

Bob Ricks, FBI's main spokesman in Waco standoff, looks back to 25 years ago

“Probably the best description of him is a master manipulator,” Ricks said of David Koresh, who died in a fire in 1993 along with dozens of his Branch Davidian followers.

by [Religion News Service staff](#) and [Christian Century staff](#)

This article appears in the [May 9, 2018](#) issue.

Bob Ricks, the FBI's main spokesman during the 51-day standoff outside Waco, Texas, between federal agents and an apocalyptic religious sect known as the Branch Davidians, remembers April 19, 1993, as beginning with hope that the conflict could be resolved.

Instead, the Branch Davidian leader David Koresh and more than 75 of his followers, including children, died when their compound burned to the ground after FBI agents in an armored vehicle smashed the buildings and pumped in tear gas. The Justice Department maintains that Branch Davidians set the fire.

Ricks disagrees with those who described Koresh as a madman or psychotic.

“Probably the best description of him is a master manipulator,” Ricks said. “Did he believe he was Christ? I think it was to his benefit to believe that.”

Part of how he convinced followers was by writing an interpretation of the seven seals in the book of Revelation, said Ricks, a Baptist lay leader.

“Only the Lamb of God, only Christ, can open up the Seven Seals,” Ricks said. Koresh “was able to, in effect, open them up in their eyes to describe what the seven seals each represented.”

Ricks, now director of the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, bristles at theories tying the FBI to the siege's deadly end 25 years ago.

“We did not start any fires,” Ricks said. “There have been multiple independent investigations, and they know that we did not do that. If you believed your government was that vile and corrupt—I mean, how could you even support a government of that nature?”

The Branch Davidians still exist, with one pastor, Charles Pace, reclaiming the 77-acre Mount Carmel property in 1997 and welcoming visitors. He leads an online church and teaches that the fire was God’s judgment on Koresh’s “apostate leadership.” The few Branch Davidians remaining in Waco who survived the fire do not associate with him.

Philip Jenkins, a professor at Baylor University in Waco, [wrote in a 2013 *Century* article](#) that the siege “came to signify bitter divisions over matters as diverse as violence and gun ownership, trust in government and popular sovereignty, religious persecution, and issues of gender and masculinity. . . . Waco and its aftereffects continued to poison the political atmosphere, contributing mightily to the polarization of U.S. politics.” —Religion News Service, *Christian Century* staff

A version of this article, which was edited on April 23, appears in the print edition under the title “People: Bob Ricks, David Koresh.”