

Brevard & state

A people's preacher, Jamie Buckingham, dies

□ He led a large church, wrote 40 books, had a good word for all, except the holier-than-thou.

By Cory Jo Lancaster

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

MELBOURNE — The Rev. Jamie Buckingham, founder of The Tabernacle Church and author of more than 40 books, has died from complications of radiation treatment for liver cancer. He was 59.

One of Central Florida's most charismatic and popular religious leaders, Buckingham died Monday surrounded by his family at Holmes Regional Medical Center after battling several types of cancer for more than a year, friends said.

"He had a tough struggle, but every time

it looked like it [the cancer] was beat. Finally, it ravaged his liver," said Bill Nelson, a former U.S. congressman and close friend for 20 years. "Although he had his down times, he was always very upbeat and optimistic and hopeful."

With just a few parishioners in 1967, Buckingham founded the non-denominational Tabernacle Church in Melbourne that now attracts about 2,000 people on Sundays.

The Vero Beach native traveled the world — flying with bushmen pilots while they spread the word of Christianity in the Amazon and retracing Moses' steps in the Sinai — to research his long list of books and articles for Christian magazines.



Buckingham

Steve Strang, the founder and president of Strang Communications, remembered Buckingham as a mentor, a confidant and best friend. Buckingham was a member of the board of directors of Strang's Lakeland-based company in addition to his roles with the company's publications. He was editor at large and an award-winning columnist for *Charisma & Christian Life*, a charismatic Christian magazine, and editor in chief of *Ministries Today*, a publication aimed at charismatic ministers.

"Jamie was not one to really put on airs," said Strang, who recalled Buckingham never liked to wear ties. "He was real good in puncturing holes in people's religious balloons and he wasn't crude, but he would be honest in a way that sort of holier-than-thou people sometimes weren't used to," said Strang.

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Brevard pastor, author Jamie Buckingham dies

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Both Strang and the Rev. Peter Lord, pastor of Park Avenue Baptist Church in Titusville, said Buckingham was never out of touch with people, despite his roles as pastor of a large church, columnist and author.

"He was one of the most approachable people that I know," said Lord, a friend of 26 years.

Buckingham co-wrote a book with Nelson after Nelson's voyage into space aboard the shuttle in 1986. And he counseled with the Rev. Jim Bakker during the PTL Ministries' collapse in 1987 over Bakker's fling with a church secretary and extravagant spending.

Buckingham's battle against cancer began in the summer of 1990 when doctors told him he would die from cancer in his kidney. The kidney was removed, and the cancer disappeared. The ordeal was chronicled in Buckingham's *Summer of Miracles*, published last year.

But then a cancerous spot was found on his backbone. He underwent radiation and, again, the cancer disappeared, Nelson said. Another cancerous spot appeared and later disappeared on his lung.

Two months ago, Buckingham learned the cancer was moving quickly through his liver. He continued preaching at the Tabernacle Church on Sundays until mid-January, when he began losing physical stamina after a speaking engagement in Arizona, Nelson said.

He spent the last month at

home in Palm Bay battling hepatitis from the radiation treatments and was taken to Holmes Regional Medical Center on Saturday with a weak pulse. He died there Monday at 3:30 p.m., his family said in a prepared statement Tuesday.

Born March 28, 1932, Buckingham earned a bachelor's degree in English from Mercer University, and a bachelor's of divinity and a master's degree in counseling from the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

A public memorial service is set for Monday at 7 p.m. at the Tabernacle Church, 1619 Ferndale Ave. Instead of flowers, the family requests donations be sent to Buckingham's religious and charitable foundation: Hebron Ministries, 3905 Hield Road N.W., Palm Bay, FL, 32907.

Buckingham is survived by his wife, Jackie; two sons, Bruce, Tim, both of Palm Bay; three daughters, Robin Moore, Palm Bay, Bonnie Ranzino, West Melbourne, Sandy Smith, Palm Bay; mother, Elvira Buckingham, Vero Beach; brothers, retired Army Maj. Gen. Clay Buckingham, Manns Choice, Pa., John Buckingham, Birmingham, Ala.; sister, Audrey Unruh, Missouri; and 13 grandchildren.

A private funeral service will be held for the family. Brownlie & Maxwell Funeral Home in Melbourne is handling the arrangements.

Adelle M. Banks of the Sentinel staff contributed to this report.