

BOOK REVIEW BY DAVID JAMES

The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?

Does Isaiah 9:10 really contain an ancient mystery that holds the secret of America's future?

Note: This review is an abridged version of a book of the same title by this author.

Proverbs 18:17 (NKJV)

The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him.

Introduction

The Harbinger, by Jonathan Cahn,¹ is about a series of signs or omens which he believes have manifested in America beginning with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The author believes he has discovered an ancient mystery in Isaiah 9:10-11 that “explains everything from 9/11 to the collapse of the global economy.”² Although he uses a fictional narrative as a framework, the book is based on what he believes are undeniable facts from the biblical text, the corresponding history of 8th century B.C. Israel and current events of the last decade in America. As Cahn states at the beginning of the book, “What you are about to read is presented in the form of a story, but what is contained within the story is real.”³

The overall purpose of *The Harbinger* is to call America to repent for turning her back on God and moving away from the foundations upon which the country was built. It is also to warn of the danger of God's judgment that this represents. Not only is this a valid message, but one that needs to be proclaimed. Jonathan Cahn is to be commended for his passion and commitment to sharing this message with as wide an audience as possible.

However, because of serious flaws throughout the book, the potential dangers may well outweigh the benefits. Many of the author's views and ideas as presented in *The Harbinger* are misguided, having both significant exegetical and theological problems. Additionally, the book could well leave its readers with serious misunderstandings about how to appropriately interpret and apply the Word of God. Beyond this, it is also problematic because in trying to support his conclusions, Cahn appears to variously overstate his case, see prophetic fulfillment where arguably none exists and presses details to draw parallels between historical events beyond what the facts reasonably support.

Not only does *The Harbinger* fail to reveal a mystery in Isaiah 9:10, but in spite of the much-needed call to repentance, the book presents a danger to believers and unbelievers alike.

A Runaway Success

Released on January 3, 2012, *The Harbinger* has already established its place as one of the best selling books of 2012. According to “CharismaNews,” on January 22, the *The Harbinger* debuted at No. 10 on the NY Times best-seller list in the “print paperback” category and at No. 28 in the “combined print hardcover and paperback” category. In just 10 days, it had gone to reprint four times. (Charisma House is the publisher of the book.)⁴

¹ Jonathan Cahn is the senior pastor of Jerusalem / Beth Israel Worship Center in Wayne, New Jersey. On the church's website, it is suggested that Beth Israel is perhaps the largest Messianic congregation in the United States. He is generally referred to as “Rabbi.”

² *The Harbinger*, from the back cover.

³ *The Harbinger*, p. v.

⁴ <http://charismanews.com/us/32649-warning-book-to-america-debuts-on-two-new-york-times-best-seller-lists>

As of April 26, on Amazon.com, it was ranked at #1 in the “Christian Books and Bibles - Fiction” category, at #1 in the broader “Religion and Spirituality” category, #2 in “Christian Books and Bibles - Theology” category and at #50 for all books. There were also 346 reader reviews of the book on Amazon.com - with 282 giving it a 5-star rating.⁵

The founder of “World Net Daily,” Joseph Farah, has produced a two-hour documentary featuring Jonathan Cahn: “The Isaiah 9:10 Judgment.” On March 13, in an email alert, WND noted: “*The Isaiah 9:10 Judgment* DVD tops faith chart at Amazon.com...It is also the No. 8 most popular documentary of any kind and the 247th most popular video for sale.”

On the day of the book’s release, Jonathan Cahn was interviewed by Pat Robertson on *The 700 Club*, who said of the book, “This is one great book...This is the read you need to make...It is a prophetic word.”⁶ The author has also been interviewed on a number of other programs as well, giving the book very broad exposure.

Departure from a Biblical Hermeneutic

The heart of a biblical hermeneutic is the commitment to understanding the literary context of a passage. This is where Cahn’s thesis first runs into trouble. Nothing in the context gives any indication that either Isaiah or the Lord intended for Isaiah 9:10 to be understood as having to do with anything other than the Northern Kingdom in the 8th century B.C. Although the author has insisted in a moderated discussion with this reviewer that he does not believe Isaiah 9:10 is to, for or about America,⁷ the book paints a very different picture.

Although Cahn has tried to explain that the passage is only functioning as a “sign” to America, this is not a meaningful distinction. Biblical signs are revelatory and therefore prophetic, in that they signify that something is happening or is going to happen. And, this is exactly the way Cahn handles these “harbingers” in the book—meaning that in at least some way he actually does see a direct connection with Isaiah 9:10.

Also, if Isaiah 9:10-11 functions to demonstrate a pattern of God’s judgment, as Cahn believes, why is it not identified as such, either here or elsewhere in Scripture? If it is a predictable pattern as he suggests, why is there neither a precedent nor repetition of the pattern in the Bible? Yet, it is the author’s contention that the nine harbingers he believes he has found in Isaiah coincide precisely with recent historical events, beginning with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Furthermore, there is no mention of the first seven verses in the chapter. Yet, these form a critical part of the immediate context of Isaiah 9:10 and represent one of the most important messianic kingdom passages in the entire Old Testament. This is a significant omission when dealing with the subject of Israel’s judgment because it includes the unconditional promise that even in the face of the coming destruction, Israel’s future is still sure. The kingdom will still be established and Messiah will rule from the throne of David forever.

A Prophetic Message?

Although Cahn says he does not claim to be a prophet, he does affirm that his message is prophetic. But, what else besides “prophet” would be an appropriate title for someone who believes he has discovered the hidden meaning of a biblical mystery and then proclaims this prophetic message as factual? He is doing more than simply relaying a message given by someone else. He is the originator of the message.

⁵As of April 23, 2012. http://www.amazon.com/The-Harbinger-ancient-mystery-Americas/dp/161638610X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1332454190&sr=8-1

⁶http://www.cbn.com/media/player/index.aspx?s=/mp4/SUB109_JonathanCahn_010312_WS

⁷On April 4, 2012, Dr. Jimmy DeYoung moderated a discussion between Jonathan Cahn and this author which is available on the Prophecy Today website (www.prophecytoday.com)

In the brief biography introducing the author, the back cover of *The Harbinger* has the following: “His teachings are seen on television and radio throughout the nation and are known for their prophetic significance and their revealing of deep mysteries of God’s Word.”

Others have also identified Cahn’s message as prophetic and him as a prophet. For example, in September, *It’s Supernatural* aired shows that were produced around interviews with Jonathan Cahn. Of these host Sid Roth said, “This may be—no, this is **the most important prophetic show you will ever see.**”⁸

On Amazon.com, the book description includes the following:

Hidden in an ancient biblical prophecy from Isaiah, the mysteries revealed in *The Harbinger* are so precise that **they foretold** recent American events down to the exact days. The **revelations are so specific** that even the most hardened skeptics will find it hard to dismiss or put down. It sounds like the plot of a Hollywood thriller with one exception... IT’S REAL.⁹

Fact or Fiction?

Even though categorized as “fiction,” the story is prefaced by: “What you are about to read is presented in the form of a story, but what is contained within the story is real.”¹⁰ In other words, the book conveys what Cahn considers to be biblically accurate and historically factual. However, the lines between what is fact and what is fiction is not at all clear.

For example, the story centers around a set of small clay discs that are said to date from 8th century B.C. and connected with Isaiah’s prophecy. The purpose of the nine seals is to reveal the ancient mystery and to authenticate that their message comes from God. But do these seals really exist as an archeological find or are they simply part of the fictional storyline? The answer is not clear in the story and it seems very likely that many readers will think these seals do exist, although they do not.

In addition, rather than simply adding an element of authenticity to the story, the nine harbinger seals only make things more confusing for the reader. The obvious question is, “Does this mean that the author is using them as a literary device to suggest that his views are authentically from God (though perhaps confirmed in some other way)? “Are they inherently fact or fiction?

In the *The Harbinger*, the nine seals are given over a period of time, to journalist Nouriel Kaplan by a mysterious figure identified only as “The Prophet.”¹¹ Kaplan and The Prophet are the primary characters in the book, along with a third lesser character, Ana Goren, a Manhattan publishing executive, to whom Kaplan tells the story of his encounters with The Prophet. Are The Prophet and Kaplan purely fictional characters or do they in some way represent real people? Do they represent two different people, a compilation of multiple people or are they rather just two aspects of the same person? Given the central role of The Prophet, is there really someone who is believed to be a prophet who gave the author his message? Or is the answer actually somewhere between the two? Based on the way the story develops and then concludes in the last chapter, one has to wonder if The Prophet and Nouriel Kaplan, when taken together, actually represent Jonathan Cahn. Are they fictional characters or are they real?

⁸http://www.sidroth.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=10457&news_iv_ctrl=0&abbr=tv_ (at the 8:21 mark)

⁹http://www.amazon.com/The-Harbinger-ancient-mystery-Americas/dp/161638610X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1332907071&sr=8-1

¹⁰Page v.

¹¹In the book, “The Prophet” is not capitalized, but it is capitalized here and elsewhere for clarity.

In the second half of the book, Kaplan has a dream about the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem which includes the biblical king Solomon. However, when Solomon turns around, he has unexpectedly transformed into George Washington on the Temple Mount. Is this dream just a literary device in the story or did the author actually have a similar dream? Although he has stated that he did not have a dream as described in the book, it is clear that the idea for the dream sequence did not develop in a vacuum. Could it simply represent Cahn's contemplation and thought process as he sought to arrive at a meaningful interpretation of some of the events in America over the past decade? Once again, the crucial question is: "Fact or fiction?"

Another major issue is the interpretation of events in America since 9/11. Can the author's interpretation of the events rightly be considered to be facts as he apparently does? For example, Cahn believes that God removed His "hedge of protection" from the United States which allowed the successful attacks on the World Trade Center. He also believes that these attacks marked the beginning of God's judgment upon the nation.

However, to claim to know these things with the absolute certainty claimed by the author is to claim insight into the very mind of God, including His specific purposes and plans for America in this generation. Although one might speculate and form opinions, these things cannot be known for sure unless God were to personally reveal them. So, does the author believe he has received this necessary revelation? And if so, is he right? Is God using him as a prophet? Has God given him special insight into an ancient mystery? Has God truly shown him that his confidence in the veracity of his conclusions and interpretation is justified? Or does his message amount to nothing more than speculation? Fact or fiction?

The Mystery of Isaiah 9:10: A Direct Link between Israel and America?

The author denies that he is arguing for a direct connection between Israel and America and maintains that the passage only demonstrates a pattern of God's judgment. Likewise, he concludes that recent events in America, beginning with 9/11, are only parallels to that specific pattern. Yet, in multiple places the book gives the very clear impression that these are more than simply parallels and that a direct connection does exist. Based on what is clearly stated in the book, it is difficult to conclude that this is not precisely what Cahn intended to convey at the time. The following are just a few of the numerous examples.

[Ana Goren] "How could an ancient mystery have anything to do with September 11?"

[Nouriel Kaplan] "*An ancient mystery behind everything* from 9/11 to the economy . . . to the housing boom . . . to the war in Iraq . . . to the collapse of Wall Street. *Everything in precise detail.*"¹²

[The Prophet] "The Assyrians are the fathers of terrorism, and those who mercilessly plotted out the calamity on 9/11 were their spiritual children, *another link in the mystery joining America to ancient Israel.*"¹³

[Kaplan] "So if the ancient mystery is *joined to America*, then somehow 9/11 has to be linked to the words 'We will rebuild.'"¹⁴

[The Prophet] "Well done, Nouriel. So what would we expect to find in Washington DC?"

¹²Page 3.

¹³Page 38.

¹⁴Page 61.

[Kaplan] “Some link between this city and the ancient vow,” I said. “Somehow ***Isaiah 9:10 has to be connected to Washington DC.***”¹⁵

[The Prophet] “And all referring to America’s campaign to defy the calamity of 9/11, as ***he links it all to the judgment of ancient Israel.***”¹⁶

[The Prophet] “Solomon was the king of Israel. Washington was the first president of the United States. There was something in ***the linking of ancient Israel and America***, as with all the other mysteries.”¹⁷

Cahn’s belief in a direct *prophetic* link between Isaiah 9:10 and the United States could not be more clear. As such, the author’s theory about this direct connection unambiguously forms the “factual” basis for the entire story.

The Mystery of Isaiah 9:10: A Driving Force?

Not only does Cahn seem to believe that there is a connection, but he also presents Isaiah’s words as functioning as a driving force in specific events in America over the last decade, set into motion by the attacks of 9/11. According to The Prophet, because of the link between Isaiah 9:10 and Israel, once the pattern is set into motion, each step of the progression ***must inevitably take place.***¹⁸

The cause/effect relationship is also confirmed in his *The 700 Club* interview on January 3, 2012:

[The mystery] even has ***determined the actions and the actual words*** of American leaders. A mystery that goes back two and a half thousand years and is a warning of judgment and a call of God—a prophetic call of God.¹⁹

This comes perilously close to being a mystical view of the prophetic Scriptures because biblical prophecies do not function this way. Any prophecy as specific as Isaiah 9:10 also has a unique, specific future referent in view which sets parameters and limits on what constitutes literal fulfillment. That what is being suggested about Isaiah 9:10 sounds more like a sort of mystical incantation than a prophecy is reinforced when the author introduces the idea of “The Isaiah 9:10 Effect” later in chapter 15.

Undoubtedly, Jonathan Cahn did not intend to give this impression. But he would not be the first person to unintentionally confuse genuinely spiritual approaches with unbiblical and dangerous mystical ones.

America: A New Israel?

In the April 4 discussion, as well as in email correspondence, the author has stated that he does not believe that America is the “New Israel” or has replaced Israel in God’s program. However, a number of exchanges between The Prophet and Nouriel Kaplan could easily leave *The Harbinger’s* readers with a different impression. The Prophet builds the case for the connection by referencing the thinking and intentions of America’s founders:

¹⁵Page 104.

¹⁶Page 109.

¹⁷Page 195.

¹⁸Page 141.

¹⁹Beginning at the 2:15 minute mark: http://www.cbn.com/media/player/index.aspx?s=/mp4/SUB109_JonathanCahn_010312_WS

[The Prophet] But there was one other—a civilization also conceived and dedicated to the will of God from its conception . . . America. In fact, those who laid its foundations . . .”

[Kaplan] “The Founding Fathers.”

[The Prophet] “No, long before the Founding Fathers. Those who laid America’s foundations saw it as *the new Israel, an Israel of the New World*. And as it was with ancient Israel, they saw it as in covenant with God.”²⁰

Although the author denies this, the argument of the book seems to specifically depend on the idea that America’s founders and early leaders had indeed established the nation to be in a covenant relationship with God similar to that of ancient Israel. If it were not for this belief there would be no book. However, God established a covenant relationship with only one nation through His covenant with Abraham. Abraham entered into the covenant by faith, forever establishing Israel as a unique nation in a unique relationship with God that would be enjoyed by no other nation.

While *The Harbinger* does not state that God has completely rejected national Israel, there is no reference to either modern-day or future Israel at all. This is a significant omission because the sense one gets from the book is that Israel had failed to heed the warnings of the prophet and was subsequently *permanently* annihilated. This impression is compounded by the fact that there is no mention of Isaiah 9:1-7 (as noted earlier).

Granted, it is beyond the scope of *The Harbinger* to present a fully-developed eschatology. However, all we know from the story is that ancient Israel did not repent and was therefore destroyed. The story then jumps to the vision the founders had for America to be the New Israel. Again, this gives the impression that Israel met its final end, which is precisely the warning the author is communicating to America if there is no repentance.

The Ancient Mystery: *The Nine Harbingers*

As previously noted, the fictional part of the story centers around a “mystery” connected with nine small, engraved clay discs.²¹ The original purpose of the nine seals was to warn the Northern Kingdom of Israel of progressive stages in God’s judgment as prophesied in Isaiah 9:10.

*“The bricks have fallen down,
But we will rebuild with hewn stones;
The sycamores have been cut down,
But we will replace them with cedars.”²²*

The nine seals were “harbingers” of impending events in the passage that would take place if Israel did not heed them as warnings—events which would ultimately lead to a catastrophic final judgment resulting in Israel’s total destruction and collapse. And although the nine seals are only part of the fictional narrative, they do represent nine actual “harbingers” or signs which the author believes he has identified in the Isaiah passage. He also believes that he has discovered an ancient mystery—a pattern of judgment represented by these signs, that is being manifested once again in the United States of America. This is what the author means when he writes, “...what is contained within the story is real.”

NOTE: A thorough treatment of all nine harbingers is being included in a book-length response to The Harbinger by this author. Each of the nine harbingers has problems comparable to those discussed in this review.

²⁰Pages 18-19.

²¹Page 9.

²²Isaiah 9:10, NKJV

The First Harbinger: The Breach

Concerning Israel: God's removal of his "hedge of protection" which allowed the Assyrians to attack

Concerning America: God's removal of his hedge of protection which directly led to the breach of America's security, providing an opening for the terrorists to attack on 9/11

While God protects whomever, whenever and however He chooses, a "hedge of protection" is a very specific type of protection. Such protection is mentioned only twice in the Old Testament: once in Satan's accusation against God concerning Job (Job 1:10) and once concerning the nation of Israel (Isaiah 5:5). In the New Testament, it appears in only one parable which is also about Israel (Matthew 21:33; Mark 12:1). There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that any other nation ever has or ever will be protected in this particular way.

In the absence of any scriptural support, how can it be claimed with any certainty that 9/11 marked the removal of God's hedge of protection? Furthermore, even if God ever has provided such a hedge of protection around America, is it not possible to also argue that it is still in place? There has not been another terrorist attack since 9/11—even though the motivation, intent and plotting to launch more attacks has continued to the present.

Also, if America enjoyed God's hedge of protection, then what about Pearl Harbor? Hawaii was an American territory and therefore the attack was against America and on American soil. The next year, the Japanese captured and occupied two Aleutian islands of the Alaska territory. In the War of 1812, Detroit was captured by the British and Washington D.C. was captured and burned. Mexico invaded Texas in the Mexican-American War. In 1993, the World Trade Center was bombed by foreign nationals with the intent of taking down both towers. Was God's hedge of protection not in place when these breaches occurred? If not, when was it put into place or put back into place?

Third Harbinger: The Fallen Bricks

Concerning Israel: The bricks which were originally used to build the city walls

Concerning America: Bricks that fell from buildings when the World Trade Centers collapsed.

Fallen bricks meant the Northern Kingdom lay in ruins. However, as tragic as they were, the 9/11 attacks involved only a few buildings, not an entire city, let alone the entire nation. And although there had been an airport security breach, this was not a breach of America's military defenses, even when the attack on the Pentagon is considered.

The pattern of forcing current events into the Isaiah 9:10 prophecy continues with the author's discussion of the bricks themselves. The fallen bricks in ancient Israel were the ruins of a destroyed city, while fallen bricks were only incidental in the World Trade Center attacks. In fact, it has been suggested that it was the *lack* of masonry construction that allowed the collapse of the towers.²³

Fourth Harbinger: The Tower

Concerning Israel: A spirit of defiance against God when Israel would declare that the destroyed city would be rebuilt

Concerning America: The declaration by America's leaders that the destroyed towers would be rebuilt

On the fourth clay seal is the image of a tower which is described as looking like the Tower of Babel. With nothing in the text about a tower (more on this later), how does this fit in? In the story, it is connected with a "spirit of defiance" which prompts the declaration by ancient Israel to rebuild the leveled city with hewn stone—and in the case of the WTCs, to rebuild a tower at Ground Zero.

Israel knew that the Assyrian attacks were a judgment they had brought upon themselves. When they declared that they would rebuild, they were shaking their fists in defiance of both their enemies and their God.

²³http://www.cement.org/masonry/pp_fire_towers.asp

This is not what happened in the wake of 9/11. Yet, in both the book and the documentary by World Net Daily, the author attempts to build the case that America's leaders were proudly and arrogantly acting in defiance against God when they spoke of rebuilding (even though they didn't realize it).²⁴ This is very misleading because although standing in defiance of America's *enemies*, they were demonstrably not standing in defiance of God.

The explanation of the ninth harbinger seems even more misleading. In the book, Cahn gives the impression that Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle concluded a speech on 9/12/2001 by quoting Isaiah 9:10.²⁵ But, that was not the end of the speech. In the documentary by World Net Daily, Cahn specifically states that Daschle closes the speech with, "That is what we will do and we will rebuild, and we will recover."²⁶ However, this is not how the speech ended. There were two more sentences not shown in the documentary:

The people of America will stand together because the people of America have always stood together, and those of us who are privileged to serve this great nation will stand with you. ***God bless the people of America.***²⁷

By invoking God and thinking he was comforting Americans by using the Bible (albeit wrongly), his intent was clearly not defiance against God—it was exactly the opposite. To fail to include or mention his last two sentences is very misleading.

On September 11, 2004, then vice-presidential candidate John Edwards was speaking at the Congressional Black Caucus Prayer Breakfast. Cahn attempts to frame his speech as another unwitting act of defiance against God. However, an honest reading of the speech²⁸ shows that defiance of God was the furthest thing from his mind.

However, he explains that both Daschle and Edwards were defying God without realizing it. In spite of their intentions, Cahn postulates that God was *inspiring* them to unknowingly pronounce judgment upon America.²⁹ But how does he know that God is inspiring America's leaders to prophecy? Unfortunately, he presents his speculation as fact. This is undoubtedly not part of the fictional storyline.

The author attempts to defend his theory by referencing Caiaphas, who unwittingly prophesied concerning the death of Christ (John 11:49-52). Cahn concludes that Daschle and Edwards intended to say one thing, but their words carried a far different meaning. However, that is not what happened with Caiaphas. His words were inspired to mean exactly what he intended. He just didn't know how right he actually was. Once again, the author's exposition of the biblical text does not stand up to scrutiny and the supposed parallel is simply not there.

Finally, Cahn appeals to the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to bring the idea of a tower into Isaiah 9:10. The Septuagint has "let us build for ourselves a tower."³⁰ However, this phrase is not in the Hebrew text.

Furthermore, he doesn't inform his readers that in contrast to the Hebrew text, the Septuagint indicates that it is Israel that cuts down the sycamores. And rather than planting cedars, they, too, are cut down—apparently for the purpose of building the tower. So, the Septuagint eliminates the sixth and seventh harbingers. It is extremely misleading and ethically questionable to pick one phrase out of a translation in order to prove a point when the passage as a whole has a very different meaning.

²⁴At the 21:10 mark, DVD #1.

²⁵Page 117.

²⁶At the 44:38 mark, DVD #1.

²⁷<http://wfile.ait.org.tw/wf-archive/2001/010913/epf407.htm>

²⁸<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=84922#axzz1M02bgo9D>

²⁹Page 117.

³⁰Page 66.

The Isaiah 9:10 Effect

The Harbinger is roughly divided into two major parts. Chapters 1-13 lay a foundation for the author's arguments as he attempts to correlate the nine harbingers of Isaiah 9:10 with events of the last decade in America as evidence for the first wave of God's judgment. In the second part of the book, chapters 14-22, Cahn presents a second wave of God's judgment, a "second shaking," as a final warning of impending severe judgment if America persists on its present path and refuses to repent. The "Isaiah 9:10 Effect" is introduced in chapter 15 and is used to explain the second shaking, which is the collapse of the entire American economy. The Prophet explains the Isaiah 9:10 Effect as follows:

"The attempt of a nation to defy the course of its judgment, apart from repentance, will, instead, set in motion a chain of events to bring about the very calamity it sought to avert."³¹

Thus, the Isaiah 9:10 Effect is presented as having prophetic force, going far beyond a simple parallel or pattern. Cahn believes that the Isaiah 9:10 Effect is what has driven the course of events since the 9/11 terrorist attacks:

[Kaplan] "And they connect 9/11 to the economic collapse?"

[The Prophet] "Not only do they connect them . . . **they determined them . . . down to the time each would take place.**"

[Kaplan] "An ancient mystery?"

[The Prophet] "Yes, an ancient mystery upon which the global economy and every transaction within it **was determined, a mystery that begins more than three thousand years ago in the sands of a Middle Eastern desert.**"

Thus, the Isaiah 9:10 Effect is presented as an inviolable principle that once set in motion, the corresponding prescribed outcome is inevitable. Furthermore, it is discussed as if it were completely biblical, yet nothing even remotely similar to this theoretical principle is mentioned or implied anywhere in the Word of God.

The theory of the Isaiah 9:10 effect also raises an obvious, but very important question: Are there any other prophetic passages in the Old Testament that also function in a similar way? How many other prophecies directed to Israel can be correlated to historical events in the United States? Is there also a "Genesis 12:1-3 Effect?"—or a "Joshua 1:6 Effect?" Are such principles to be found throughout the Old Testament or is Isaiah 9:10 the only such passage (which would seem unlikely if the Isaiah 9:10 Effect were true)?

The bottom line is this: If a theological idea cannot be supported by the Bible, then someone simply made it up. Unfortunately, this is precisely the nature of the Isaiah 9:10 Effect—it is made up.

The Shemitah

The Shemitah as a Mystery

In the Law God commanded that every seventh year Israel must allow the land to completely rest with no harvesting, reaping or any other work in the fields. In addition, all who owed money to creditors were to be released from their debts (Deut. 15:1-2). This was the Shemitah (or "release" in Hebrew).

Humanly speaking, the Shemitah should be crippling for any nation that attempted to practice it. However, Israel was not just any nation. It was the one special nation God had raised up to be His chosen people. God would demonstrate His love and faithfulness to Israel by providing enough in the sixth year to meet the nation's needs the following year. Conversely,

³¹Page 136.

Israelites would demonstrate their faith in God as individuals and as a nation by obeying the command to keep the Shemitah and trusting Him for the results.

The author correctly has The Prophet stating that the Shemitah was never given to nor binding upon any nation other than Israel.³² However, in an apparent contradiction, he also believes that hidden in the Shemitah is a mystery that is now affecting the United States³³—a mystery that extends to even the precise timing of events to the day.³⁴ He argues that God has imposed a Shemitah upon the United States as He did when Israel had turned from Him and failed to voluntarily observe the Shemitah for centuries. In what seems to be an attempt to mitigate this contradiction, he presents the Shemitah as a principle as he did the Isaiah 9:10 Effect. Yet, as is true of the Isaiah 9:10 Effect, Scripture nowhere presents the Shemitah as either a mystery or a pattern or a universal principle connected with God's judgment.

The Shemitah as a Principle

In order to lay a foundation for the argument that the Shemitah is a principle, the author makes the following assertion through the words of Nouriel Kaplan: "Seven years—the biblical period of time that concerns a nation's financial and economic realms."³⁵ While Israel was on a seven-year cycle as required by God, this statement further suggests that the Bible indicates that seven years represent a natural economic cycle in general. However, once again, there are no biblical passages to support this idea.

Furthermore, extensive internet research does not reveal any uniform conventional wisdom or consensus among economists or financial experts that seven years is a natural economic or financial cycle (although apparently it has been suggested a couple of times). Things are said about various cycles that range from three to ten years, but cycles of specifically and exactly seven years apparently do not exist. And, yet, the Shemitah was precise to the exact day.

Cahn's theory that the Shemitah is a principle thus appears to be yet another example of speculation raised to the level of fact, which is once again misleading. Yet, the second half of the book is built on this theory.

The Shemitah as a Sign

According to Cahn, the Shemitah is not only a principle, but is also a sign which is "given to a nation that has driven God out of its life and replaced Him with idols and the pursuit of gain. The issue is the Shemitah as a sign of judgment, the sign that specifically touches a nation's financial and economic realms."³⁶

However, if the Shemitah is genuinely a sign from God, then it is a predictor of things to come because a biblical sign is revelatory. Therefore, if God warns that judgment will come through a particular set of events, when those events begin to happen they signify that the prophesied judgment is underway. On the other hand, in the absence of such a prophetic warning, even if identical events happen, it cannot be known with any certainty that God is executing judgment. For example, even though God judged Egypt through a locust plague, that another region of the world also experiences a swarm of locusts does not necessarily mean that those people are under judgment.

Because the Word of God does not give the required prophetic warning concerning America and the Shemitah, there is no Scriptural basis to interpret recent events as a sign that God is imposing a Shemitah as judgment upon the nation.

³²Page 159.

³³Page 159.

³⁴Page 161.

³⁵Page 161.

³⁶Page 159.

The Shemitah and America

What, then, could bring someone to suggest any sort of connection between the Shemitah and America? The only potential explanation would seem to be that the author, in some sense, believes the founders were right about America being in covenant with God, even if not as a new Israel per se, at least patterned after Israel's covenantal relationship with Him. This is not to suggest that Cahn believes that national Israel has been replaced and has no future in God's program. Unfortunately, there seems to be a significant disconnect between what the author says he believes about this and the ideas he presents in the book.

The Case for the Shemitah

The examples Cahn uses to demonstrate that America is going through an imposed Shemitah feel contrived. In contrast, the Shemitah in ancient Israel was simple. The Israelites were not to work the land and the wealthy lenders were required to forgive the debts owed to them by average people. When God imposed the Shemitah on Israel, He forced them to stop working the land completely by taking the nation into captivity. And, as captives, the wealthy were brought down to the level of their debtors and the financial system *completely* collapsed. The imposed Shemitah was not simply a sign, it was the judgment itself. It meant utter devastation. Almost everyone lost almost everything.

Since the situation with America has been significantly different, the author must go to great lengths in an attempt to support his interpretation of both the Bible and history. He has clearly done extensive research and has assembled an impressive array of facts and figures. Because he writes and speaks with conviction and authority, he makes a case that initially seems compelling—and one that has persuaded a lot of people that he is right.

However, upon closer examination, little of what is presented concerning America remotely resembles the Shemitah imposed by God upon ancient Israel. The first major component of the imposed Shemitah, forcing the land to lay completely fallow, has no contemporary parallel, even if possible economic modern-day equivalents are considered. Nothing in this regard indicates that an imposed Shemitah might be underway.

An analysis of the other major component, concerning credit and debt, reveals that the parallels proposed by the author are not much closer. He draws his support almost exclusively from the failure of a few large financial institutions and the response of the federal government. He cites four corporations: Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Lehman Brothers, and AIG.

However, this doesn't follow "the ancient pattern." Ancient Israel was overrun by a foreign army with everything of value either destroyed or taken. In sharp contrast, even though the U.S. and global economy has gone through a serious contraction and certainly many have been hurt, it has not been even close to the scale, relatively speaking, of the utter devastation that occurred in Israel.

As the author rightly notes, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were rescued by the federal government when the Federal Financial Housing Authority placed them under conservatorship. They did not collapse.³⁷

When Lehman Brothers filed for the largest bankruptcy in history after being denied a federal bailout, the U.S. and world markets were rattled for weeks. However, the analysis in the book includes overstatements and what feels like spin in the effort to find support. Although The Prophet states that the fall of Lehman Brothers triggered the implosion of the American and global economies,³⁸ the fact is that they did not implode. They were seriously shocked, even damaged, but they did not collapse.

³⁷<http://problembanklist.com/fhfa-conservators-report-why-fannie-mae-and-freddie-mac-failed-0183/>

³⁸Page 161.

Unfortunately, because the failure was staggering in terms of dollars (\$639 billion in assets and \$619 billion in debt),³⁹ the reader's initial reaction might be that the author has made his case on this point—but he has not. If both the assets and debt of Lehman Brothers, at \$1.25 trillion are added together, this represents only an extremely small percentage of the world economy. Even when compared to just the American economy, which has an estimated value of \$188 trillion in assets,⁴⁰ it comes out to only about 0.6%—a far cry from what happened when God judged Israel and imposed a Shemitah.

The author continues to try to build his case by citing the September 29, 2008 stock market crash as the “greatest single-day stock market crash in Wall Street history.”⁴¹ However, in only one place does the author note that it was the biggest drop in terms of *points* not in terms of percentage. At the same time, he repeats over and over that it was the “biggest crash in Wall Street history.” The fact is that at just 7%, the drop in the Dow Jones industrial average did not even rank in the top ten.⁴²

To be fair, the Dow did drop a total of about 25% in the two weeks following the defeat of the bailout bill in the U.S. Congress on September 29. Once again, however, this does not rank in the same league as the market collapse in 1929 when it fell 48% in just over two months. By the time the crash had run its course, stocks had lost 90% of their value.⁴³ Was God imposing a Shemitah in 1929? What about the other major market crashes that are in the top ten?

Even the above examples do not exhaust the numerous overstatements in this section, but they do give a sense of just how statistics can be used to prove almost anything.

King Solomon and George Washington

Confirmation of the Israel-America link

As previously noted, Kaplan, the journalist, has a dream about the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem under king Solomon (chapter 19). Although the author has said that this dream is simply part of the fictional storyline, it seems unlikely that there is not a specific reason behind connecting Solomon and George Washington given what is in the previous eighteen chapters. Why does Solomon transform into George Washington on the Temple Mount? This suggests that Cahn does, in fact, believe that there is much more than some superficial parallelism between the establishment of ancient Israel and the establishment of the United States as an independent nation.

Although preceded by kings Saul and David, it was Solomon who built and dedicated the temple. This finalized the establishment of Israel as a nation because it was then that God came to dwell among His people once again—not in a temporary tent, but in a permanent structure. So, too, the inauguration of George Washington finalized the establishment of the United States as a nation. The factual message that Cahn believes he is communicating through this fictional literary device is unmistakable (and not too surprising).

At this point, it would seem difficult for the author to continue to deny that he has clearly connected ancient Israel and America together. In fact, that he believes they are linked is stated explicitly in the book:

³⁹<http://www.investopedia.com/articles/economics/09/lehman-brothers-collapse.asp#axzz1sMPTOMMA>

⁴⁰<http://rutledgecapital.com/2009/05/24/total-assets-of-the-us-economy-188-trillion-134xgdp/>

⁴¹Page 164.

⁴²http://money.cnn.com/2008/09/29/markets/markets_newyork/index.htm

⁴³<http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/bierman.crash>

[Kaplan] “Solomon was the king of Israel. Washington was the first president of the United States. There was something in the *linking of ancient Israel and America, as with all the other mysteries*.”⁴⁴

Mosaic or Abrahamic Covenant?

Also, despite denials to the contrary, Cahn seems to affirm, once again, that America is in a covenant relationship with God. As part of his explanation of the dream, The Prophet says, “The nation’s ground of consecration will become its ground of judgment.”⁴⁵ A few pages later, Kaplan has traced the consecration of the United States to God’s purposes to the first capital, New York City—and more specifically to St. Paul’s Chapel, “The place where America was dedicated to God”⁴⁶—which is located at Ground Zero.

In other words, a harbinger had been manifested in America, just as it had been in Israel. The place of Israel’s consecration, the temple, was destroyed, while the place of America’s dedication, Ground Zero, was also destroyed. Immediately following the above quote, The Prophet continues: “The Temple Mount represented the nation’s *covenant with God*. So its destruction was the ultimate sign that the covenant was broken.” In other words, the destruction of the place of consecration was a sign that the nation’s covenant with God had been broken—both Israel’s covenant and America’s covenant.

By insisting on pressing every detail as he has, Cahn has either tipped his hand as to what he really believes or has made a serious mistake that needs to be corrected because no one could come to any other conclusion but that he is saying Israel and the United States are both God’s chosen covenant nations. When combined with the fact that he only refers to Israel’s destruction, but never its restoration as modern-day Israel or its future hope as the center of the Messianic Kingdom, he gives the unmistakable impression that America actually does constitute a new Israel.

Another serious question is that of precisely which covenant was broken? Was it the Mosaic Covenant or the Abrahamic Covenant? The foundation of America has been in view throughout the book, but it was upon the foundation of the Abrahamic Covenant that the nation of Israel was established. If Cahn is somehow proposing that Israel managed to break the Abrahamic Covenant, then that means God is finished with national Israel. If that is not what he is suggesting, then *The Harbinger* needs to undergo some serious revisions to clear up the theological confusion caused by this ambiguity.

Confirmation of prophecy to America

In chapter 20, the author once again demonstrates that there is a discrepancy between what he now says he meant in the book and what he actually wrote. He emphatically denies that Isaiah’s prophecy is to America. However, he explicitly states that there is a prophetic word from Solomon to America:

[The Prophet] “So the message is twofold. There’s another part to it, another prophetic word, and this time from King Solomon.”

[Kaplan] “*From King Solomon to America?*”

[The Prophet] “For that nation that has turned from God, for that nation from which the smiles of heaven have been withdrawn.”

[Kaplan] “And this word came during the dedication of the Temple?” I asked.

[The Prophet] “It came when the dedication was finished”⁴⁷

⁴⁴Page 195.

⁴⁵Page 198.

⁴⁶Page 206.

⁴⁷Pages 221-222.

Preparing for Eternity

As stated in the beginning of this review, the author is to be commended for his desire to proclaim a message of repentance to America. His target audience is believers and unbelievers alike, which is one reason he chose to use the fictional format. He also rightly notes that national repentance can only take place at a personal level, when people individually turn to God. Because of this, chapter 21, “Eternity,” is arguably the most important one in the book. The challenge to be spiritually prepared for the day of judgment is quite clear as *The Prophet* states: “And no one is exempt. Each must stand before Him.”⁴⁸

Unfortunately, there are some issues which diminish the impact this chapter could have. A believer, or even an unbeliever who already understands the gospel would understand what the author is talking about. However, there are a few things which are either not stated, are unclear or require the reader to “connect-the-dots”—a difficult task without some prior exposure to Christianity.

Although the author does present the idea that Jesus is God in one place in the dialogue,⁴⁹ it could be easily missed by an unbeliever. Neither is Jesus identified as “the Son of God.”

The book does talk about God putting himself in our place, “In our life, in our death, in our judgment . . . the sacrifice”⁵⁰ which is a very good statement. However, while the *Cross at Ground Zero* is mentioned, the connection with Jesus and what He did is not. What is not clearly stated is that Jesus died on the cross, shedding His blood for our sins.

It was Jesus’ death that secured the forgiveness of sin and it is His resurrection that provides the sure hope of eternal life. Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 that Jesus’ resurrection is an essential component of the gospel and in Romans 10:9 that one must believe in His resurrection to be saved. However, there is no mention of the resurrection in *The Harbinger*.

As previously noted, Isaiah 9:10 is in the context of one of the most important messianic passages in the Bible. Yet, the problem of not mentioning Jesus’ resurrection is compounded by the fact that His return is not mentioned either. Although Cahn repeatedly emphasizes the danger of coming judgment, nowhere does he tie it to the Second Coming of Christ. Neither does he mention the hope of the peace that will come to the earth during Christ’s rule over the promised millennial kingdom.

Cahn describes what someone must do to be saved:

[The Prophet] “By receiving . . . by letting go . . . by letting the old life end and a new one begin. By choosing . . . by opening your heart to receive that which is beyond containing—the presence . . . the mercy . . . the forgiveness . . . the cleansing . . . the unending love of God.”⁵¹

However, it is never explained that it is by simple faith that one “receives, lets go, chooses or opens one’s heart.” Neither faith in Christ, nor believing in Christ, nor trusting in Christ for one’s salvation are ever discussed. Someone with no biblical background would not understand what *The Prophet* means when he speaks of partaking in the infinite sacrifice.⁵² Unfortunately, the gospel is almost obscured in the midst of the many words, while things which could have made it much more clear are missing.

⁴⁸Page 227.

⁴⁹Page 232.

⁵⁰Page 232.

⁵¹Page 233.

⁵²Page 232.

The Tenth Seal

In addition to the nine harbinger seals, there is a tenth, which is Kaplan's personal seal. In the last chapter of the book, which deals with the tenth seal, the author seems to reveal the connection between himself and Nouriel Kaplan. It actually seems likely that Kaplan is Jonathan Cahn himself.

Kaplan is Jewish, as is the author. Kaplan is from the priestly line of Levi, as is the author. Kaplan becomes a messianic believer in Christ, as is the author. Kaplan has been given a prophetic message by God, as the author apparently believes is true of himself. Kaplan is commissioned and anointed to become a prophet himself, just as many are saying of the author. Kaplan is to be a "watchman on the wall" to warn of impending judgment, just as the author sees himself. And finally, Kaplan is encouraged to get out the message by writing a fictional novel, as has the author.

Conclusion

Jonathan Cahn wrote *The Harbinger* to call America to repent and turn to God, as well as to warn the nation that it is in danger of coming under the judgment of God if it fails to do so. This is a legitimate and very important message. He also rightly recognizes that the danger faced by the nation is ultimately a personal spiritual matter for each American.

This message could have been communicated in any number of ways, including through a fictional novel. That is not the main problem. The real problem arises from the way he has inappropriately handled the Word of God, from the many instances of speculation concerning the interpretation of historical events, and from the many overstatements and misleading statements he has made in order to make his case for an ancient mystery hidden in Isaiah 9:10.

Unfortunately, *The Harbinger* is a distraction from properly understanding the Word of God, particularly prophecy and so can legitimately be characterized as dangerous. It conveys what the author believes is a prophetic message, but the book clearly does not meet the tests for a prophetic Word from God. *The Harbinger* is misleading and therefore does not legitimately achieve what it sets out to do. Believers run the risk of embracing a misguided view of Scripture and a distorted view of history, while unbelievers will likely end up either skeptical or confused or both.

Cahn apparently anticipated that the book would encounter opposition, launching a "pre-emptive strike" against his critics:

[Kaplan] "They'll do everything they can to attack and discredit it."

[The Prophet] "Of course they will," he said. "Otherwise they'd have to accept it."

[Kaplan] "But not only the message."

[The Prophet] "No, the messenger as well."

[Kaplan] "They'll do everything they can to attack and discredit the one who bears the message."

[The Prophet] "Yes," said the prophet. "The messenger will be opposed, vilified and hated, mocked and slandered. It has to be that way, just as it was for Jeremiah and Baruch."⁵³

To be clear, this reviewer is not an enemy of the Word of God or of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I accept the Bible as literally true and that all biblical prophecy will be fulfilled. I agree that America is truly on a dangerous path and could well find itself under God's judgment, if that has not already begun. Americans do need to repent.

⁵³Page 251.