FAQ

Description

1. Are you David Koresh's Davidians?

No. We are in no way connected with David Koresh. We do not share his theology or condone his actions. It is quite unfortunate that this question is often the first to arise and we regret that it is the first in need of answering. That said, it must be answered. Due to the widespread misinformation concerning Branch Davidians, we would like to provide you with a brief outline of the facts:

The Davidian movement began in 1929 through the message of a man named Victor Houteff. As a laypersons' movement within the Seventh-day Adventist church, it continued under his leadership until his death in February 1955. A few months later, a Davidian named Benjamin Roden began to proclaim a new message in continuation of Victor Houteff's teachings. Under Benjamin Roden, the movement received a new name – Branch. Those Davidians who did not accept Roden's message continued to call themselves "Davidian Seventh Day Adventists" while those who accepted his message went by "Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists." Branch Davidians have thus been around and have been going by that name since 1955.

David Koresh (originally, Vernon Howell) was not born until 1959 and had no contact with the Branch movement until late 1981 when he went to New Mt. Carmel Center (the Branch Headquarters at the time) to offer his labors as a carpenter to Lois Roden, who was then the leader of the Branch (Ben had died in 1978). After burning down the Branch Davidian publishing house in 1983, Vernon left Mt. Carmel Center to form a new group called "The Davidian Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists" (DBDSDA) centered in Palestine, Texas. From that location, Howell led his group (under the DBDSDA name) for three years in opposition to Lois Roden and the Branch Davidians who were still located at New Mt. Carmel Center near Waco (we mention this to show the clear distinction between the two groups). Lois died in November 1986. In 1987, Vernon illegally claimed presidency of the Branch Davidian movement and gained control over the New Mt. Carmel property in early 1988 after having a shootout with George Roden (Ben and Lois' eldest son). From that time until the tragic siege and fire of 1993, Koresh was illegally usurping the name and identity of the Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists, at least on paper. In his teaching, however, Koresh abandoned all things Branch Davidian, including the name. During the 1990's, Koresh and his followers did not self-identify as Branch Davidians; instead they called themselves "The Students of the Seven Seals," only using the Branch name for records in order to keep the Branch property.

In summary, Davidians have, since 1929, existed as a movement separate from David Koresh – before, during, and after his lifetime. Here is a brief presidential timeline of the Davidian movement with reference to Koresh's Branch-related activities during each period.

Period	President	Koresh's Branch-Related Activity
1929-1955	Victor Houteff	(none – not yet born)

1955-1978	Benjamin Roden	(none – no contact)
1977-1986[1]Ben and Lois co-presided over the Branch from late '77 to late '78 when Ben died.	Lois Roden	(first contact in 1981; led DBDSDA from '83-'86)
1986-2013	Doug Mitchell	(stealing Branch identity from '87-'93)
2013-present	Trent Wilde	(none – no longer living)

We hope that this helps to clarify the historical reality that the Branch Davidians have never been followers of David Koresh and David Koresh has never been the leader of the Branch Davidians. For more information on this subject, please read our book [Waco Untold: How David Koresh Stole the Identity of the Branch Davidians](#).

2. What is the difference between the Branch and other religions?

It is truly a challenge to answer such a broad question in such a short space, but we will do our best to summarize some of the major differences. First, however, we need to point out a problem in the question. Asking for an explanation of the difference between the Branch and "other religions" assumes that the Branch is a religion. While this is an understandable assumption, it is problematic. The word "religion" has a large number of definitions, some of which may apply to the Branch, but many of which do not. One very common element to include in definitions of "religion" is a belief in a supernatural, or non-physical, realm. We Branch Davidians reject the idea of such a realm and thus fall outside of any definition of "religion" which includes that element. This is just an example, but it highlights that the differences between the Branch and most religions are broad and fundamental in nature. Thus, in order to provide the most comprehensive and concise explanation possible, we will focus on these sorts of fundamental issues rather than individual doctrines.

First – We Profess No Creed and Promote No Canon

While most modern religions are defined (at least in part) by a set list of dogmatic beliefs, the Branch is far more interested in principles and continual learning. While we do have a number of strong convictions, we base them upon experimental knowledge rather than religious faith. We recognize that religious creeds only serve to limit open investigation and foster dogmatism. Wefind the same to be true of church canons, including scripture canons – all of which we reject. Our rejection of creeds and canons is not rooted in an objection to the entirety of their content, but is rooted instead in an objection to the very principle upon which creeds and canons are based; that is, dogmatic authority. We consider the merits of each item and idea included in creeds and canons separately from the creed or canon itself and separately from each other. We do the same with items and ideas which have not been included in such dogmatic declarations. Whether something is included in, or excluded from, a creed or canon means nothing to us in respect to its truth-value. We are determined to accept any claim that stands the test of well-reasoned empirical investigation and to abandon all claims (however cherished) that prove to have no foundation in reality. This ongoing testing process has, thus far, led to both our rejection and acceptance of individual points included in, and excluded from, creeds and canons. We are sure we still have much to learn and much to unlearn, but that is our goal – to discard error and to discover, accept, and live by truth.

Second – We Advocate Progression

All religions start with some form of divergence from the status quo at the time of their inception. These divergences are seen by the religion's advocates as an advancement from previous thought. Unfortunately, most religions cease to advance as soon as their founders die. The progression that was present (at least in theory) at the beginning soon vanishes and the religion settles into a more fixed form, taking on creeds and the like. This is not to say there is no more development, as all religions continue to change over time; it is only to say that the trend of development is usually toward fixing positions and stabilizing a certain form rather than toward asking new questions and actively changing perspectives in light of new evidence. We are determined never to lose the principle of progression. We expect to always learn and to ever receive fresh revelations of truth. Throughout history, men and women have risen up to proclaim enlightening messages of truth and righteousness. Religions have sometimes been formed around these men and women in such a way that any other man or woman who would later arise to bear a similar message of revolutionary thought is most often rejected. From our perspective, the continual rising of new men and women to call for change through enlightening messages is part of the very fabric of positive human experience. Thus, we do not expect this phenomenon to cease, but to continue – ever onward and upward.

Third – We Are Materialists

By "materialists" we do not mean that we are excessively interested in accumulating possessions (in fact, we think such an orientation would be contrary to right principles). No, we refer to philosophical materialism – the position that all things which exist are material (a.k.a. physical) and that supposed non-physical realities are not realities at all. Some also refer to this basic idea as "physicalism" or "naturalism." Whatever one may call it, the idea stands in sharp contradistinction to nearly all religious thought. Most religions are founded upon the idea that there exists another realm apart from the physical – the realm of souls, spirits, angels, god(s), heaven,

hell, spiritual energy, etc. We find evidence for such a realm to be entirely lacking and we reject the possibility of such a realm due to the self-contradictory nature of all possible claims in favor of its existence. How are these claims self-contradictory? Well, non-existence is simply the negative of all things. Does a non-existent thing have shape? No. Weight? No. Mass? No. Texture? No. We can go down the list. It is simply negation. How about non-physicality or immateriality? Both of these terms are also negations. "Non-physical" is the negation of the physical. "Immaterial" is the negation of the material. Does a non-physical/immaterial thing have shape? No. Weight? No. Mass? No. Texture? No. We can go down the list. There is literally no difference between non-physicality/immateriality and non-existence other than the fact that, when using the former terms, people will say, "Oh yes, that exists!" but none would dare say such a thing when using the latter term. Thus, to propose non-physical/immaterial existences is just a masked way of proposing non-existent existences.

So, do we reject the existence of spirits, gods, angels, heaven, etc.? When these terms are understood to refer to proposed non-physical entities (which is how nearly everyone understands them), then our answer is a definite "Yes! We do reject their existence!" Yet, we need to make an important distinction. Words like "god," "spirit," "soul," etc. are often used when translating ancient texts in instances wherein the original words do not refer to proposed non-physical entities. Let's look at a few examples of such words being used as translations of Ancient Hebrew words. The word "spirit" is most often understood today to mean something like "non-physical" or "non-physical being" and it is often used to translate the Hebrew word "ruach" which means "wind," "breath," or "one who breathes." The word "soul" is understood to refer to a proposed non-physical part of humans which is thought to be capable of, and responsible for, our thoughts and emotions and is usually believed to survive the death of the physical body; it is used to translate the Hebrew word "nefesh" which simply means "being" or "person" and is used for humans and all animals. The word "God' is used today to refer to the proposed creator of time and matter, who is thus thought to be outside of time and matter – to be timeless and immaterial. This word is often used to translate the Hebrew word "'el" which means "mighty ruler" or "sovereign." So, while we do not believe in spirits, souls, or gods (as almost universally understood), we do believe in wind, breath, breathers, beings, and sovereigns. We find all this necessary to clarify since our rejection of a non-physical realm could easily be misinterpreted as a rejection of the messages of the ancient Israelite prophets. Likewise, since many assume these ancient prophets to have proposed the existence of non-physical entities, if we say we accept their message, we could be misunderstood as holding a belief in these non-physical entities. The fact is that there are ancient Israelite prophets whose messages we accept, but their messages do not at all promote the existence of non-physical entities.

While we accept the messages of these ancient prophets, our materialist position does not depend upon them. Rather, the truth of this position can be independently verified without requiring one to accept certain presuppositions. Let us explain. The claims of the major religions of today depend upon their sacred text. One of the problems which arise from this circumstance is that religious disputes can hardly ever be settled, for both parties view their Scripture as the thing which defines truth and therefore, so long as their sacred text says something, they conclude that it cannot possibly be wrong. But what happens when two religious persons have two different sacred texts and both believe that their text defines truth? Each one believes certain claims and each has the same reason for their belief; that is, their scripture says so. Thus, both persons only have as much justification for their beliefs as does the other. If a third person is introduced who

has no presupposition as to the truth of either of the claimed sacred writings, how would that person go about determining which (if any) is correct? S/he cannot simply assume one to be true, or arbitrarily side with one or the other, or choose by preference and expect to come to real knowledge. None of these methods are a reliable means of finding truth, as most will candidly admit. Consequently, there must be something outside of, and beyond, all sacred texts and religions by which we can test all claims. Such a standard does exist and it is actually quite easy to discern. We will provide a brief example to demonstrate: Suppose a person claims to have a sibling. What determines whether their claim is true? Is it not the case that the material existence, or lack thereof, of such a sibling is what makes the difference? In other words, if they really do have a sibling in material reality, their claim is true. But if they have no sibling in material reality, their claim is false. An imaginary sibling won't do, will it? Countless other examples could be given to demonstrate this point, but the lesson they all teach is this: Claims which do not correspond to physical reality are, by definition, not true, while claims which do correspond to physical reality are, by definition, true. This shows us that physical/material reality is actually what determines truth. Any claimed non-physical reality, then, is (by definition) false. Thus, our conclusion is that material reality is the standard by which all claims can and must be tested. Also, that materialism must be true and immaterialism must be false.

The implications of these conclusions are far too vast to expound upon here, but they impact literally every aspect of thought and belief, both in terms of the content of the beliefs themselves and in terms of the methods by which we form our beliefs. It should be sufficient here to just say that materialism demands science as the sole method of gaining knowledge on any and every subject.

Fourth – Our Conception of the "Divine" and Our Basis for Believing in Such

The vast majority of religions advance the claim that there exists an immaterial God – beyond time and space. Since we have found that immateriality and non-existence are, in reality, the same, we see such claims as self-contradictory from the start, and thus, unavoidably false. To state the same thought more clearly: If the immaterial and the non-existent are really the same, then saying, "an immaterial God exists" is the same as saying, "a non-existent God exists" – which is a self-contradictory claim. Therefore, we conclude that such a God cannot exist.

As we have already explained, it is a mistake to retroject the immaterialistic god-claims of modern Jews and Christians back onto ancient Israelites. In fact, most of the claims regarding "God" in known ancient Israelite and Jewish literature do not match the modern immaterialistic definition of "God." This is the case to such an extent that using the word "God" may not even be helpful. The 'elim (plural of 'el) known to these ancient Israelites and Jews were spoken of as material, biological entities composed of bodies having parts, form, gender, location, etc. and absent of any immaterial spirit or soul. These beings were clearly viewed as inside, and a part of, the natural world rather than outside, and beyond, the natural world, as inherent in modern definitions of "God." It is not that we find the word "God" to be wholly objectionable. We just think that if people are going to use it in contexts where its meaning is different from the common understanding, they need to clearly state the meaning. More specifically, if the word "God" is used to refer tosomething ancient Israelites believed in, it needs to be explained that "God" in that context doesnot refer to a timeless, immaterial being, but instead to a material, biological being who rules as asovereign.

To be clear, we do not claim that all ancient Israelites were materialists. In fact, the archaeological record shows us that many of them engaged in idolatry – a practice rooted in the spiritualistic notion that the "spirits" of gods inhabited the idols. These "spirits" were probably not overtly thought of as being immaterial, but the thinking was certainly magical, and thus not materialistic. Even idolatrous Israelites had no concept of God as a purely disembodied spirit. They thought the spirits of the gods could (and did) inhabit multiple bodies in different locations at the same time. The gods thus had bodies, but also some sort of "essence" or "spirit" that transcended any one body. This is a far cry from the extra-universal, timeless God of later monotheistic religions, but the spiritualistic roots were certainly present. As we have already mentioned, however, there were other Israelites and Jews who opposed all known forms of spiritualism and who upheld materialistic notions of every subject upon which they commented – including "gods." Only this latter class can rightly be considered our philosophical progenitors. We should also point out that just as the majority of people today incorrectly assume that most ancient Israelites believed in the existence of a "God" who was conceived of as "beyond space and time," just so it is incorrectly assumed that they believed in the existence of only one "God." In fact, most ancient Israelites believed in the existence of many "gods" – again, not immaterial, timeless beings, but material, biological, temporal, gendered beings who were also sovereigns.[2]See Divine Plurality Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2.

Now, what about whether any of these beings actually exist? A survey of the so-called evidence in favor of the existence of an immaterial God reveals that it can be ultimately reduced to philosophical arguments and appeals to personal experience. Indeed, that is all one could expect for such a claim since its proposed God, being immaterial, is definitionally beyond the realm of our senses, and thus beyond empirical investigation. It is also worth noting that the philosophical arguments tend not to be straightforward arguments that God exists. Instead, they tend to be arguments for the inherent necessity of God – the impossibility for this God not to exist. Claiming that your dog exists is one thing, but claiming that the non-existence of your dog is a universal(and extra-universal) impossibility is something completely different. With this in mind, it isapparent to us that the philosophical claims regarding the necessary existence of an immaterialGod are extraordinarily extraordinary. They seek to philosophize into necessary existence a beingwhose possibility, nonetheless probability, has yet to be demonstrated. This is inadequate, to saythe least.

Claims regarding the existence of the various "gods"/'elim spoken of by ancient Israelites are so radically different in nature from immaterialistic God-claims, that they need to be addressed using entirely different methods. To start, it must be admitted that the materialistic 'el-claims are not so extraordinary. In fact, the claim that such beings exist is far less extraordinary than the claim that no such beings exist. At its core, the claim states that there are other intelligent, biological beings in the universe. We know that beings of this character exist since we are an example, and the chances of us being the only example in this vast universe are so minuscule that the probability is staggeringly on the side of the existence of other intelligent life. What is more controversial is the claim that such intelligences have contacted humans. Voicing this possibility is often met with immediate objections which we need to address before considering any purported evidence in favor of their existence. The primary objection is that it would take far too long for any non-earthly intelligence to get here from elsewhere in the universe. But this could only apply if the claim were that these beings came from far away (on a cosmic scale). Since ancient Israelites did not know how vast the universe is, they did not, and could not, claim that these beings came from great distances. In fact, they made no claims at all concerning the distance between the earth and the home of these beings, and neither do we. Another reason why this objection fails is that it is an argument from ignorance. Non-earthly intelligences may have technology that enables them to travel at incomprehensible speeds from the perspective of our current knowledge. We don't know or claim that they do have such technology, but our ignorance does not equate to their lack. It only means that we don't know and shouldn't make claims one way or the other on the question. Furthermore, our ignorance of how such beings could get here does not diminish our ability to know that they got here if indeed they have. As a general principle, we can know that a thing happened, without knowing how it happened. If, on the other hand, these beings are more local, travel wouldn't be an issue, though some might object on the basis that we should see them through our telescopes. Yet, we have to admit that our ignorance of the objects in our local cosmic neighborhood is far greater than our knowledge. Even within our own solar system, never-before-seen objects are discovered year by year and astronomers tell us that there may even be undiscovered planets. With this degree of ignorance, it would certainly be premature to argue that our lack of telescopic observation of nearby non-earthly intelligence is evidence of their absence. To be clear, we do not assert that since these objections are faulty these beings exist. We do regard them as faulty, but our intention in clearing them is only to prevent them from hindering serious investigation of the evidence. Too often, when being presented with evidence for uncommon claims, or claims which are regarded as "fringe," people tend to raise objections to the

general idea rather than examining the purported evidence. With these objections out of the way, we hope to encourage an honest examination of the evidence without such lingering biases affecting one's evaluation.

Ancient Israelites made claims regarding the involvement of non-earthly intelligences in human history. Most naturally, then, the methods by which these claims should be tested are historical methods. Some may object that historical methods cannot be applied to supernatural claims, but as we have already pointed out, the ancient Israelite claims with which we are concerned are not supernatural, they are materialistic. The straightforward truth is that if these beings really did interact with human history, then applying sound historical methods to the question should reveal indications of that fact and would thus evidence their existence. Likewise, if no such beings have interacted with human history, applying sound historical methods to the question should give no indication that they did. In either case, historical methods yield results and since this is a matter of what happened in the past, they really are the right methods to use.

So, what are these methods? Well, that is quite complicated and each instance requires its own set of methods. The core principle, though, is that whenever we examine the question of whether a being referenced in ancient texts actually existed, we need to gather all the facts related to that individual and then see whether the best explanation of all the facts requires the existence of the individual. To be more specific, facts are individual aspects of reality. Since present reality has been formed by the past, we can infer what the past was by what the present is. A good example of this is tree rings. If you cut down a tree and count the rings, finding fifty-three of them, you can know that the tree is fifty-three years old since tree rings develop annually. The present reality of the tree lets you know something that happened fifty-three years earlier; namely, a new tree started to grow. Furthermore, each individual tree ring contains information about each year of its growth, such as how cold or warm it was and how wet or dry it was. The present reality of the tree – more precisely, the facts related to its rings, compels us to draw certain conclusions about its past and the past of its local environment. There are many explanations one might think up regarding the tree and its local environment and the history of its climate, but the best explanation is the one to which the facts compel us. This same general principle is what is at work with any question about the past, including the existence of beings referred to in ancient texts. Let us use a concrete example: Paul of Tarsus.

When we gather up all the facts related to Paul of Tarsus we find that we have many texts which refer to him. Some claim to have been written by him while others refer to him, whether at length or in passing. How do we explain all these documents? Were they written by someone in the 19th century as forgeries or fictions? That is an explanation that could be offered, but it is not the best explanation – it is not the explanation to which the evidence compels us. To the contrary, scientific dating methods applied to these manuscripts show that at least some were copied as early as the early second century. And yes, "copied" is the right word since these bear evidence that they are not the originals, but are rather copies of other manuscripts, which themselves were probably copies, eventually going back to originals. Other facts about these letters show us that at least some of them were originally composed during the 50's of the first century – the time when Paul must have lived if he really did exist. Other facts within these same letters show us that they are genuine letters written in real circumstances to communities who were personally acquainted with the author. There are, in fact, seven letters known as "the seven undisputed letters of Paul," the facts of which compel us to the conclusion that they really were written by Paul of Tarsus. No

other explanation is adequate to account for all the facts. These seven letters form one part of the body of evidence that has convinced virtually all historians that Paul of Tarsus really did exist. There is more that could be said of Paul, but you get the point. Our contention is that the sorts of methods that are used to determine the existence of earthly beings referenced in ancient texts are the same methods that should be used to determine the existence of non-earthly beings referenced in ancient texts, given that they are claimed to have interacted with human history. Conducting historical experiments which consist of the application of these methods has compelled us to the conclusion that at least some of the 'elim/"gods" spoken of by the ancient Israelites really do exist.

Fifth – Our Understanding of Morality

There are two primary differences between our view and that of most religions in this area. They are (1) the basis of morality and (2) the solution to immorality. First, the basis: Many religions suggest that morality has its origin with God and/or that he created it and instilled it within each of us. This is often set in opposition to secular morality, most versions of which view morality as a social construct which evolves over time and space from society to society. Both conceptions of morality, we find to be flawed. We agree with the latter in that it accurately describes how moral systems actually play out in the real world, but we disagree with it in that it confuses the moral systems created by societies with morality itself. We agree with "religious morality" in that it proposes what is supposed to be a more objective model for morality itself, but we disagree with it in that it requires that we view this objective morality as being arbitrarily chosen by a supreme being (God). We say, "arbitrarily" because the view implies that God could have chosen for anything to be moral and immoral and that there is no outside standard beyond God to test his choice. This is nothing more than "might makes right" – the principle which lay at the root of bullying.

In contrast, our view of the basis of morality is this: moral claims are just as much claims as are any other, and so must be tested in the same manner as any other claim. The standard by which they must be tested is material reality. This necessitates that material reality is the foundation and standard of morality. We will give some examples to illustrate. The reason why lying is wrong (both morally and in terms of its truth value) is because each lie is a claim contrary to material reality. The reason why stealing is immoral is because, in order to steal, one has to pretend (whether in thought or in action) that the object in question is theirs, when, in material reality, it is not. Murder is wrong because it is the wiping out of a part of material reality – the person. More examples could be given, but this should be sufficient to teach the lesson – material reality determines what is moral and immoral; the "moral" is choosing to act in harmony with material reality and the "immoral" is choosing to act contrary to reality.

The second difference between our view of morality and the views of others relates to the solution for immorality. Among the advocates of pagan religions, a commonly faced problem was/is that, by misbehaving (acting immorally within their morality system), the god(s) could become very upset with them and potentially curse them and perhaps even seek to take their lives. The solution which these religions offer for this conundrum was/is to appease the god(s) by offering some sort of sacrifice. Obviously, killing the innocent in order to "get off the hook" with an angry God is not a genuine solution for immorality. In fact, it only causes immorality to fester and grow, for the act itself is immoral and it provides an illegitimate reason for a person to continue in immorality,

provided they are willing to kill another creature (whether human or another animal).

Other religions, such as modern Judaism and Islam, teach that moral behavior is highly important, but that we are not to expect ourselves to act morally at all times. The thought is that so long as our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, we are a good person and will thus merit everlasting life. There are a number of problems we have with moral systems that promote this sort of idea, but for now it should be sufficient to say that making an effort to do good more than bad does not actually solve the problem of immorality, it only restrains it to a certain degree. In doing so, it actually justifies doing wrong some of the time.

The traditional Christian view is that, due to the sin of Adam, humanity has been in a state of entire moral depravity – incapable of even choosing the right. In this condition, humans are thought to be deserving of death or even eternal torment by the wrath of God. The death of Jesus is understood as satisfying the wrath of God so that God no longer desires to bring the penalty of death on those who ask Jesus to enter their hearts. In other words, Jesus has been killed and/or tormented in place of his followers. Because of this, it is thought that so long as you "accept the sacrifice of Jesus" you are in good terms with God, and that even if you sin, God does not see your sin; he only sees Jesus and his righteousness (moral behavior). We take issue with this teaching on a number of points. First, it offers no true solution to immorality; it just proposes to block God's view of how immoral people really are. Moreover, the supposed means of accomplishing that end is entirely nonsensical. Let us illustrate by analogy: Imagine a judge. The judge makes a law and sets death as the penalty for breaking it. A man in the jurisdiction of the judge then breaks the law. The judge not only condemns the man, but also all his children. All are sentenced to death and are considered incapable of keeping the law because the one man broke it. The judge then decides that he wants to provide a way for the children and the man to be free from the death penalty. So, he brings in his own son, who has never broken the law, and executes the death penalty on him. Then he tells the man and his children that if they believe that his son died in their place, they don't have to die anymore. Even if they break the law again, they will not be punished, just so long as they believe in the death of his son.

If a real judge did this, what would you think? Would you think it makes sense? Would you think it is a solution to immorality? No! You would recognize the judge to be totally insane and the circumstance to be wholly lacking in rhyme or reason. Moreover, you would certainly see it all to be horrific and exceedingly immoral. Unfortunately, this is not so different, in principle, from the doctrine taught by Christianity. God is the judge, his son is Jesus, the man is Adam, and the children are descendants of Adam (the human race). While much more could be said concerning this doctrine, we hope it is plain to all that we find it to be absolutely horrendous and immoral, and we also hope you can see some of our reasons why.

In our view, the solution to immorality is quite simple. Since morality is choosing to act in harmony with reality and immorality is choosing to act in disharmony with reality, the solution is for people to be acquainted with reality and to choose to act in harmony with it. The cause of immorality is, in some instances, a lack of knowledge concerning reality; in other instances, it is ignoring reality. Where there is a lack of knowledge, supplying the lack will bring about moral behavior. Where there is willful ignorance, the solution can be found in a change of thinking whereby someone realizes the importance of choosing to act morally. The promotion of truth, then, is really what can set people free from immoral behavior, so long as they are willing to accept it and act in harmony

with it. Since there is no part of reality which is isolated from the whole, we see acting against a part of reality as being, in principle, the same as acting against the whole. The mindset which is willing to work against reality in one area will undoubtedly be willing to work against it in another area. It is really a change in mindset that is needed. We all need to be thoroughly persuaded that all immoral action is unjustifiable and grossly detrimental to reality and all of its component parts, including ourselves and all other lifeforms. A way of thinking which is governed by truth and only truth will lead a person to act morally and only morally. Anything short of this standard is a danger. Condoning, or lessening abhorrence of, any amount of immorality opens the door for its spread. Loving truth and hating falsehood is the only way.

Though it is drastically different from, and contrary to, the popular Christian doctrine, we have found that the moral system we have advocated here is the one advanced by Jesus and his early followers. Evidence for this is given in our written, audio, and video studies.

3. What does "Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventist" mean, and what is its origin?

Perhaps the first thing one needs to recognize in order to understand the meaning of the name is that it is composed of the titles of a succession of movements starting with the Adventist movement of the first half of the 19th century and leading up to the Branch movement of the mid-20th century. Each name that was added qualified the previous name. Thus, the word "Adventist" describes someone who believes in the imminent return of Jesus, but "Seventh-day Adventist" describes a sub-category of Adventists who also believe, and participate, in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Likewise, the phrase "Davidian Seventh Day Adventist" describes a sub-category of Seventh-day Adventists who also believe in, and work toward, the re-establishment of the Davidic kingdom. Finally, "Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventist" describes a sub-category of Davidian Seventh Day Adventists who believe in, and co-operate with, the work of "the man whose name is Branch" (Zech. 6:12). Here is a bit more detail regarding each of these successive movements and their names:

The Adventist Movement – As mentioned before, the word "Adventist" designates a person who believes in the soon coming, or arrival (advent), of Jesus to this world a second time. The Advent movement began in the 1830s with William Miller as its predominant leader. The Adventists expected the return of Jesus to occur in about the year 1843 (later, 1844) based primarily off their understanding of a prophecy in Daniel 8:14. When their expectations were greatly disappointed in October 1844, the majority of believers left the Advent movement while others set dates later in the 1840s or '50s. Still others continued to believe in the soon coming of Jesus but set no dates for his return.

The Seventh-day Adventist Movement – Among those Adventists who continued to believe in the soon coming of Christ (but without setting new dates) was a small group who ended up concluding that the Advent movement was correct as to the date (Oct. 22, 1844) but wrong as to the event. Prior to 1844, the common idea was that the "sanctuary" of Daniel 8:14 was the earth and that its being cleansed was its cleansing by fire at the second coming of Christ. This small group of Adventists, however, concluded that the sanctuary referred to in Daniel 8 was the sanctuary in Heaven where Jesus went to minister on behalf of humanity after his ascension. The cleansing of that sanctuary was seen to be the fulfillment of the cleansing of the Israelite sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Since on that day the Israelite high priest would enter the Most Holy

Place, this group of Adventists believed that Jesus entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 to accomplish the final cleansing – both of the record of sin and of sin itself within the lives of his professed followers on earth. A young woman named Ellen Harmon (later Ellen White) received a number of dreams and visions in relation to this event and the other experiences of the Advent people. In one vision,3You can read this vision in Early Writings, p. 32-33. she saw Jesus move into the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary wherein dwelt the ark containing the ten commandments. She saw a halo of glory around the fourth commandment and was shown that God had not changed the Sabbath – that it was still in force and called for observance. The Adventists who believed in these dreams and visions ended up joining together and comprising the Seventh-day Adventist movement.

The Davidian Seventh Day Adventist Movement – The Davidian movement began in 1929 through the teachings of a Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School teacher named Victor Houteff who was burdened to share with other Seventh-day Adventists a message he received concerning the sealing of the 144,000 and the purification of the church. At that time, those who accepted the message of Victor Houteff were not yet called "Davidians." By 1934, they were called "Shepherd's Rod Seventh Day Adventists" (borrowing the name from Victor Houteff's first two publications, The Shepherd's Rod, Vol. 1 and The Shepherd's Rod, Vol. 2). In the late 1930s, Victor Houteff received another revelation, this time concerning the restoration of the ancient kingdom of David in the Promised Land prior to the return of Christ. It is the belief in this teaching to which the name "Davidian" refers. Shepherd's Rod believers began to be called "Davidians" starting in the early 1940s.

The Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventist Movement – Shortly after Victor Houteff died in 1955, a Davidian named Benjamin Roden was given a message of rebuke to bear to the leaders of the Davidian movement (this included Victor Houteff's wife, Florence, and others who had formerly been members of the governing body of the Davidian Association), and later to the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church. When he had written the first letter, he was hesitant to sign it by his own name since he knew that its contents did not originate with himself. He then heard an audible voice telling him to sign the letter by the name "Branch." Later, he understood that "Branch" was the new name of Jesus as prophesied in Rev. 3:12; 2:17; Zech. 6:12, 3:8, among other passages. Those who accepted his teachings became known as "Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists," or "Branches" for short. This new name was received, not just as a distinguishing mark between those who accepted Roden's message and those who did not, but in fulfillment of certain prophecies which describe how God's people would receive a new name, even the new name of Christ (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16; Isa. 62:2, 65:15, etc.). Because of prophecies such as Isaiah 65:15, Ben Roden taught that, when our work within our parent movements comes to an end, the "Davidian Seventh Day Adventist" part of our name will be dropped and only "Branch" will be retained since it is the only one prophesied as being the name of God's people.

Note: The summaries we have here provided concerning these movements are intentionally brief and selective. We have only given what is necessary in order to explain the basic meaning of our name, but it must be understood that there is much more to the history and teachings of each movement. If you would like to learn more concerning these movements and the messengers and messages associated with them, we recommend for you to read the brief bios for each author on our website by going to their individual author page which you can find under "Authors and Writings" in the above menu.

4. What is your religious identity? Since your beliefs and practices are so different from other religions, how do you think you should be classified? Do you consider yourselves to be Christian, Jewish, or something else?

While classification can be helpful, it can also serve to encourage misrepresentation. The reason for this is simply that different people associate the same words with different ideas. The idea in the mind of one person when thinking of the word "Christian," for example, is not precisely the same as the idea in the mind of another person when thinking of the same word. Thus, to categorize one's self using such a word could communicate the wrong idea to another person if that person understands it to mean something other than the meaning intended by the person using it. We mention these things to highlight the importance of judging everything, and everyone, on their own merits and to seek to understand individuals and people-groups according to their own self-identity. We ask that you keep these principles in mind as you read our explanation of our own identity.

Another preliminary aspect we feel we must mention is the practical role which self-identity often plays for individuals when encountering different ideas. Most people have a sense of religious (or non-religious) self-identity which is part of their overall self-image. This self-categorization gives each person a sense of belonging in the community which shares the same self-identity. Those who are raised as Muslims, for example, grow up with a Muslim self-identity and a sense of belonging in Muslim communities. To change their religious self-identity would be to lose their sense of belonging and to isolate themselves from their community. The same is true for Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. Since changing one's self-identity and potentially isolating one's self from one's community can be very uncomfortable, and even frightening, most people hold themselves back from seriously considering something which might cause them to radically change their views and, consequently, their religious identity. Another factor which often becomes involved with this is one community's overall perspective of another community. Often, religious groups negatively categorize other religions and thus members of the group find the thought of self-identifying as part of another religious body too unappealing or unattractive, to say the least. There is the potential fear of how one might be perceived by their current religious (or non-religious) community if s/he was to self-identify as part of a religious system which was viewed negatively by their current community. All these factors show the practical importance of self-identity for the lives of individuals. What it also shows is that most people have a lot more in consideration when investigating religious claims than simply whether or not they are true. What we encourage all people (including ourselves) to do is to prize the truth more highly than their self-identity or their standing within their community. As we have explained in another answer (above), truth is the foundation of all things and separation from truth can only bring immorality and suffering upon the world. This said, please consider our view of our own self-identity with

thoughtful care.

Because of our belief in the message and mission of Jesus, most people would probably categorize us as Christian. And if all one means by the word "Christian" is "(a) follower(s) of Jesus," then we have no problem with that categorization. However, for many people, the word "Christian" carries with it certain doctrinal viewpoints and devotional practices such as the acceptance of a certain Scripture canon, a supernatural worldview, belief in a conscious state of the dead, participation in the mass, Sunday church attendance, etc. none of which we believe or advocate. Thus, self-identifying by the term "Christian" could certainly misrepresent our actual positions. Moreover, believing in the mission and message of Jesus is not (historically speaking) a uniquely Christian perspective. What we mean by that is that Jesus' original followers were not actually Christians; they were Jews. Neither his disciples nor the writers of the earliest pro-Jesus writings nor any of his followers spoken of in those writings self-identified as "Christian." Historians have recognized for some time now that Jesus and his first followers were actually a sect within Judaism. This sect, according to Acts 25:5, 14 and a number of early Christian sources, was known as the Nazarenes (Netzarim in Hebrew), meaning "branches" in English. The Nazarenes were a sect of Jews within Judaism just as were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and other groups. It was really only in the second century that certain gentile believers in Jesus (Ignatius, among others) made a split with Judaism to start a new religion which they called "Christianity." Meanwhile, the Nazarenes continued on, at least until the early fifth century, as a part of Judaism not considering themselves to be a part of "Christianity." Since we believe in the mission and message of Jesus and since he and his followers were Nazarene Jews, also since our beliefs and practices are in keeping with the ancient Nazarenes and do not resemble those of Christianity, we self-identify as Nazarenes (or Branches) rather than as Christians.

This does, of course, imply that we have a Jewish self-identity. Unfortunately, this also is subject to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. When most people today think of the words "Jew," "Jewish," "Judaism," etc., they typically think of the Judaism of the Rabbis (or "Rabbinic Judaism") since that is the predominant Judaism of today. This Judaism is different in many respects from other forms of Judaism and so we must encourage all to take care not to bring assumptions and preconceived ideas to the word "Judaism." This is all further complicated by the fact that Judaism itself is a problematic term. The ancient words which are sometimes translated as "Judaism" were actually used to refer to the idea of "acting like a Jew" in the same way someone could talk about "acting like a Greek" and "acting like an Egyptian." The word referred to something which encompassed much more than what we call "religion." It was not until the early second century CE that Ignatius of Antioch used "Judaism" to refer to what amounts to a "religious system" which he set at odds with his newly-coined "Christianity."

Lastly, while the term "Nazarene" is a fair description of our group and while it is a self-identifying phrase, it is easy for people to think of the phrase only in regard to people from the early centuries of the Common Era. On the other hand, the phrase "Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventist," or even just "Branch Davidian," communicates more effectively our recent history, including the various movements which have led us to our present position. Unfortunately, however, the name "Branch Davidian" is so often incorrectly associated with David Koresh and his beliefs and practices that it commonly conveys the wrong idea. All this said, we know of no identifying terms which are not subject to misunderstanding and which do not require at least some explanation. The terms and phrases by which we self-identify include "Branch Davidian Seventh Day

Adventist," "Branch Davidian," "Branches," "Nazarenes," and "Netzarim." Ultimately though, as stated above, we will eventually drop the names "Davidian Seventh Day Adventist" and retain only the name "Branch" or in Hebrew "Nazarene" and their equivalents in all languages. Furthermore, if you want to know what we are all about, the best way is to talk to us and to get acquainted with our literature and other media.

- 1
  Ben and Lois co-presided over the Branch from late '77 to late '78 when Ben died.
- 2
  See [Divine Plurality Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2](#).
- 3
  You can read this vision in [Early Writings, p. 32-33](#).