

Scholar Speculates on Similarities Between Cult Leaders Called Koresh

■ Like David Koresh, Cyrus Teed "Koresh" was obsessed with the Book of Revelation.

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WACO, Texas — A biblical scholar and expert on cults who has advised federal authorities during the standoff with David Koresh and his followers believes that Koresh modeled himself after the messianic leader of a turn-of-the-century doomsday cult near Fort Myers, Fla., who died after a violent confrontation with a town marshal.

J. Phillip Arnold, director of Reunion Institute, a biblical research center in Houston, Wednesday cited striking similarities between Koresh and Cyrus R. Teed, a former Union Army medical corpsman in the Civil War who changed his name to Cyrus Teed Koresh and founded a religious commune called the Koreshian Unity.

"I've never heard of anybody else calling themselves Koresh before, and I've been reading this stuff for 20 years," said Arnold, whose institute studies religious cults and provides counseling for members who leave.

Koresh is Hebrew for Cyrus, the Persian king and defender of the Israelites who, according to the Book of Isaiah, was anointed by God to crush the Babylonians.

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essed with the Book of Revelation, a darkly allegorical work that foretells a series of calamities leading to the apocalypse. Also like David Koresh, Teed took mistresses although he preached that his followers should be celibate to guarantee them eternal life, Arnold said.

Like Koresh, Teed taught that God was an embodiment of both male and female and that Teed himself was an incarnation of the Messiah and had experienced a vision telling him to regather a spiritual nation of 144,000 in preparation for the Final Judgment, as recounted in Revelation, Arnold said.

Both mixed science with religion, David Koresh focusing on astrology and Teed on an egocentric philosophy that viewed the earth as a hollow, concave sphere in which mankind lived and looked out onto three layers of atmosphere, Arnold said.

According to Robert S. Fogarty of Antioch College, who wrote an introduction to Teed's 1898 book, "The Cellular Cosmology — The

Earth a Concave Sphere," Teed "may have been a lunatic, fraud and swindler; however, to his followers he was Koresh, the prophet whose philosophy was not only divine but a mandate to cultivate the earth and save it for future generations."

Born in upstate New York in 1839, Teed claimed his first vision in 1869 and, after founding a commune in Chicago, moved to Estero, Fla., in 1903, where his community cultivated 2,000 acres and built dormitories, a bakery, laundry, print shop and school.

At one time, Arnold said, Koresh Unity had 300 members living in the commune and 4,000 followers nationwide.

But, the cult expert said, Teed's group became embroiled in controversy in 1906 because it broke with its tradition of voting for Democrats and entered its own party, which ran for county offices on a platform of redistribution of wealth and public ownership of utilities.

Arnold said Teed was beaten severely during an argument with a town marshal and died 1½ years later in 1908. Soon after, the colony, whose members had believed that Teed would live forever, dissolved, and the land now is part of a town park called Koresh Park.

Arnold said he believed that David Koresh either had read some of at least six books that Cyrus Teed Koresh wrote or had come under the influence of someone who had been a student of Teed.