

The End of America? Review of *The Harbinger* by Jonathan Cahn

Will America suffer devastation in the not too distant future? Devastation orchestrated by God? Was 9/11 merely a warning shot, a wakeup call to a godless nation? This is what Jonathan Cahn posits in his book, *The Harbinger*. This work of fiction starts with a serious disclaimer: “What you are about to read is presented in the form of a story, but what is contained within the story is real.” In other words, the fiction is the spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down.

Here’s the basic plot: a journalist named Nouriel Kaplan receives a mysterious, ancient seal in the mail. This leads to a “chance” meeting with a man in a dark overcoat. He has no name but is a prophet. This spaghetti western-ish messenger helps Nouriel decode the seal. Nine more seals come into Nouriel’s possession throughout the story. Each builds successively on the others, and Nouriel comes to understand their meaning through the prophet’s coaching. The seals culminate in a prophetic message concerning America and every person on earth.

“The bricks have fallen, But we will rebuild with hewn stone; The sycamores have been cut down, But we will plant cedars in their place” (Isaiah 9:10, translated by J. Cahn).

The seals amount to verbal nail-and-string art. Connections are made between Isaiah 9:10, events surrounding 9/11, and American history. Once the points are strung together, the pattern emerges. The connections Cahn makes are so many and so dense I’m only going to touch on some of them:

- America’s founders dedicated America to God. Although not an official covenant like Israel had, God honored this dedication and treated America like a nation in covenant with Him.
- Though not a new Israel America is following Israel’s pattern—a nation in covenant with God that turns away from God and suffers spiritual decline.
- Nine harbingers of judgment portended Israel’s destruction. These nine harbingers (represented by Nouriel’s nine seals) have manifested in America and warn of America’s destruction.
- Isaiah 9:10 is the key to the harbingers. It was penned after Assyria invaded Israel and captures the spirit of Israel’s response to God’s warning. Isaiah 9:10 reveals a nation that was defiant instead of repentant. American political leaders at all levels of government also reacted to 9/11 with a defiant spirit. Cahn employs quotes from a plethora of public statements to document this. These include two instances where senators quoted Isaiah 9:10 itself.
- America’s defiant spirit was also expressed through actions taken to memorialize 9/11. Things like the Freedom Tower, the Sycamore of Ground Zero, and The Tree of Hope are modern fulfillments of Isaiah 9:10 and mirror Israel’s pattern of rebellion.
- The Great Recession and global financial crisis starting in 2008 were aftershocks of 9/11. Key moments of America’s economic collapse coincided with Shemitah, a Hebrew celebration during which debts are cancelled.
- After his inauguration in 1789, George Washington and members of congress met in a church to pray, to give thanks, and to commit America to God’s blessing and

protection. The church (St. Paul's Chapel) still stands today and is at ground zero. Ground zero was the place America was originally consecrated to God and the place God sent His warning through the 9/11 attacks.

- “The purpose of the Harbingers is not to condemn America to judgment but to save it, to give it warning, to awaken it, and to turn it back from destruction” (pg. 215, Kindle Fire HD version).¹

These are merely strands in the exhaustive tapestry of coincidence Cahn weaves. The correlations between Isaiah 9:10, 9/11, and American history are startling and well documented. Since most of Cahn's citations are a matter of public record, they are easily verified.

So is *The Harbinger* true? That is the \$64,000 question. Cahn's conclusions flow easily and logically from his assumptions. But it is his assumptions I find most flawed. Cahn states America is not Israel and is not in covenant with God like Israel. However, he says God honored the founders' dedication of America to Him and treated us *like* Israel. This is a have your cake and eat it too proposition. It allows Cahn to (unbiblically) hold America to covenant standards while maintaining America isn't in covenant with God.

But there is an even more fundamental question: Is God working His purposes through nations and dealing with them prophetically? Scripture indicates this was an old covenant arrangement. No nation is set apart to advance God's purposes in the earth. God is dealing with the whole world through Christ. The church—those called out of every nation—is the “nation” He is working through now.

Another question: Is God moving in sync with the Judaic calendar, as Cahn says about America's financial crises? Hebrews and Colossians tell us the law (including its calendar of religious festivals) was a shadow of reality in Christ (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:16-17). Jesus established a new covenant in which everything of God happens through Him. He is the time, and He is the season through which God now moves. Hebrews again tells us, “By saying **a new covenant**, He has declared that the first is old. And what is old and aging is about to disappear” (Heb. 8:13).

So will America be judged? Yes. But not because of a pseudo-covenant, parallels to ancient Israel, or esoteric applications of Isaiah 9:10 to current events. America, like all human governments, is part of what the Bible calls “the world” (1 John 2:15-17). The world is the socio-political expression of fallen humanity. It is a system formed of the people, by the people, and for the people rather than of God, by God, and for God. The world was judged when Jesus died on the cross (John 12:31; Gal. 6:14). At some point, the judgment of the cross will manifest in the cataclysmic end of all things (2 Peter 3:7, 10). Short of this ultimate end, America will rise and fall like every other nation in history because it is not the kingdom of God; it is merely another human construction, making it ultimately corruptible and temporary.

Despite these criticisms, I still found value in Cahn's book. He calls attention to 1) the marginalizing of Christianity in America; 2) our tolerance of ungodly things like abortion, sexual immorality, greed, and materialism (pp. 20-21). No one can change unless the problem is identified. Naming our cultural failings is more genuinely prophetic than pointing out mysterious coincidences between 9/11 and Isaiah 9:10.

Whatever America's response to the harbingers, Cahn says each of us will be judged by God for our own actions. Evil must come to an end. Each of us has evil within and deserves God's judgment. Through Jesus Christ, God became human, put Himself in our place, and took

¹ Page numbers refer to an electronic version of the book read on Kindle Fire HD. I don't know if these correspond to pages in paperback format.

His own judgment. If Jesus took our judgment, we don't have to bear it ourselves, and God can forgive us. The Cross of Ground Zero was a sign of God's love in the midst of His judgment on America. Cahn urges us to turn from our own ways and to believe this message of love—that Jesus died to cleanse us from sin and save us. This is a classic evangelical appeal, an altar call to every reader. No theological problems here. Just the gospel, plain and simple.

As a blend of fact, fiction, theology, and conspiracy theory, *The Harbinger* was an unusual read in every way. Its hybrid nature is best approached with an open-minded skepticism or a skeptical open-mindedness, take your pick. Cahn's moral concerns and gospel presentation should be taken very seriously. His conflation of Israel and America, of the old and new covenants, should be as seriously discarded. All in all, *The Harbinger* is like a curiosity shop—better for browsing than buying; full of things that are more fascinating than useful.