

Prophets for Profit

By Jamie Buckingham

If Arkansas evangelist Edgar C. Whisenant was correct in his calculations, most of you will be reading this from heaven.

Whisenant wrote a book stating the "rapture" would take place in September. That means if you're still here on earth to read this, either you're in big trouble—or Whisenant is a false prophet. (Whisenant says he did not receive a word from God, but he did foretell future events by using Bible prophecy.)

Although the word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible, a number of people believe (based on 1 Thess. 4:13-18) the return of Christ will begin when Gabriel sounds a trumpet and the church rises to meet Jesus in the air.

Whisenant clarified that, stating the rapture would occur during the Jewish celebration of Rosh Hashanah—some time between sunset September 11 and sunset September 13, 1988. In his book he wrote that the Antichrist would sign a peace pact with Israel on September 21 (The Day of Atonement) to start the 70th week of Daniel, also known as the tribulation. Five days later, on the Feast of Tabernacles, the two witnesses were to arrive to seal the 144,000 Jewish Christians.

September was to have been a very interesting month.

Whisenant was sincere. Sincerely wrong. He really thought he had the dates figured out. It would have been nice and would have given needed credibility to the pre-millennialists, who have been taking it on the chin recently. Rising into the sky, they could have shouted at the "Kingdom Now" folks: "I told you so!"

Many 20th century prophets sell their prophecies as Tetzels sold indulgences in 1500. Whisenant sold some of his books—he even advertised them in *Charisma*. But he also gave many books away. If you really believe Jesus is coming back tomorrow, why try to save money?

God is still speaking through His prophets. He did not become a mute when the canon of Scripture was closed. But when His prophets begin peddling



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their prophecies—for a profit—my red flags go up. Frankly, what we need are some non-profit prophets.

It's hard not to become cynical, especially when you consider the ridiculous nature of some of the more recent "prophecies."

Remember the great "California prophecy" that predicted everything east of the San Andreas fault was going to break off and slide into the sea?

And what about the spate of Florida tidal wave prophecies? The late Roxanne Brant played that to the hilt. After warning us south Floridians in her book *My Vision* of the coming tidal wave, she offered to sell us high water lots. That's the mark of a real entrepreneur.

And remember all those prophecies about the comet *Kohoutek*, which, interestingly enough, never did get close enough to be seen—much less cause the judgmental tidal waves.

The question is not whether God is still speaking. Nor is the question whether biblical prophecies are true. The question is how much of a mark-up will the Holy Spirit allow on published prophecies and interpretations?

Ten years ago a group of innovative people, believing the rapture was going to occur on a set date, borrowed hundreds of thousands of dollars and put it in bank accounts to be drawn upon by the "remnant" they believed would be left behind during the tribulation. Since the borrowers expected to be caught up with

Jesus, there was no way the bank (all bankers will surely be left behind) could collect. Neat! Unfortunately, the rapture did not appear but the lenders did.

Several years ago the nation was swamped with rumors of strange hitchhikers who got into people's cars, said Jesus was coming soon, then disappeared. These ranged from bearded hippies to little old women in tennis shoes. But when I checked around, I never found anyone who actually picked up one of these characters. It was always "a friend told me he had heard."

Shortly afterward there was a bevy of photographs that appeared. They were of a gowned and bearded figure hanging in the sky surrounded by clouds. One woman told me the photo was taken by her aunt in Miami. Another was taken by a woman who spied the figure in the Nebraska clouds and leaped from her car just in time to snap the picture before it disappeared. Still another said the figure appeared over a Hawaiian volcano. Strange. All were the same photograph.

When I asked what the cloud apparition meant, I was told it was a warning that Christ was coming soon. All were disappointed when I reminded them the Bible says we're not to look at the sky; we're to look at the fields white unto harvest.

Sadly, many of us longing for the rapture are also longing to escape earthly responsibilities. Now we have to deal with our self-righteous bumper stickers: "In case of rapture this car will self-destruct. (And you'll be left behind. Goody-goody!)"

How do we then live? We live as though He could come tonight, and work as though He'll not be back for a thousand years.

God has deliberately withheld not only the time, but the sequence of Christ's return. Jesus never tried to scare people—or sensationalize them—into the kingdom. Evangelism based on fear is cheap and shallow.

Besides, the good news is not just that He's coming again. The good news is He has come—and is here now in power. ■