

Review of “The Harbinger”

Jonathan Cahn’s *The Harbinger* is marketed as “Christian fiction”, but proceeds to present an immediate conflict in that while the format may adhere to a literary style proposed to be “fiction”, in the end the story is nonetheless supposed to be taken as not just being true, but a literal fulfillment of biblical prophecy. The essence of the book is to connect not just the events associated with 9/11 but the subsequent economic milestones in its wake with the fulfillment of specific prophecy in Scripture, asserting that the United States is in the process of losing its divine status as God’s most favored nation, and additionally in danger of completely losing the supernatural hedge of God’s protection provided since the nation’s inception as the only other nation in history with which entered into a covenant relationship with God. What might be normally delivered as a sermon or short work of non-fiction is therefore in actuality thinly disguised with this notion of being fiction, but in the end the reader is supposed take the information presented in the plot as being a real and true revelation of God’s prophetic Word for this present time. It does not take more than a minimum of logic to know that Cahn cannot have it both ways.

Especially when one takes into consideration all that the author has presented through various appearances and writings subsequent to the publishing of the book, it would appear that Cahn himself desires a hedge of protection against critics by claiming on the one hand the book is “only fiction”, while on the other somehow maintaining that the contents are to be seriously received as a new and literal revelation of the truth. This presents quite a conundrum when the absolute propositional truth of God’s Word is presented within a claimed framework of fiction. But what removes the dilemma of whether or not to treat this book as protected, subjective literary material as opposed to the claims of a modern-day prophet providing a new revelation from God’s Word is the résumé of its author, who cannot be characterized as a fiction writer who just happens to also be a Christian.

Jonathan Cahn is the President of Hope of the Word Ministries and ascribed the title of “Messianic Rabbi of the Jerusalem Center/Beth Israel” in Wayne, New Jersey. According to the Beth Israel [website](#), “His teachings are widely known for revealing the deep mysteries of God’s Word”. From the very outset we must negotiate past the conflict that *The Harbinger* is not authored by a noted fiction writer but a self-described “Rabbi” and head of a Christian ministry. This becomes even more complicated in that the content of the book, said to be rendered as “fiction”, is completely based on the interpretation of God’s inerrant Word and, in the end, encouraged to be accepted as anything *but* a mere work of fantasy. Once the absolute truth of God’s Word is introduced into the story’s plot, much less so prolifically referred to over and over again as the author’s proof of its validity in real life, it cannot be accepted as a mere script and there is simply no hiding behind the façade of “it’s only fiction”. Does Cahn really think he can assert a new, literal revelation from God’s Word and somehow avoid examination of his handling of Scripture simply by publishing it as a claimed work of fiction? This is but one of the many paradoxes presented to a biblically discerning reader.

From the outset, I would be less than honest if I did not first and foremost confess that, as a work of fiction in and of itself, this is the single *worst* work of its genre I have ever read. Its complete failure to live up to any minimum standard of literary quality is one of the most condemning reasons, ironically enough, why no one can realistically confirm this as actually belonging to the category of fiction. There is no dramatic imagery, involved descriptions of people or places, nor the qualities we would expect to find from a “wordsmith”. Perhaps it was not planned this way, but it certainly feels like something which was hastily thrown into a story format only for the reason of dressing it up as fiction, but never actually conceived and born from the outset from someone’s imagination; that all seems like a complete afterthought. But this dearth of literary quality in and of itself is also an indictment against the book as actually being fiction, because the only reason someone would get excited about and recommend this work to others is because of their belief that this is a new revelation of God’s prophetic Word for America alone.

The substance of the story is really a very Spartan, elementary conversation between three people, what amounts to a very thinly disguised sermon offered in a conversational format. This is betrayed by the fact that there is such repetition in the conversations going over and over and over again what are really the basic teaching points that the author is trying to get across to the reader rather than a writer’s well-thought out fictional plot. True works of fiction do not fixate on what are actually preaching points which must be repeated in subtle variations from the pulpit in order for the greater biblical truth behind them to sink in to the hearer. The main character, Nouriel the journalist, records and transcribes the conversations which took place over several years between himself and a supernatural messenger only described as “the prophet”, and those conversations are retold to us in yet a second parallel interview taking place between the journalist and his potential book publisher, Ana. The prophet preaches to Nouriel, Nouriel preaches it all back word-for-word to Ana, and in the process we the reader get the same points preached to us in undue quantity so that the true message of the author cannot be missed. Activity outside of these parallel conversations is uncharacteristically sparse and mostly barren for a true work of fiction because this is actually a sermon in a conversational format.

In fact, what finally removes any license the author thinks he may have had by publishing this as fiction is when, at the end of the book, he eliminates all doubt about his true intentions. The journalist finally reveals that it is his duty, like the biblical prophets of old, to write and publish the prophetic word revealed to him by “the prophet”, and the publisher in turn suggests this should be accomplished by putting it into the very format that *The Harbinger* is, in reality, presented. In other words, the book begins as a fictional conversation about the literal fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning the United States of America, but its ending provides the truth about the author’s true intentions by suggesting that after hearing that biblical truth, it be published as a work of fiction, exactly what Cahn does in real life with *The Harbinger*. In this clumsy effort to tie the end back to the beginning through this failed attempt at art imitating life, Cahn actually reveals his true intentions, confirming for us that he is not actually presenting something he believes to be fiction at all. The reader is supposed to experience an, “Aha! It **IS** true after all!” epiphany that removes the veneer of “fiction” thinly disguising the truth as Cahn sees it.

Doctrinally, the first and most pressing issue is that one has to accept that in spite of the fact that Scripture expressly states there is only one nation with which God has a covenant relationship—Israel,

He actually has two, the second being America. It is critical that the reader's lack of biblical discernment buy into this notion in order for all the other Old Testament teachings which apply to Israel and Israel alone to be misapplied to the USA throughout the book. This is revealed in the purported consecration of a covenant arrangement for America through George Washington in his inaugural address in the character of Solomon's so doing on Israel's behalf at the consecration of the Temple, and an interesting attempt to tie America's economic troubles as not just relating to the events of 9/11, but the Old Testament concept of "*shemitah*"—the Torah's mandated release of debt every seven years. This, and other "dots" connected between ancient Israel and America, both presented as having a covenant relationship with God, is based on lifting out of Scripture some verses in Isaiah 9, but the repeated one specifically used over and over again is Isaiah 9:10.

In the original manuscript—the original scroll of Isaiah, there were no verse or chapter markings. We always have to keep our eye on the exegetical ball and flee the temptation to take a verse out of its original context. Isaiah 9:8-21 is a message delivered to the ancient northern kingdom of Israel that is not intended as a mere warning that they should return to God before it's too late, but the decreed judgment of God upon them for what is about to happen to them precisely because it **IS** too late. Cahn extracts a couple of verses to build a case for nine harbingers which he purports to not only have literally appeared in the days of ancient Israel, but literally re-played for present-day America in the wake of 9/11, all of which combine to offer a message that it is not too late to be saved from the inevitable judgment of God that is coming upon us. What in Scripture in its original context for the northern kingdom of spiritually fallen Israel is an explanation of God's impending judgment for their sin, is here re-packaged by Cahn to have a literal, present-day fulfillment as God's warning to America that it's not too late to avoid that judgment.

Please do not send me email asking why I am "against" a message of repentance and returning to God; Lord knows that is a continuing message which needs to be proclaimed by every Believer in Christ at every level, and who needs that more than America? The issue that I am *really* talking about here is the handling of Scripture. America has never had, does not currently have, nor will ever have a covenant relationship with God parallel to that of Israel. In my opinion this is a variant of "Replacement Theology" which outright replaces every instance of "Israel" in Scripture with "the Church". In this case, it is some kind of attempt to yoke America as being equal with Israel when that is simply not the scriptural case; it does, however, stroke the ego of the American public who purchases the book. It is outright error to take what only and literally applies to Israel alone in Scripture and assign it equal status with any other nation in history, much less the United States. Furthermore, misapplying Isaiah's message of coming judgment against the apostate and spiritually fallen northern kingdom of ancient Israel to modern-day America as a reconfigured message of warning and hope discredits not just the intended message of the book, but the authority and original meaning of God's Word as it is literally intended in Isaiah. Even with the best of intentions, are we allowed to misrepresent God's Word in order to get people to return in obedience to that very Word?

However, I also became confused from time to time by the author's apparent ability to interchange "Israel" with "Judah", and even sometimes "Jerusalem", when the text he constantly returns to has nothing directly to do with anyone but the northern kingdom of Israel, both a people and geographic

entity completely separate from either Judah or Jerusalem. Again, for those who think I'm too nit-picky, I refer you back to the author's credentials as a "Messianic Rabbi" and someone who is supposed to bring to his teaching the deeper things of the Jewish culture and history, much less simply know the basics of Scripture. It's not just surprising that terms which any first year seminary student knows cannot be used interchangeably so often cross over throughout the book, but is probably another indicator that the author wants to convey something much more than a mere fictional story and therefore stretches a bit too far here and there.

But for me personally, what was even more perplexing than seeing the truth of God's Word laid out within a framework of fiction was to see its interpretation and meaning most often explained through "the commentaries". Whenever "the prophet" in the book is explaining how God's Word is to be literally understood through the symbolism of the nine harbingers and their relationship to something connected with 9/11, "the prophet" most often provides the answer not from other Scripture, but from human-authored commentaries. A very few number of Scriptures are repeated throughout the book many times, but a far greater number of commentaries are used to explain their many nuances in relation to Cahn's explanations of the nine harbingers. There are an unbelievable number of commentaries referenced and someone could probably do their doctoral thesis just on cross-checking them to see whether or not those commentaries were selected because their authors seemed legitimately credible, or whether what they said merely fit best with Cahn's intended overall message. Nonetheless, it concerns me that what the reader is led to believe is that God's Word cannot be understood apart from a commentary.

Granted, I may be reading too much into this, but I cannot help seeing a parallel between someone calling themselves a "Messianic Rabbi" and their use of commentaries in almost the exact, same manner as an Orthodox rabbi who interprets and teaches Scripture based more on what the "sages" have written than the Word of God and failing to show how Scripture is always the best interpreter of itself. In fact, I would argue that many of the interpretations Cahn offers from Isaiah 9:10-11 and inflated into a whole book, *require* the embellishment of those commentaries in order to re-cast the original text into his own mold. Frankly, I would characterize this work in its entirety as a classic example of "eisegesis", where one reads into the text what one wants to impose *upon* it rather than drawing *out* the plain meaning from its surrounding text and parallel references in other corroborating Scripture.

But this brings me to what I believe is the most subtle yet most dangerous aspect of this book, in its encouragement of the reader to discover the truth about God's Word by searching "the commentaries". It's not only that we would have to accept that whatever commentary Cahn chose to quote must therefore be accepted as sanctified opinion as a whole on anything and everything in addition to Isaiah 9, but in what I believe is his abandonment as a pastor and teacher of God's Word the obligation to first and foremost exegete Scripture with Scripture. I realize that part of this may be a holdover from his coming from an academic environment where students are taught to assemble papers based on researching and organizing quotes from noted authors in a given field, but is this the hermeneutic he employed in order for his teachings to be "widely known for revealing the deep mysteries of God's Word" as his ministry's website asserts? Is this what a sound expositor of Scripture instills in his

disciples? Or does he re-cast it as “Christian fiction” in an attempt to obtain an exemption from normal accountability for handling God’s Word?

If I am to be fair, not everything in the book is unpolished in its presentation nor poorly presented scripturally. Toward the end there is one of the most eloquent and well-presented presentations of the Gospel I have ever read, yet this also seems to betray the truth that what is presented is not actually and purely fictional. The overriding principle when it comes to biblical discernment, however, is that just because someone is right about one point of doctrine does not automatically make them right about everything else. No one should ever mistake that I am questioning whether Cahn is a born-again believer, because I do not think *anyone* could present the Gospel in this manner without absolutely being so; the issue is his handling of God’s Word in general and his assertions that he has found a direct, foreordained prophetic link to America and 9/11 in Scripture specifically. If someone is *wrong* about the doctrine of salvation, they will *never* be right in their teachings on God’s prophetic Word; but if someone is *right* about the doctrine of salvation, it does not automatically mean they are right in what they espouse concerning the End Times.

There is a problem whenever truth is laid, side by side, next to error. I realize there are those who think we can just pick out the “good” things, that we don’t have to eat the whole enchilada, and can somehow independently inhale the tortilla without any residue from the tainted ingredients, but that is not the biblical case when it comes to such things. It might be more understandable, even more palatable, if the author was simply a well-intentioned Christian who made their living writing, but we cannot escape the resume of who authored this, and therefore how they are handling Scripture. We especially cannot ignore it given that in the end we are not supposed to actually accept it as a fictional message at all.

Additionally, in several places one has to accept that physical objects such as the type of trees mentioned by Isaiah actually translate to literal equivalents on the American continent which are exclusive to the Middle East, and accept this being a coincidence overridden by divine intervention. While I would not go to the extreme of saying its fabricated, we still have to recognize that a precise match is at times a healthy stretch. There is also a lot of commentary of the general workings of economics and the specific cause and effect on America since 9/11, which in spite of the author’s self-assuredness are not universally agreed upon.

Especially difficult for me was the notion that George Washington, on behalf of the country, initiated a covenant relationship with God which guaranteed His “hedge of protection” which was only recently withdrawn with the advent of 9/11. We could cite many historical instances where, if such protection existed, it for some reason temporarily failed such as Pearl Harbor or the War of 1812, and wonder aloud that if such a covenant actually existed, why is it not specifically annotated in any of the country’s founding documents. Yes, there are plenty of *references* to God, but America “called” and founded as an equal with Israel in a binding covenant relationship with God? I have no doubt that President Washington openly practiced and lived the Christian faith, but I challenge the notion that he was operating in the character of Solomon on behalf of a people called by God in the same, literal manner as the apple of His eye, Israel. A Bible expositor is obligated to make the distinction between applying a

principle learned from Scripture to any given nation from its strict and literal biblical connection to Israel alone. Many things in Scripture may be applied spiritually, but never breach the gap to become re-applied literally.

At the end of the discussion, I am most concerned for rank-and-file members of the Body of Christ who will make this work appear successful according to the author's true intention, and though presented in the guise of "Christian fiction", accept it as doctrinal truth on an equal footing with Scripture. We already have too many Believers whose only knowledge of eschatology comes from works claiming to be fiction such the *Left Behind* series, or only understand spiritual warfare through Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness*, or an alarmingly bulging list of Christian fiction authors of the widest variety whose themes are increasingly replacing direct contact with Scripture. I am not referring to works which are actually allegorical such as John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but those which lay Scripture side by side with fictional plots designed to actually produce a truth either absent from Scripture outright on its own, or cannot be proved by normal, exegetical examination of the plain text of God's Word. Why do we tolerate authors being allowed to re-invent God's Word simply because they claim it's only "fiction"?

For those who still aren't sure that what is presented as "fiction" is actually intended as a new revelation of God's Word, just spend a few minutes at the website dedicated to *The Harbinger* at <http://www.theharbinger-jonathancahn.com/>. Of particular note is the [8 DVD set](#) titled, *The Harbinger Mysteries – The Full Revelation*. Are these statements made on that web page advertising a work of fiction or actually claiming a true, new revelation from God?

- "The Full Revelation – With More, with Details, with Mysteries, & Revelations..."
- "Listen as Jonathan Cahn shares in depth the full revelations, the full details, and the full significance that lie behind and with the mysteries and prophetic message of The Harbinger".
- "Hear and learn more and get deeper into the mystery".

These, along with other quotes and interviews posted on that page, leave absolutely no doubt of the author's true intentions.

In this same vein, it is worth noting that a true work of fiction is never accompanied by a subsequent work such as Jonathan Cahn's [The Harbinger Companion with Study Guide](#) which promises that it will allow readers to "decode the mysteries and respond to the call that can change America's future – and yours". There simply can be no doubt of the author's intent for his book to convey a new revelation from God's Word. In fact, I would argue that Cahn is not just building an empire around the book, but these follow-up works are the mother of all red flags where spiritual deception is concerned, when the books become the center of attention in place of Scripture itself.

Finally, in what is an obvious and inexcusable violation of Scripture, the purported Christian publisher of *The Harbinger*, Charisma House, has filed a civil lawsuit against the Christian ministry [The Berean Call](#) over their reviews of the book. Even Believers with the most rudimentary understanding of God's Word know that this in itself proves something contra-biblical is at work, and we will now be provided a

glimpse into Jonathan Cahn's true Christian character in whether he has the courage to scripturally rebuke his Christian publisher, or in the same character of publishing his revelation under the guise of fiction, will allow this un-Christian witness to the world unfold under the fiction of his being a separate, third party to it all.

This book not only fails to pass the test of God's Word, but even more so by the behavior of its publisher and the tacit approval of their behavior by its author.

In Him,

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