

THE WACO SEIGE, TEXAS

Nearly 80 people died in the inferno at Waco, Texas on 19th April 1993. Many facts are still unknown. A religious sect known as 'Branch Davidians', a splinter group from the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) had all the features of a religious cult. David Koresh the leader, with his followers, believed they were an Army of God called to prepare for the Apocalypse. New Mount Carmel Center, just outside Waco, Texas was a compound for their headquarters.



David Koresh's real name was Vernon Howell, born in 1959. He joined the Branch Davidian movement in 1983. Koresh was a handsome rock musician with a guitar who played and sang in church services at Mt Carmel.

After various power struggles, he quickly worked his way into a position of influence. He married the daughter of a senior church elder in 1984. She was 14 and he was 24, which was legal under Texas law. He changed his name to David Koresh in 1990. David (after King David), Koresh (after Persian King, Cyrus). He was a charismatic leader, whose followers were inspired by him and he knew the Bible inside out. Koresh recruited other members from the SDA, not only from the US, but also from the UK and Australia. Koresh claimed to be the 'Messiah'

His claim to be 'the Lamb of God' was encouraged and supported by his followers. Eventually he announced he had the right to sleep with any woman in the movement in order to 'spread his holy seed', some of his followers disapproved and left, others accepted it. Koresh wanted to have 24 children to occupy the 24 thrones in the Book of Revelation. They were to serve as ruling elders during the millennium, after the return of Christ. It is reported he had slept with at least 14 of the women and girls in the community, some were mature and married to male members of the movement, some were young, which included the 12-year old sister of his one legal wife.

The Branch Davidians believed that the Lord's return was near. Koresh claimed he cracked the code of the Seven Seals in Revelation and told followers the Lord wanted him to build an Army of God. Koresh believed he was the group's final prophet. They began to stockpile weapons, ammunition and food supplies in preparation.



Life inside of Waco community was very disciplined, Koresh was fully in charge. Their diet consisted of only fruit, cornflakes and popcorn. Men and boys were to rise at 5.30 a.m. for training. Men and women were to sleep separately, even married couples. Women had to wear long blouses, no make-up or jewellery. The evenings were spent listening to Koresh's sermons, his followers listened to all his teachings intently

for hours. He could preach for more than ten hours at a time. He had memorised the Bible from a young age. He believed that the prophecies in the book of Daniel would be fulfilled in Waco, and The Mt Carmel Center would be the Davidic kingdom. Koresh's life was centred around the seven seals of Revelation.

In February 1993, the ATF attempted a raid in a search for illegal weapons and ammunition. Koresh had already told his followers a confrontation with the government would take place, and his followers believed the raid to be a confirmation of his prophecies. It is still unclear who fired shots first. Four ATF agents were killed and six of Koresh's followers were injured. Koresh was shot in the wrist and the waist. This led to the 51-day standoff with negotiations. Koresh's talks with negotiators was mostly biblical speech. Koresh was believed to have said to the FBI at one point, *"I am dealing with God, not you."* The FBI finally ended the siege by firing CS gas and ramming buildings with tanks. The entire compound shortly after erupted in flames. 9 members of the movement escaped and over 80 died. The FBI claimed Koresh's followers had set fire to the compound, survivors claim it was started by the FBI's attack. The end result still led to ammunition and weapons exploding into an inferno and the deaths of over 80 people on April 19, 1993. Koresh died from a gunshot wound to the head during the fire, some believe he shot himself, but no-one knows for certain who killed him. The few survivors claim they were strip-searched. They were manacled and paraded in orange overalls and kept in prison for up to 300 days without trial.

The ATF had initially claimed that Koresh was inside the compound and a raid was the only way they could arrest him. Local shopkeepers and others claimed that Koresh was in town most days and could have been picked up peacefully. In August 1995, the ATF were cleared of any incompetence.