spirit of prophecy." Those belonging to the Shepherd's Rod would include Victor Houteff's writings in this category, while other splinter groups might add Ben Roden's writings to this body of works. The term "spirit of prophecy" comes from Revelation 19:10, which describes the testimony of Jesus Christ as the spirit of prophecy (King James Version). For the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists, the term is simply a common designation.
- [6]. The references here are to Isaiah 8 in the King James Version of the Bible.
- [7]. This book, originally published in 1888, was written by Ellen G. White.
- [8]. Ben L. Roden The Leviticus of The Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists The Branch Supplement (The Universal Publishing Assn: Waco Texas) 1972. p. 9.
- [9]. This allegation of illegality is based on some statements which Vernon's lawyer/follower Douglas Wayne Martin made to me. He told me that the property had actually been set aside for war veterans but that the real estate agent had struck up a deal with the organization in the hope that no one would discover the "illegal deal."
- [10]. The tracts referred to here are those published by Mr. Farrell. I have retained this reference because the name Eliakim has been circulated as being the main name by which Mr. Howell describes himself and his ministry.
- [11]. Nassco Inc. The King James Version of the Bible: computer Edition, (Nassco Inc: Lubbock Texas, 1984). The words contained in braces { } reflect the italicized words in the King James Version of the Bible. For the purposes of quoting Scripture, I employ Nassco Inc.'s CompuBible program. The bolded words are strictly my emphasis.
- [12]. For the purposes of this discussion, I employ the term cult, or cultism, with the following definition in mind. A cult is a religious organization whose leadership and spiritual inspiration derive from, and center around a single person.
- [13]. Isaiah 45:13 is, in fact, speaking of Cyrus. But the context is very clear. God will make

straight all the paths for Cyrus as indicated in 45:2. Cyrus's rise to power would be smooth. Indeed, God did bless Cyrus II of Persia and his rise to power was accomplished through God's design. He was the one who allowed the temple to be built again.

[14]. Vernon Howell taught that the King James Version of the Bible is the only true and uncorrupted English translation of the Bible. Hence, many Vernonite doctrines are based on misunderstandings of King James English. Mr. Howell believed this about the King James because, according to him, all churches, save the Seventh-day Adventist church, fell in 1844 and were no longer used by God. Howell taught that the King James Version was the only English translation made before 1844 and therefore, the only English translation made while God still favored the churches. He teaches that any translation made after 1844 is made by "Babylon" and therefore untrustworthy.

[15]. This was how Mr. Howell justified his interpretation of vessels in Isaiah 52 and 22 as people.

[16]. Newbold College is a Seventh-day Adventist college. I should point out here that this is not strictly a theological school. Most Seventh-day Adventist colleges are Liberal Arts schools, which sport a wide ranging curriculum. The standard of education is usually quite high.

[17]. Ellen White (born Ellen Harmon 1827-1915) is one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Her writings are considered, by most Seventh-day Adventists, to be inspired, although her writings are not considered on an equal footing with the Bible. Mrs. White wrote on a variety of topics ranging from theological issues to health reform. She was responsible for setting up a number of health institutions throughout the United States and the world. She was also instrumental in setting up, and implementing the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist educational system.

[18]. Brisbane and Melbourne are two of Australia's largest cities.

[19]. This amazing statement is from a direct transcript of one of his tapes. We have both the tape and the transcript so there is no way Mr. Howell can deny this statement. The tape was made in September/October 1989. The Australians were starting to break away and Vernon, in his arrogance, tried to keep their loyalty through fear. He sent them this Bible study. It was contained on a 90 minute tape. As far as I am concerned, this is public domain material.

[20]. The following, all the way to #2 below, are notes taken from a former member's Bible.

[21]. All of the above quotations are taken from the same study. Vernon has been very careful to document as little as possible. I think you can see why. There are other tapes and eyewitness accounts, but I hope this will suffice at present. These other tapes have not been transcribed.

[22]. The Koresh comes from the Hebrew word for Cyrus. See Isaiah 45:1. Thus, his name means, literally, David Cyrus.