

**Register of the
Branch Davidians
of Waco, Texas
Documents
Collection 399**

Center for Adventist Research
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Andrews University
Berrien Springs, MI 49104
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Processed by: Jonathan Gomide

Branch Davidian of Waco, Texas—Documents

Collection 399

Background

The Shepherd's Rod is a breakaway group from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They were most active from their founding around 1930 through the early 1960s. The initial leader of the Shepherd's Rod was Victor Houteff, an Adventist layman and immigrant to the United States from Bulgaria. In the early 1930s, he presented ideas on the 144,000 and religious purification to Adventist church leaders in southern California. Most Shepherd's Rod adherents believed that Seventh-day Adventists had relinquished their faith in the imminent Parousia—the second coming of Jesus Christ. Church leaders ultimately disfellowshipped Houteff and his followers. He moved to Waco, Texas, where he established the headquarters of his movement in 1935. Through the years, many different groups splintered off from the main body of Shepherd's Rod over doctrinal differences and located at various sites across the United States. Houteff's successors eventually called themselves the General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. There has never been a formal connection between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Branch Davidians following Victor Houteff's disfellowshipping.

The Davidians developed a tight-knit religious group that eschewed entertainment and favored self-sustaining methods of communal living. After Victor Houteff's death in 1955, his wife, Florence, became the leader of the community. Following a failed prediction from Florence, Ben Roden assumed leadership of the Davidians, which he held until his death in 1978.

Upon Ben Roden's death, members of the 'Mount Carmel' community, as the Davidians called their compound, were torn between following Roden's wife, Lois, or his son George. Lois' death in 1986 led to George becoming the sole leader, albeit briefly. A young would-be rock star and former Seventh-day Adventist named Vernon Howell had arrived at the commune in 1981. He quickly became close to Lois Roden, even having an affair with her. By 1986, following Lois' death, a power struggle ensued between George Roden and Vernon Howell.

Howell left Waco with a group of followers and travelled to eastern Texas. He returned in 1987 with seven followers. Armed with semiautomatic rifles and 400 rounds of ammunition, tensions escalated between the two groups until a gunfight broke out, resulting in Roden being shot in the chest and hands. During the subsequent trial, the jury found Howell's followers not guilty, even though a verdict for Howell was not agreed upon.

Howell established himself as leader of the Davidians in Waco and changed his name to David Koresh. Activities with his "spiritual wives" (many of whom were teenage girls), coupled with a retail gun business caught the attention of federal government officials. In 1993, agents of the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) attempted a forced entry into the Mount Carmel compound. Four BATF agents and six Davidians were killed. A 51-day siege ensued, climaxing when the FBI attacked the compound with tanks and tear gas on April 19, 1993. A fire erupted resulting in 82 Branch Davidians being killed, including children.

Scope and Content

There is a wealth of sources and scholarly work available on the Branch Davidians. This collection, however, stands apart for its insights into the rhetoric and eschatology of Branch Davidians in the years and months leading up to the Waco siege of 1993. This primary-source collection contains diary fragments, sermon drafts, sketches of prophetic timelines, drawings of Davidian symbols, and a fragment with Koresh's signature. A significant portion of the collection is devoted to the seals of Revelation 6. Other important sections include manuscripts on the hierarchy of the angels and notes on the Trinity. Significantly, one of the documents (Folder 19) was written during the siege of the Mount Carmel compound.

The events surrounding the Waco siege were regrettable and ultimately brutal. This collection reveals Davidian leaders' attempts—through sermons, homilies, and exhortation—to create a bond of unity through a fundamentally eschatological system of belief. The Davidian rhetoric, at least shown in these documents, is calm and poised, with no calls to violence anywhere to be seen. Another distinctive feature is the style of the prose employed. The prose is infused with biblical language, the writing itself is strikingly devoid of punctuation, and, in some cases, there is no syntactic structure.

Researchers should be aware that additional materials by or about the Shepherd's Rod or Branch Davidians are also found elsewhere in the Center for Adventist Research.

Arrangement

Some of the papers show signs of water and fire damage. The papers, when originally received, were in random order and had to be arranged into the order we now have. In some cases, matches were made according to handwriting and syntactic structure. Others (such as Folders 12-17), were arranged according to handwriting and page numbers.

The first part of the collection (Papers by Date) includes papers that are dated. The second part features those papers that are undated. In this way, the second part of the collection is arranged by topic, with the graphs and sketches being featured last. Titles with no brackets retain the original designations from the manuscripts, whereas bracketed titles were added to papers that had no titles, respecting the original themes.

Provenance

After the siege and burning of the Mount Carmel compound in 1993, the FBI selected several buildings for document retrieval. The papers in this collection, however, came from one of the buildings not selected for document retrieval. One of the workers in the demolition crew at Waco pulled these papers from a dumpster and put them in storage in 1993. The children of the workman sold the papers to a rare book dealer in 2023, who in turn sold them to the Center for Adventist Research.

Extent

1 small Hollinger Box [.21 linear feet]

Use

All users of this collection are required to complete the "Application to Use Unpublished Records," and to observe the regulation specified in the "Patron Agreement" and "Researcher's Code of Conduct." All records in this collection are open and available for research. Citation for this collection:

Folder ____, Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas, Documents (Collection 399), Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

Branch Davidian of Waco, Texas—Documents Collection 399

Papers by Date

(from oldest to youngest)

Folder 0: **Provenance Emails**, November 2023 to January 2024, 4 pp.
Emails on the provenance of the collection.

Folder 1: **Spiritual Battles of Davidians**, July 17, 1988, 1 p.
A homiletical discourse encouraging Davidians to persevere in the “spiritual battlefield.” Deals with spiritual warfare in the context of victory over sin and the apocalypse. Signed at the end.

Folder 2: **The Tapestry of Time**, August 17, 1988, 1 p.
A double-sided loose-leaf fragment on the first seal of Revelation 6:1-2. A hexagram is sketched on the upper right-hand corner. The rider of the first seal is described as the “sage of ages in prophecy.” Alternative views of the rider’s identity are stated. The document concludes that the rider is a mysterious warrior who is on a “prelude to destroy,” a position that is deemed “crystal clear.”

Folder 3: **[Sheaf Offerings]**, 1988, 1 p.
A short study on the meaning of the sheaf offerings. According to the document, sheaf offerings were “a demonstration of gratitude, dependence on Gods [sic] provision.”

Folder 4: **Righteousness**, November 1988, 1 p.
A homily urging the audience to live with love and righteousness in face of the imminent end of the world.

Folder 5: **Blessings of Communal Support**, September 17, 1989, 3 pp.
A discourse on the communal living of the Branch Davidians. It is argued that communal support is a fundamental tenet of the Davidian belief system. The bottom right-hand corner of the last page is signed.

Folder 6: **Near End**, October 12, 1989, 1 p.

A homily encouraging Davidians to live with “the transformative power of faith,” in preparation for the “end days.”

Folder 7: **The Weeks [sic] Sermon of the Seals**, October 12, 1990, 1 p.

A draft citing Hosea 2:17 and Isaiah 57. Virtually no treatment of the seals.

Folder 8: **Angelic Structure**, June 21, 1991, 1 p.

An expository note on the “hierarchical structure” of the angels. The document argues that the book of Hebrews describes their order.

Folder 9: **When a seal has been broken? [sic]**, September 17, 1991, 1 p.

A collage of quotes from the book of Hebrews. Quotes Hebrews 9:24, 10:12-14, 26, 29. All quotes are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Folder 10: **As Davidians we share a bond...**, November 18, 1991, 1 p.

A homily on the importance of the Davidians’ spiritual brotherhood. The thesis is that the world “will come to know themselves as they navigate their own darkness with the light of our union.”

Folder 11: **Thoughts for the Day and for My Family**, September 22, 1992, 2 pp.

A description and critique of a sermon on the gospels. “Branch Davidians” is written on both pages, with the star of David sketched beneath the name. The first page begins with a description of Pilate losing his soul for condemning Christ, then critiques the “independent place” of the sermon in question. Page 2 states that the sermon’s position was “not unique.” On the left margin of the second page are two hearts, three question marks, and a note stating, “need more detail.”

Folder 12: **7 Seals Unveiled / First Seal**, December 21, 1992, 3 pp., double-sided.

A draft of a sermon on the seven seals. The first page states that the sermon will be “a bit more intense and exciting” than the previous week’s sermon. The seven seals are introduced within the context of sanctification. “...the man who feels the fear [sic] has an uncleansed heart and need [sic] sanctification within[.]” The sermon probes into the meaning of Revelation 6:1-2 and concludes by calling listeners to “be part of the divine conquest.”

Folder 13: **The Second Seal**, December 21, 1992, 2 pp., double-sided.

The second part of the sermon on the seals. Begins by quoting Revelation 6:3-4. The red horse, it is argued, symbolizes “conflict and strife,” and the large sword is “a call to spiritual warfare.” Concludes with an appeal to “embrace the call to actively pursue peace [,] to be instruments of reconciliation[.]”

Folder 14: **The Black Horse and the Scales of Justice: Unveiling the Third Seal**, December 22, 1992, 4 pp., 3 double-sided.

The third part of the sermon on the seals, dealing with Revelation 6:5-6. Quotes the biblical passage, then argues that the black horse is a “symbol of famine and economical challenge.” Page 2 features a large sketch of the star of David in the middle of the sermon. Concludes with a brief homiletical application. The last page is an unfinished fragment on the third seal.

Folder 15: **[Fourth Seal]**, December 23, 1992, 2 pp., double-sided.

Fourth part of the sermon on the seals. It is argued that the pale horse is a “symbol of mortality and impermanence.”

Folder 16: **The Fifth Seal**, December 25, 1992, 2 pp., double-sided.

Fifth part of the sermon on the seals. Begins with a biblical quotation, then presents an exposition of the fifth seal in commentary-style—a heading, followed by an explanation. Concludes by calling the Davidians to find “comfort beyond the pale horse.”

Folder 17: **The Sixth Seal / The Seventh Seal**, December 26, 1992, 3 pp., double-sided.

The first two pages are on the sixth seal. The back of the second page deals with the seventh seal. The third page is a fragment on the sixth seal.

Folder 18: **[Apocalyptic Symbolism and History]**, January 17, 1993, 2 pp.

A two-page fragment on apocalyptic symbolism and history, possibly sermon notes. Revelation is stated as beginning “with the founding of Israel as an independent nation circa 1948 and then the rapture of the church[.]” Several apocalyptic interpretations are presented with roughshod writing. The “Protestant Separation” and “Later [sic] day Saints” are mentioned in the final paragraph.

Folder 19: **[Siege Homily]**, March 21, 1993, 1 p., double-sided.

A homily written during the Waco siege. The writer encourages the audience to focus on faith, compassion, and love. The homily focuses exclusively on spiritual exhortation. The flip side of the page features two sets of numbers.

Undated Papers by Topic

Folder 20: **Trinity**, n.d., 4 pp.

Notes on the Trinity, giving an elementary overview of the Godhead. It is stated that "Gabriel belongs to the Holy Spirit," "Michael belongs to the father as God," and "Raphael [sic] belongs to the son as god [sic]." Pages two, three, and four deal with the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, respectively.

Folder 21: **Messiah**, n.d., 1 p.

A fragment on the meaning of "messiah." Begins with a Hebrew definition, then states that the Messiah will "usher in an era of peace, justice, and ultimate redemption of the Jewish people." Written in the same hand as the "Trinity" papers (Folder. 20).

Folder 22: **Understanding the Archangels / Angelic Structure**, n.d., 2 pp.

Notes on the "celestial hierarchy." Lists the angelic realm in descending hierarchical order. Written in the same hand as the "Messiah" and "Trinity" papers (Folders. 20, 21).

Folder 23: **Arch Angel [sic] Gabriel**, n.d., 1 p.

Fragment on the roles and place of Gabriel in the heavenly hierarchy. Contains a sketch of two angels on the upper right-hand corner.

Folder 24: **Seraphim and Cherubim**, n.d., 2 pp.

The first page is on the seraphim, and the second on the cherubim. Star of David is sketched on the upper right-hand corner of the first page.

Folder 25: **Lucifer the Archangel**, n.d., 3 pp.

Three pages on Lucifer's role in heaven, rebellion, and subsequent expulsion. First page is torn in half.

Folder 26: **[The Influence of David Koresh]**, n.d., 1 p.

A journal fragment on a tense episode among the Branch Davidians. "Lately David [Koresh] has been very distant the past few days and it is reflecting on everyone. I hate it when it feels like I'm walking on egg shells [sic]." The fragment concludes by stating that the heat is unbearable, in the triple digits "for weeks now."

Folder 27: **[David Koresh Signature]**, n.d.

A small cutout from a larger page. "David Koresh" is written in cursive.

Folder 28: **The Messiah**, n.d., 1 p.

A 12-line poem on the role and mission of "the Messiah."

Folder 29: **7 Year Tribulation Broken Down [Prophetic Timeline]**, n.d., 3 pp.

A 3-page prophetic timeline. Begins with creation and concludes with the apocalypse. Heavy emphasis on the end times.

Folder 30: **[Hexagram Sketch]**, n.d., 1 p.

Sketch of a hexagram. Each point features a number from 1-7, with 4 at the center.

Folder 31: **Why do we fret**, n.d., 1 p.

A fragment containing a 6-line poem, with the star of David drawn on the top and bottom. Sun and clouds are sketched on the upper right-hand corner, with "good morning" written below the sun.

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