

## Standoff in Waco

## Austin lawyer Feazell says he could help Koresh

By Jim Phillips  
American-Statesman Staff

Vic Feazell and David Koresh have a lot more in common than one might expect.

Feazell is a highly successful Austin lawyer who once was the district attorney in Waco, and Koresh is the cult leader whose automatic weapons are keeping hundreds of law officers at bay 10 miles east of Waco.

They once were adversaries, when Feazell's office prosecuted Koresh on a charge of attempted murder. But now, with Koresh besieged and facing possible charges of capital murder, Feazell is offering to represent him and his followers for free.

Feazell also is offering to negotiate with Koresh to persuade him to surrender, and it is the common experiences the men share that leads Feazell to think he could succeed where trained experts have failed.

Both men quote the Bible freely, both are former preachers who have compared themselves to Christ and both say they have found themselves persecuted by single-minded federal agents.

"They should let somebody sit down and talk to him who had read the Bible," Feazell said Friday. "I don't know if the people talking to him understand Ezekiel or Revelations.

"I wish they'd let me talk to him. I don't think they'd ever do that."

Feazell said he could bring something to the negotiations that he thinks has been lacking. "I'd be willing to listen. I'd certainly be willing to discuss what his alternatives are and how they fit into his beliefs and, most importantly, how they fit into his ability to spread his message.

"Some of the greatest messages ever spread were by Paul while he was in prison."

Feazell has spread his own messages over the years, as an ordained minister and as a crusading prosecutor in McLennan County. After he took on the cause of Henry Lee Lucas — charging that Lucas' serial-killer confessions were fed to him by police — he became the target of a Dallas television station and federal investigators

who said he was corrupt.

After comparing himself both to Christ and to Daniel in the lion's den, Feazell beat them both. He was acquitted of federal charges by a jury that said he may have been framed, and he won a \$58 million libel judgment against the television station and its reporter. He is now helping defend Lucas against a murder charge in Florida.

As Feazell watches the unfolding drama in Waco, he says, "I see a lot happening here like happened to me."

Feazell said he quit preaching after his 1986 federal indictment because reporters followed him to church and took his comments out of context. "They made me sound the way they're making David Koresh sound now."

When Feazell first got to know Koresh, the sect leader's name was Vernon Howell.

Koresh in 1987 was accused of leading seven followers in an attempt to kill George Roden, who headed the sect at the time and is now a patient at Vernon State Hospital.

"The reason they didn't convict him was they felt George Roden was just as culpable," Feazell said.

"They were out there trying to take a photo of a dead body that George had dug up and was trying to raise from the dead. They tried to introduce the coffin and the body during the trial, but the judge wouldn't take it. Nobody wanted to keep up with it. It's the duty of the district clerk to keep up with all evidence, and that was a little much to ask.

"It sat up there in the rotunda of the courthouse for a couple of days until the county judge ordered them to take it out."

The jury acquitted seven sect members. The jury was hung on Koresh, and a mistrial was declared. All the group's weapons were returned to them.

Asked if investigations of the sect continued after the trial, Feazell replied, "For what reason? It's not against the law to live in a commune. It's not against the law to say you're Christ."

Feazell said he talked to Koresh on a couple of occasions during the trial.

"I thought he was mild-man-

nered, pretty peaceful," Feazell said. "I have seen tapes of him preaching and it's the same kind of stuff you see in any evangelical church on any Sunday."

Feazell is highly critical of the raid last Sunday that led to the deaths of four agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and an undetermined number of sect members.

When Koresh was arrested on the charge of shooting Roden, the sheriff simply called and asked him to come in and told him their weapons would have to be confiscated.

ATF agents, Feazell said, did not take into account the religious beliefs of the sect.

"They are waiting for the end of the world and the persecution of their church, and they are ready for it. As far as they are concerned, their persecution has started," he said.

"This is the end of their world. I think this should have been considered by the people higher up" in ATF.

Feazell said he thinks the group amassed weapons "for their own protection, not for aggression."

The former prosecutor knows Koresh and his followers responded to the ATF raid with a withering barrage of gunfire, but he said that does not necessarily contradict Koresh's beliefs.

"As far as the shooting, you're dealing with a man who reads the Bible and who has named himself David, and David of the Bible was used to combat and used to miracles in combat."

Of the bloodshed, Feazell said, "I believe it could have been avoided, based on our prior experience. I think (the attempted arrest of Koresh) should have been in a quieter, more peaceful manner."

Feazell has guarded hopes that the agents surrounding the commune will try to wait out Koresh.

"I don't think it will take months and months. I think there will be some resolution prior to that.

Why risk the loss of more human lives? Why risk the life of another agent when patience might work?

"How many days is a life worth?"



Waco Tribune-Herald file photo

During a 1987 trial, a judge in Waco ordered the Branch Davidians to remove a coffin from the rotunda of the McLennan County Courthouse.

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