

which he invokes the hybrid category of the “Christian *mudang*.”

FRANCISCA CHO (2005)

**KORESH, DAVID.** On Sunday morning, February 28, 1993, David Koresh (1959–1993), the messianic leader of the small band of approximately 130 followers known as the Branch Davidians, dramatically captured headline attention throughout the United States. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) had staged an armed raid on Mount Carmel, the Branch Davidians’ communal residence outside Waco, Texas. The rambling wood-frame building was home to forty-one men, forty-six women, and forty-three children under age eighteen, all fiercely loyal to their leader.

The ATF arrived at the property in an eighty-vehicle convoy including two cattle car trailers loaded with seventy-six heavily armed agents, while three helicopters circled overhead. A fierce gun-battle followed, lasting for several hours and leaving four ATF agents killed and twenty wounded. Koresh and four of his followers were also wounded and six others were fatally shot. Who shot first remains in dispute.

The ATF had a warrant authorizing it to search for improperly registered firearms. Koresh, claiming that the stockpile of weapons the Branch Davidians collected were all legally acquired and were for self-defense in case the government did try to interfere with its activities, said that he had nothing to hide and that when the agents charged the building with guns blazing he and his followers had acted in self-defense. The ATF maintained that its attempt to serve the warrant was met with a hail of bullets. Koresh and his followers refused to exit the building and surrender.

With federal agents dead the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was immediately called in and took over what became a fifty-one-day stand-off that attracted worldwide media attention. Although Koresh agreed to send out a selected group of thirty-five, mostly elderly folk and children, eighty-three Branch Davidians remained through the entire period. (Six Branch Davidians were off the property at the time of the raid.)

The stand-off ended on April 19, 1993, when the FBI attempted to force Koresh and his followers to surrender by an assault with tanks equipped to disassemble the building while inserting a military-grade tear-gas inside. After several hours, and not a single surrender, a fire mysteriously broke out and the entire place quickly went up in flames. How the fire began, and who might have been responsible, remains unresolved. At the end of the day, Koresh and seventy-three of his followers were dead, including twenty-one children. Only nine followers managed to escape the fire.

**KORESH’S EARLY YEARS.** Before this tragic confrontation with U.S. federal authorities David Koresh was virtually unknown outside his tiny band of followers, the bulk of whom were living with him in Texas.

He was born Vernon Howell on August 17, 1959, in Houston, Texas, to Bonnie Clark, a fifteen-year-old unwed mother. (It was not until he was thirty-one years old, in August 1990, that he legally changed his name to David Koresh based on his own messianic claims.) Howell’s grandmother, Earline Clark, assisted in his upbringing during his early years. His mother married Roy Haldeman in 1964.

Howell grew up in various east Texas towns and eventually dropped out of high school in the tenth grade. He worked as a carpenter and took various other odd jobs. As early as junior high school, he showed an avid interest in three things: playing the electric guitar, working on old cars, and studying the Bible. He had an uncanny ability to memorize, and as a teenager could quote hundreds of chapters of the Bible with word-for-word exactitude.

**KORESH’S SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.** When Howell was twenty years old he was baptized into his mother’s Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tyler, Texas. He avidly accepted the basic doctrines of the Adventist denomination, including its belief that the nineteenth-century founder of the movement, Ellen G. White (1827–1915), was a divinely inspired prophetess of the last days.

Although Howell amazed all who heard him with his knowledge of the Bible, he was a vocal and controversial figure and began to develop certain apocalyptic views considered heretical by his church, causing his membership to be revoked. He was convinced that the “living voice of prophecy” had surely not ceased when Sister White died in 1915. He maintained that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had become complacent, lethargic, and worldly, having lost the original apocalyptic fervor generated in 1844 by the preaching of William Miller (1782–1849).

**KORESH AND THE BRANCH DAVIDIANS.** In 1981 Howell visited, and subsequently joined, the Branch Davidian community headquartered on the Mount Carmel property ten miles outside Waco, Texas. At the time, the group was led by Lois Roden, a former Seventh-day Adventist in her late sixties, who claimed to represent a continuation of the prophetic inspiration that had once resided with White. The origins of the group trace back to 1934 when Seventh-day Adventist Victor Houteff (1885–1955), a Bulgarian immigrant to the United States, broke with the parent body to form his own movement that he called the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. He was convinced of his own prophetic gifts and saw as his divinely appointed mission the gathering of a final remnant group of God’s faithful (144,000 taken from *Revelation 7*) before the imminent second coming of Christ. Lois and her husband, Ben Roden, had assumed leadership of the group in the early 1960s and the name Branch Davidian took hold. The Branch Davidians emphasized four main beliefs in contrast to the parent body:

1. A living succession of contemporary prophets following White.
2. The calling together of a remnant group of God’s faithful and obedient followers.

3. The imminent return of Christ and his literal worldwide reign in Jerusalem.
4. The observance of the biblical Jewish festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Howell's fervor, dedication, and particularly his vast knowledge of the Bible served him well. It became obvious to all that he was becoming Lois Roden's anointed successor, despite the opposition of her son, George. The two traveled to Israel together in 1983, and rumors of a sexual relationship, and even a nonlegal "wedding," were rampant. (Ben Roden died in 1978, three years before Howell's arrival.) In 1984 George Roden and Howell got into a gunfight when Roden claimed he could raise a deceased member of the group from the dead and Howell was trying to take a photograph of the corpse to show to the sheriff's department. By this time Howell was claiming to have received the Seventh Angel's Message mentioned in *Revelation* 10:7, thus joining the ranks of seven inspired end-time prophets that included, as Koresh counted them, Miller, White, Houteff, his wife Florence, and Ben and Lois Roden.

**THE COMING OF A SECOND CHRIST.** In 1984 Howell legally married Rachel Jones, the fourteen-year-old daughter of longtime Branch Davidian Perry Jones and Mary Jones. By this time he had become the dominant influence in the group and several of the leading members had accepted his claim to be the herald of the final prophetic message before Christ's return. In 1985 Howell and now-pregnant Rachel visited Israel where he, like Jesus of old, hoped to confound the rabbis in Jerusalem with his prophetic message.

It was there he had his greatest and most defining religious experience. He claimed that he was taken up to heaven, that he was shown and taught all the prophetic mysteries of the Bible, and that he was given the ability to open the book "sealed with seven seals" mentioned in *Revelation* 6. Implicit in this claim was the idea that Howell had become a kind of second Christ or Messiah figure, in that he, as the chosen "Lamb," was the only one in Heaven or on Earth empowered to open the Seven Seals. He subsequently took the name Koresh, the Hebrew name for the Persian king Cyrus, who is actually called a "messiah" in *Isaiah* 45:1. Just as the ancient Cyrus conquered the Babylonian empire, Koresh saw himself as a kind of spiritual counterpart who would vanquish the forces of the "Babylonian" governments of the world. The first name David signified his spiritual link with the messianic line of King David of ancient Israel.

David Koresh never claimed to be Jesus Christ, though he did claim that as a kind of second or final messiah, he had received the same level of inspiration that Jesus had received at his own baptism. He referred to this as the "Christ-spirit." He pointed to messianic texts such as *Psalms* 40 and 45 that he was convinced predicted the coming of a final "sinful" messiah who would appear at the end of the age. Not only would this figure have the normal weaknesses and "sins" of any ordinary human being, but he would marry multiple

wives and sire children who were destined to rule with him in Jerusalem as King of the Earth. While Jesus would maintain his heavenly rule at the right hand of God, Koresh interpreted the second coming of Christ as the coming of a *second* Christ. Like Jesus, he, too, would be slain by his enemies, but would be resurrected thereafter to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Those faithful Branch Davidians who remained with him to the end would have places of honor in the new world government.

**KORESH'S FINAL YEARS.** In 1989 Koresh dissolved all marriages among the Branch Davidian members and instituted a policy of celibacy for the group. He promised each person that he or she would find his or her true soul mate when the Kingdom of God arrived. He took several of the women, some underage, and others previously married, as his own wives and fathered twelve of the children who died in the fire. Koresh claimed these special children were the firstborn of the new millennial generation, uncontaminated by the corruptions of society. (Although Koresh and his followers had been previously investigated for allegations of child abuse the Texas authorities had found no substance to the charges.)

Koresh prided himself as a Texan and a legal gun owner exercising his constitutional rights. The group was adamant that the stockpile of weapons they collected were all legally acquired and were for self-defense in case the government did try to interfere with their activities. Koresh had prepared his followers for a final confrontation with the forces of Babylon, as he called them. However, he expected that to happen in 1995, and in Jerusalem, not in Texas. The irony in the whole Waco tragedy is that the FBI unwittingly delivered to Koresh and the Branch Davidians a kind of preemptive apocalypse—but in a place and at a time that they never anticipated.

**SEE ALSO** New Religious Movements, articles on New Religious Movements and Millennialism, New Religious Movements and Violence, and Scriptures of New Religious Movements; White, Ellen Gould.

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JAMES D. TABOR (2005)

**KOSMAS AITOLOS** (1714–1779), also known as Father Kosmas, was a Christian saint, priest, monk, popular preacher, and educator. Kosmas was born in Aitolia, Greece, and received his elementary education in his home province. After spending some time as a teacher, he entered the theological academy on Mount Athos then headed by Euerios Voulgares, one of the eminent Greek educators of the eighteenth century. Shortly afterward, Kosmas became a member of the monastery of Philotheou (one of the twenty monasteries of Mount Athos), where he later was ordained a priest.

Within a year, Kosmas felt called to leave the monastery and become an itinerant preacher. With the permission of the patriarch of Constantinople, Serapheim II (r. 1761–1763), Kosmas began his preaching ministry, which lasted until his death by hanging in 1779 at the hands of the Ottoman authorities, who accused him of, among other things, being a Russian spy.

What alarmed the Ottoman authorities was the great popularity enjoyed by Kosmas. His honesty and direct manner of preaching in the language of the people, his reputation for sanctity, his frequent visits to remote villages and hamlets, and his total disregard for material possessions caused hundreds, sometimes thousands, of men and women to follow him while he traveled from village to village.

Kosmas preached a gospel of love and concern for the fair and just treatment of women and children. In addition, he laid great stress on education, founding ten secondary schools and over two hundred elementary schools. Often he secured both teachers and funds for these schools. He believed that an educated laity would be able to rise to a higher standard of moral and ethical living and thus be better prepared to resist the temptation, due to discrimination as well as social and economic pressures, to convert to Islam. Kosmas can truly be credited with effecting enormous changes in education and in the moral behavior of the people of western Greece and southern Albania.

Honored as a saint in his lifetime, Kosmas remains one of the most popular saints of the Greek Orthodox church. He has been given the sobriquet "teacher of the nation."

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NOMIKOS MICHAEL VAPORIS (1987)

**KOTLER, AHARON** (1892–1962), was a rabbi and prominent educator in eastern Europe and the United States. A child prodigy, Kotler was sent as a youth to study in the famous *musar-yeshivah* of Slobodka (near modern-day Kaunas, Lithuania), which emphasized Talmudic studies as well as ethics and self-improvement. After his marriage to the daughter of Isser Zalman Meltzer, the head of the *yeshivah* in Slutsk, White Russia, Kotler moved to Slutsk and began to teach in the *yeshivah*. In the wake of World War I he moved the *yeshivah* from the Soviet-controlled area to Kletzk in Poland. There he became one of the best-known figures in Polish rabbinical circles. He was the youngest member of the Council of Scholars and Sages of Agudat Yisra'el.

In 1935 Kotler visited the United States, where he discussed the need for an American *yeshivah* that would be designed not for the training of rabbis and religious professionals but for the study of Torah for its own sake. The discussions came to naught and he returned to Poland.

Following the German occupation of Poland, Kotler immigrated in 1941 to the United States, where he was to have his most lasting influence. He was driven by the concern that with the destruction of the *yeshivot* in eastern Europe, new centers of Torah study would have to be established in America. Despite widespread doubt that the atmosphere of intense Torah study that had prevailed in eastern Europe could be re-created in the United States, Kotler persevered and in 1943 established the Beit Midrash Gevohah in Lakewood, New Jersey. The school was designed for students of post-high-school age, and its curriculum was made up solely of religious studies with no admixture of secular studies. The school grew rapidly and by the 1980s had more than eight hundred students. Active in the Jewish day-school movement as well, Kotler also helped to intensify Jewish education on the primary level. One result of his influence was a decrease of cooperation between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jewish groups, for he was strongly opposed to the participation of Orthodox bodies in associations that included Reform or Conservative rabbis.

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