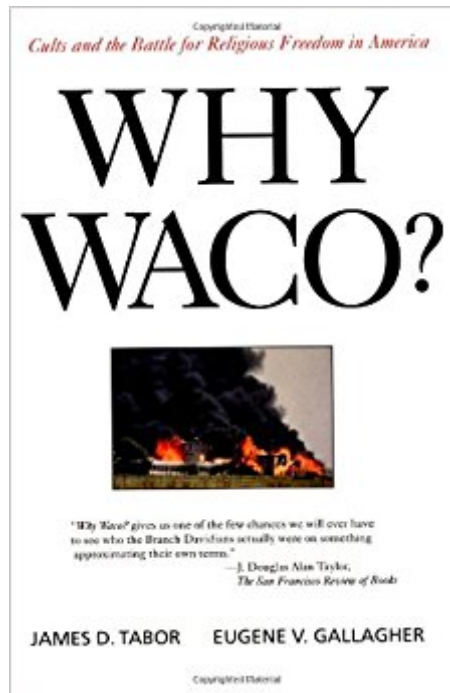


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# Why Waco?: Cults And The Battle For Religious Freedom In America



## Synopsis

The 1993 government assault on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, resulted in the deaths of four federal agents and eighty Branch Davidians, including seventeen children. Whether these tragic deaths could have been avoided is still debatable, but what seems clear is that the events in Texas have broad implications for religious freedom in America. James Tabor and Eugene Gallagher's bold examination of the Waco story offers the first balanced account of the siege. They try to understand what really happened in Waco: What brought the Branch Davidians to Mount Carmel? Why did the government attack? How did the media affect events? The authors address the accusations of illegal weapons possession, strange sexual practices, and child abuse that were made against David Koresh and his followers. Without attempting to excuse such actions, they point out that the public has not heard the complete story and that many media reports were distorted. The authors have carefully studied the Davidian movement, analyzing the theology and biblical interpretation that were so central to the group's functioning. They also consider how two decades of intense activity against so-called cults have influenced public perceptions of unorthodox religions. In exploring our fear of unconventional religious groups and how such fear curtails our ability to tolerate religious differences, *Why Waco?* is an unsettling wake-up call. Using the events at Mount Carmel as a cautionary tale, the authors challenge all Americans, including government officials and media representatives, to closely examine our national commitment to religious freedom.

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## Customer Reviews

Tabor, a University of North Carolina religious studies professor, was a consultant to lawyers mediating directly with David Koresh during the 51-day siege in Waco, Texas, in 1993 that left four federal agents dead and engulfed the Branch Davidian compound in flames, killing 74 members, including 21 children. He and Gallagher, a religious studies professor at Connecticut College, make a compelling case that the confrontation was avoidable and could have been resolved peacefully. Attorney General Janet Reno made her decision to end the siege by force, they claim, against her better judgment under pressure from officials who gave her reports containing unsupported allegations of child abuse and sexual misconduct among the Branch Davidians. Much less convincing is the authors' attempt to refute the media image of ex-Seventh Day Adventist Koresh as a cruel, megalomaniacal, polygamous fanatic who manipulated his devotees. Rejecting the label of "cult," the authors view the Branch Davidians and kindred groups as genuine, albeit unconventional, religious movements whose critics misunderstand the dynamics of charismatic leadership. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is a sober?and sobering?examination of the 1993 Branch Davidian crisis and its unsettling implications for church-state relations in the United States. Tabor (religious studies, Univ. of North Carolina) was there, talking with both David Koresh and the FBI and helping to contextualize Koresh's actions, reactions, and decisions in light of his belief system. Together with Gallagher (religious studies, Connecticut Coll.), he closely examines Davidian interpretations of biblical prophecy, analyzes popular media representations of unpopular religions, and questions the violent responses sparked by suggestions of cult. A 20-page appendix presents Koresh's unfinished manuscript on the Book of Revelation. An intelligent, thoroughly documented study, *Why Waco?* is especially important given the battle for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the Congressional hearings on Waco. Highly recommended, particularly for academic and church libraries. ?Bill Piekarski, Southwestern Coll. Lib., Chula Vista, Cal. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book was divided into 2 sections. The first section dealt directly with Waco and the incompetence of the officials that led to the fire (the author does not speculate how the fire started, which remains a mystery) he is of the opinion that the only way the Koresh could've been reasoned with was theologically. He says that the officials considered David Koresh's talk as "Bible Bible" but they should have been paying more attention. He believed that if someone with

the knowledge of the Scripture could've talk to him, he could've changed his mind and led to him coming out. Some of the agents outside were so ignorant of Scripture that they thought "the 7 seals" were animals. It was obvious that they were not connecting with Koresh on any kind of level. The author reveals that there was a biblical scholar that Koresh had talked to on other occasions who was willing to offer his expertise and talk to him, but the FBI and other agents turned him down. We will never know if he could've reasoned the Branch Davidians out of the complex. Apparently, Koresh believed that he was the new Messiah (not Jesus, as it was reported ~~that~~ he considered himself a prophet on the order of Jesus, but not Jesus himself) believed in Armageddon, so he believed he was going to be martyred and his Branch Davidians scattered, but he had always believed that this would happen in Israel. So the waters argument is that he could've been reasoned with using this as a wedge, by someone with a deep knowledge of biblical prophecy and the book of Revelation. It was the 2nd part of the book that annoyed me. The author dismisses the testimonies from people who left the Branch Davidians and told horror stories. He says they are like disgruntled husbands or wives in a divorce trial. Because of that, he completely minimizes all of the negative things that cult survivor said about Koresh. The author acknowledges and admits that Koresh was abusing children as young as 12, but makes excuses for him. He claims that the Branch Davidians were not a cult. He lashes out at anti-cult organizations and argues that they violate religious freedom. Apparently raping 12-year-olds is not a sign that an organization is bad, I don't know what the author would consider a good reason for the government interfere. He clearly felt the Branch Davidians should of been left alone. I don't know how he came to that conclusion.

This gives a balanced account of a tragedy that never should have happened. Agree or disagree, these people had a right to their spiritual beliefs. If laws were violated, it did not take an army to arrest one individual who frequently went to town for supplies and meals. The book is an antidote to the lurid and sensational press accounts of the time that linger in the public mind.

Tabor is one of my favorite authors, and this book is very eye opening for anyone who has always wondered about the events in Waco, Texas.

awesome book.

Now that a Chinese version of Martin Luther Stonehood is an official monument to American religion, the contents of the book *Why Waco?* (1995) by James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher

provide a picture of what religion means to some Americans who wish to be free of everybody else. Someone who personified himself as David Koresh in Texas found that the federal government wished to impose its power over him as soon as William Jefferson Clinton became President of the United States of America in 1993. Chicken out! The FBI became involved after BATF ran out of ammunition on February 28, 1993. David Koresh was expected to come out and surrender to the authorities, but when he did not, and proclaimed that he was waiting on God's word, the FBI suspected that he had planned to blow himself up on national TV when he came out but lost his nerve and chickened out. Modern security measures include a check for explosive underwear as suicide bombers have made the FBI more concerned about security than about the ordinary crimes that could be made up in retaliation for not being treated like dust in a society that pulverizes whatever has not already been nailed down. Electricity was shut off but search lights kept the property lit through the night, and the vehicles of the Branch Davidians were crushed or removed by armored vehicles. End of the world! David Koresh was expecting the end of the world to be in 1995. He considered the American empire a new Babylon and found scripture to support his view that Koresh was an expected prophet capable of explaining the transcendental nature of life in his own time. This is mainly the point that interests James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, the authors of *Why Waco? Triumph of the therapeutic!* American ideas about cults as groups of people under the control of a person who considers himself their prophet. As an example of how common events became a heavenly sign for the Branch Davidians, I quote: Paul Harvey had mentioned a "guitar-shaped nebula" on his national radio news report. (p. 12). According to the Gospels, Jesus had predicted that shortly before the end such heavenly signs would appear. The Davidians were particularly impressed that this comet had been described as having a guitarlike shape, since Koresh had always understood his role as a guitar player in his rock band to be an integral part of his prophetic mission. (p. 12). On March 7, 1993, Phillip Arnold and James Tabor offered their services to the FBI. The Koresh tape of March 2 convinced them that they should communicate directly with David Koresh. On March 16, Koresh and Schneider made a formal request to the FBI that they be allowed to discuss the Bible with Arnold. On April 1, Arnold and Tabor had a discussion on the Ron Engleman daily talk show on radio station KGBS. An attorney, Dick DeGuerin, was allowed to take a tape of this discussion to Koresh on April 4. On April 14, Koresh released a letter announcing that he would come out as soon as he completes a manuscript for Arnold and Tabor. Crimes against humor! By shifting to the transcendental level of theology, David Koresh thought he had found a way for people of this generation to be saved. His letter said: I thank my Father. He has finally granted me the chance to do this. It will bring new light and hope for many and they will not have to deal with

me the person. (p. 15).As soon as I can see that people like Jim Tabor and Phil Arnold have a copy I will come out and then you can do your thing with this beast. (p. 16).Counterintelligence loves to work itself into a situation where someone else thinks everything is going according to the transcendental scheme of things, like Jesus riding into Jerusalem, just before pulling the rug out from under him. The martyrdom of Branch Davidians and the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., winner of the Nobel Peace Prize was right in line with the mocking nature of lamestream American superpower policies. I quote: The FBI immediately responded to this latest breakthrough with ridicule. They joked about Koresh, the high-school dropout, writing a book and labeled Koresh's "word from God" nothing more than another "delay tactic" to prolong the agony of the siege for his own purposes. (p. 17). People who work for the FBI do not expect to be saved by anything pulled out of the Bible by someone who was not considered a saint, as the Apostle Paul is being recognized continuously in Minnesota by having a capital city name Saint Paul and Saint Peter has his own Minnesota city for people who never want to move away from Second Peter, Chapter 2. Just for the record, by April, 1993, I quote: on the whole the government did not trust Koresh and considered him insincere and manipulative. (p. 17). Dr. Miron noted that Koresh's discussion in the letter of mundane issues such as book rights, and his ability to contact his lawyer after he "comes out," were future oriented and therefore inconsistent with typical suicide precursorssuch as self-blame, guilt, or despair. (p. 18). Such perceptions, whether valid or not, obscured the only positive means of dealing with Koresh and his followers. (p. 21). That is all taken from the first chapter. An Appendix at the end has the manuscript by David Koresh and a commentary by James D. Tabor and J. Phillip Arnold. Koresh expected a Branch of David "would appear at the end of time and open the Seven Seals. (p. 205). It was "Ben Roden . . . in 1970," (p. 209) who added Branch to the name of the group, and Koresh wanted to be "the actual, final manifestation of the Lamb" (p. 209).

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