

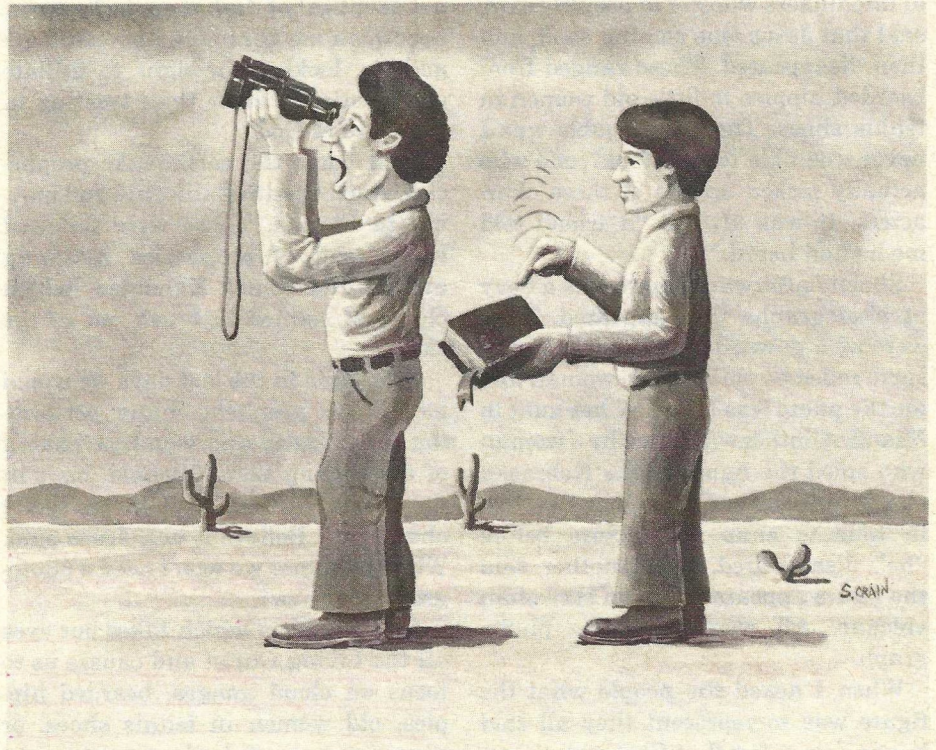
# the last word

Jamie Buckingham

EVER SINCE I was awakened by an early morning earth tremor last year I've spent a lot of time thinking about last things. Most Floridians had never experienced an earthquake. However, I had just returned from New Guinea where I had gone through a real live, teeth-jarring, road-buckling, mountain-toppling "guria." To be at home in what I thought was the safest place in the world, my Florida bed, and suddenly feel the same sensations caused me no little mind-searching.

Now aside from the fact that a lot of prophecies were confirmed that night (and a lot more came into being), our family did learn some things from that mini-quake that rocked our house for a few seconds. It forced us to think about the importance of material things. I mean, if you have 30 seconds to get out of your house before it is swallowed up in a yawning chasm, it seems well to plan ahead of time what you'd try to salvage.

In an after-dinner conference I allowed each child the privilege of deciding on two things to take with them in case they ever had to leap for safety in the middle of the night. (My wife had already declared, pragmatically, that she'd take her houserobe and glasses.)



"I know, but that little cloud to the right sure looks like Jesus' foot to me."

The children opted for things like their Bibles, an almost-completed school research paper, or the cat (Mrs. Robinson). I stated this was a waste of time because it is impossible to catch Mrs. Robinson in thirty seconds.

My 11-year-old daughter, Sandy, said she would not leave unless she could take the 27 stuffed animals she sleeps with every night. When I reminded her she was limited to two things she said she'd take her Mom and me. That was such a nice thought, even if we were second to the stuffed animals, that I declared I'd clear the table. The children headed for the TV room while Mom took the flashlight and went out to inspect the yard—just in case a yawning chasm might be appearing in the flower bed.

We had just finished reading several prophecies predicting that Florida would break off and slide into the sea. One "prophet," after mailing out his

prophecies announced it just so happened he had a farm in the Carolinas. For a very reasonable price Floridians could purchase a lot on his farm and so escape the coming disaster.

(He reminded me of my high school football coach who insisted every boy should wear a certain kind of football shoe. The shoe could be purchased only at the coach's sporting goods store. Hmmmm . . .)

All this raises the question of the multitude of last day prophecies  
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## Guatemala City

sweeping the world. Several years ago the nation was swamped with rumors of hitchhikers who got in people's cars, said that Jesus was coming soon, and then disappeared. These ranged from bearded hippies to little old women in tennis shoes. The only trouble was I never was able to talk to anyone who actually picked up one of these characters. It was always "a friend told me he had heard."

Shortly afterwards there was a bevy of photographs that appeared. They were of a gowned and bearded figure 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 "he" disappeared. Still another said the figure appeared over an Hawaiian volcano. All were the same photograph.

When I asked the people what the figure was to represent they all said it was a warning that Christ was coming soon. I'm afraid I disappointed them with my lack of enthusiasm. The

Bible gives us far more warning than signs in the sky. And even if I were not skeptical of dark room techniques, it bothers me that so many of us are gullible, looking for signs to titillate our emotions rather than trusting in the Word of God.

Next came the earthquake prophecies, starting with California and moving to Florida. These were followed by a rash of prophecies centering around the comet Kahoutec—which God just seemed to brush out of the sky.

Jesus said in the last days we would have false prophets, many performing great signs and wonders, saying of the coming Lord: "Behold, he is in the desert. Behold, he is in the secret chambers." Believe it not, Jesus said. When he comes we won't need a photograph to prove it.

Any prophecy which takes our eyes off the Living Christ and causes us to focus on cloud images, bearded hippies, old women in tennis shoes, or causes us to move to the mountains or jungle to "prepare" for the tribulation—is not of God. Even if we Chris-

tians go through the tribulation it shall not be in fear, for the promises of God are just as valid in the tribulation as they are in the millennium.

How should Christians react when faced with false prophecy? First, don't try to convince through argument. I remember a sign on the public bus in Bangkok which said simply, "Do not argue with the driver when he is drunk."

Instead, realize the purpose of such nonsense is to "deceive the very elect." Christians have nothing to fear—not earthquakes, fire, flood, famine or tribulation. Remember, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Last year a frantic woman called our house in the middle of the night. She said she'd just received a call saying a giant tidal wave was about to engulf the state of Florida. What should she do.

I said, "Shout, 'Hallelujah!' If it is true we'll all see Jesus before dawn. If it is not true, another false prophet has been revealed. Either way—we win."