

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 35, NO. 2

APRIL-JUNE 2015

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Jonathan Cahn: Man of Mystery

The Art of Making God's Word Complex and Sensational

by J. Greg Sheryl

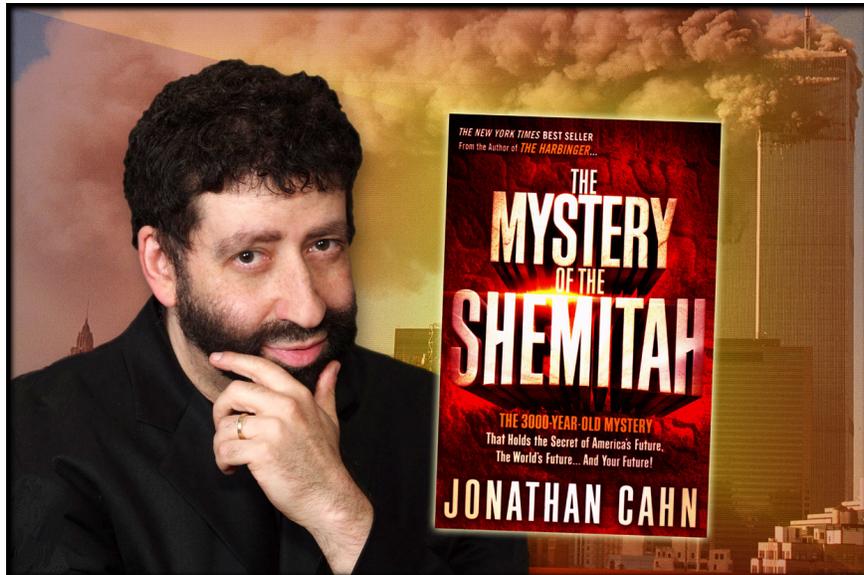
Christian bookstores are full of books written by — or ghost-written for — people so out of touch with scriptural reality that the messages conveyed are bad at their very core.

Then there are books by Jonathan Cahn, who has obscured what could have been a worthwhile message about repentance behind claims of insight into scriptural and prophetic mystery.

Cahn, a Messianic Jewish pastor/rabbi, rose to fame as a result of his first book, *The Harbinger*,¹ published in 2012. To date, he has written two more² and has said that he will write a sequel to *The Harbinger*.³ DVDs based on *The Harbinger* and featuring Cahn have been produced⁴ and he appears in several YouTube videos.

Charisma Media has published all three of Cahn's current books, the

DVD *The Harbinger Decoded*, and a book defending *The Harbinger* titled *The Truth About the Harbinger*.⁵



Cahn uses the word “mystery” to describe many of his teachings. Among the titles he’s employed are “The Hanukkah Endtime Mystery,” “The Mystery of the Leper King,” “The Yoma Mysteries,” “The Mystery of the Rains,” “The Mystery of the Ilanot,” and “The Masada Mystery.”⁶

The Harbinger's subtitle is *The Ancient Mystery that Holds the Secret of America's Future*. His latest book is *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, in which he uses the word “mystery” at least 236 times in 276 pages. Cahn's books frequently are described in words (continues on page 12)

Inside this Issue:

THE REAL IDENTITY OF BLACK HEBREWS	PAGE 2
MALARKEY RECANTS VISIT TO HEAVEN	PAGE 3
AMBASSADORS OF THE SENSATIONAL	PAGE 4

Editorials

THE REAL IDENTITY OF BLACK HEBREWS

Near the end of 2014, *The Times of Israel* reported, “The spiritual leader of Israel’s Black Hebrews movement, Ben Ammi Ben-Israel, 75, died suddenly on Saturday [Dec. 27], plunging the community into grief and disbelief.”

Not many people, including well-informed Christians, have heard of Ben Ammi Ben-Israel. However, for nearly half a century, Ben-Israel flew under most of the world’s radar. He reportedly ruled over more than 3,000 people and was seen by devotees as God’s representative on earth. He presided over the majority of his flock southwest of Masada in Dimona, Israel, in the Negev desert. There are also small clusters of followers in Arad, Mitzpe Ramon, and Tiberius.

Most historical reports agree that Ben-Israel was born Ben Carter in 1939 in Chicago.

Members of Carter’s group — some label it a commune — call themselves Black Hebrews, Black Jews, the Kingdom of Yah, and also African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem. They are *not* recognized by the Rabbinate or the government of Israel as true Jews. True Jews are born of a Jewish mother or go through the stipulated rites of conversion to Judaism.

As far back as 1969, Carter’s people came to Israel in trickles on 90-day tourist visas. Skirting the law and

living there illegally did not seem to bother them. Group members ignored their visas’ expiration dates and settled in. The group grew as more arrived as “tourists” and as members had children in Israel. They are energetic and enterprising. They earn income for their community through traveling reggae and jazz bands, profits from their garment and jewelry factories, and through several vegetarian restaurants. Their Tel Aviv vegan establishment is called Taam Ha-Chaim, meaning “taste of life.”

The Black Hebrews have what they call a Prophetic Priesthood. These men dress in holy garments (their term) patterned after the Old Testament priestly apparel. Sadly, they do not understand — or reject — the biblical truth that Jesus Christ fulfills the Old Testament priesthood perfectly and eternally, as explained in Hebrews 7:11-28.

On May 30, 2003, Carter’s people were given a visit and a “thumbs up” by the late singer and actress Whitney Houston. (Houston claimed a Baptist upbringing.) It is reported that she had friends in the group. Houston’s endorsement may have helped to somewhat legitimize Carter’s group at the time, because Israeli news reporters were fascinated by the story.

The Israeli government early on discussed deporting them, but later relented out of fear of being portrayed as racist. Following Houston’s visit, the Israeli government granted the group members resident status and work

(continues on page 21)

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MALARKEY RECANTS VISIT TO HEAVEN

In what was advertised as “a true story” of a 6-year-old boy dying, going to heaven, and coming back again is not true at all — so says not only the boy’s mother, but the boy himself.

In 2010, Tyndale House published *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*, which professed to describe the visit to heaven and encounter with Jesus by Alex Malarkey, who, in 2004, was left paralyzed and in a coma following a car accident. The book was said to be written by Alex and his father, Kevin Malarkey. His father was also involved in the accident, but not seriously injured. According to the book, Alex says his “Daddy was in Heaven too,” but his father says, “I have no memory of being in Heaven.”

The book was initially published in hardcover and enjoyed a brief seven-week stay on *The New York Times* Best Seller list, debuting at the #27 slot. A year later, Tyndale House released the paperback edition. That format first appeared at the #9 slot and enjoyed a more extended stay on the newspaper’s best-seller list. The book is said to have sold more than 1 million copies.

On January 13, 2015, an “Open Letter” was released to the sellers, buyers, and marketers of the book. In it Alex wrote, “I did not die. I did not go to Heaven. I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to.”

Alex’s letter was not the first time his story had been called a fabrication. For several years, Alex’s mother Beth has been writing and posting on blogs that the book is untrue. In April 2014, she blogged, “It is both puzzling and painful to watch the book *The Boy who Came Back from Heaven* to not only continue to sell, but to continue, for the most part, to not be questioned.” She maintained that the book is “Biblically off” and that it has hurt her son tremendously, saying that Alex “has not received monies from the book nor have a majority of his needs been funded by it.” She further stated, “Alex did not write the book and it is not blessing him! ... Alex’s name and identity are being used against his wishes.” His mother is the primary care-giver for the boy who is now 16 years old.

According to Wikipedia, “Beth and Kevin Malarkey have become estranged since the book was published” and that Beth has claimed that Kevin “was ‘not even adequately supporting his family financially.’”

As Alex’s open letter went public, it gained the attention of nearly every major media outlet. Almost immediately, Tyndale House removed the book from its list of titles. On January 16, the publisher released a statement saying, “We are saddened to learn that Alex Malarkey, co-author of ‘The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven,’ is now saying that he made up the story of dying and going to heaven. Given this information, we are taking the book out of print.”

In a further statement, Tyndale House sought to lessen its culpability by saying, “For the past couple of years we have known that Beth Malarkey, Kevin’s wife and Alex’s mother, was unhappy with the book and believed it contained inaccuracies. On more than one occasion we asked for a meeting with Kevin, Beth, Alex and their agent to discuss and correct any inaccuracies, but Beth would not agree to such a meeting.”

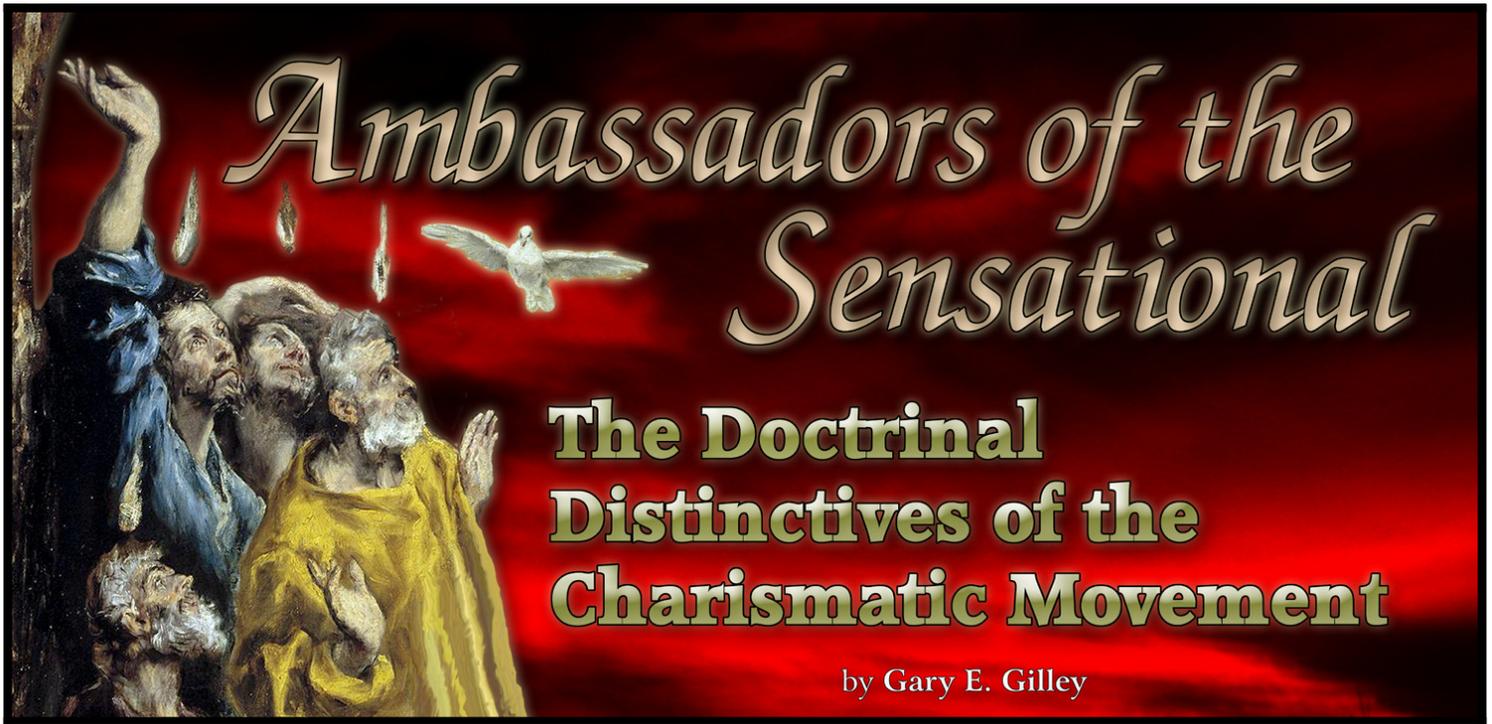
—MKG

WARREN PREACHES MARS HILL’S FAREWELL

Following months of turmoil and controversy resulting from the misdeeds of its founding and lead pastor Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, the Seattle-based megachurch, officially closed its doors at the end of last year. In late December the church posted on its website that, “This Sunday, December 28th, will be our final Sunday as Mars Hill Church.” The post further stated, “Our dear friend Pastor Rick Warren from Saddleback Church has graciously offered to preach the final sermon for us.”

Warren’s sermon, based upon Romans 8:28-29 and John 12:24, was delivered via a prerecorded video and was shown at all of the church’s various campuses. According to a news article in *The Christian Post*, “The megachurch is selling or transferring all property. The Mars Hill name and brand will also be completely dissolved by the end of the year.” A spokesman for the church noted, “Mars Hill will cease to exist after Dec. 31, 2014.” However, eleven of the church’s satellite campuses are still meeting and have become independent churches. Those locations “will be under new leadership and will no longer be affiliated with the Mars Hill brand,” the *Post* also reported.

Warren concluded his message by outlining several items for the congregation to follow in the wake of the church’s dissolution. He told them to refuse to be bitter, (continues on page 23)



The pentecostal and charismatic movements have always focused on shared experiences, not theology. This is especially true of those in the charismatic movement, which transcends all denominations. There are Catholic Charismatics who believe in a sacramental form of salvation, Lutheran Charismatics who believe that infant baptism is redemptive, and Baptist Charismatics who believe they are saved through faith alone. While these three types of Charismatics might differ on the fundamentals, they share a common experience: speaking in tongues. While all Charismatics do not personally speak in tongues, all would accept the validity of tongues-speaking. This experience does have a doctrinal framework which could be expressed as such:

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace that brings power into the life of the believer.
- The evidence of this baptism is speaking in tongues.

The logical conclusion is that a person who has not been baptized by the Holy Spirit is a second-class Christian and is not experiencing the power of God. If the Charismatics are correct, an important ingredient is missing from the spiritual life of most

Christians. If they are wrong, they have placed a questionable or even fraudulent practice at the center of the Christian life. While one would think that believers want to be certain what role speaking in tongues plays in the modern Christian life, it is not often the case. Instead one finds ambivalence in most circles, with the attitude being along the lines of: "If speaking in tongues works for you, then fine. If not, no big deal."

However, if the baptism of the Holy Spirit is truly a subsequent experience, evidenced by speaking in tongues, then all Christians should seek this. If it is not, then this teaching should be denounced.

The biblical foundation for the unique theological position of Charismatics is found almost entirely in the book of Acts. Four passages are critical:

Acts 2:1-8 — The day of Pentecost, when tongues first were spoken.

Acts 8:14-18 — In Samaria, where the new believers did not receive the Holy Spirit until the apostles came. There is no record of tongues being spoken by these believers.

Acts 10:44-48 — At Cornelius' house, when the Gentiles received the Spirit.

Acts 19:1-7 — When disciples of John the Baptist received the Spirit at their conversion and spoke in tongues.

A careful study of these passages and others reveals that it is difficult to base doctrine on the book of Acts. Acts is a book of history, tracing the transitional nature of the early Church. This is why the Epistles were written — to give us doctrine. The late evangelical preacher John R.W. Stott emphasized:

"I must first repeat that a doctrine of the Holy Spirit must not be constructed from descriptive passages in the Acts. It would be impossible to build a consistent doctrine from them because there is no consistency about them. You cannot even derive a doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the *description* of the day of Pentecost; ... No apostolic sermon or epistle contains an appeal to be baptized with the Spirit."¹

Moreover, note the transitional nature and the diversity of the reception of the Holy Spirit in the four passages from Acts cited above. For example, there is no speaking in tongues in Acts 8; no wind or fire except in Acts 2; some who were already saved received the Spirit, along with some

new converts. Now, however, according to Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, the Holy Spirit is *always* received at the moment of conversion.

It should also be noted that most converts, even in the book of Acts, did not speak in tongues. The following believers apparently did not speak in tongues: 3,000 at Pentecost (2:41); 5,000 men (4:4); the eunuch (8:35-38); Saul (9:3-18); Sergius Paulus (13:7-12); at Antioch (13:43); Lydia (16:14,15); the Philippian jailer (16:27-34); at Berea and Thessalonica (17:4,12); at Athens (17:34); Crispus (18:8); and at Ephesus (19:18).

The Epistles clearly teach that the purpose of Spirit baptism is to bring us into the body of Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:26, 27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13²).

Charismatics deal with the apostolic teaching that Spirit baptism occurs at the moment of conversion by teaching that there are actually two Spirit baptisms in the New Testament.

This view holds that the first baptism, called the baptism of repentance, happens to all believers and brings them into the body of Christ. The second baptism is the baptism with the Holy Spirit or endowment with power, which is signified by tongues. The first is baptism *by* the Holy Spirit; the second is *with* the Holy Spirit.

The charismatic position is that when Paul referred to tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14, he was speaking to believers who had received the first baptism (*by* the Spirit) and were thus part of the body of Christ. As part of the body of Christ some, but not all, had received the gift of speaking in tongues. Obviously then, not every believer will receive the gift of speaking in tongues.

On the other hand when a Christian has received the second baptism (*with* the Holy Spirit) the evidence will be speaking in tongues as a *sign* of that experience. Therefore, according to this view, some Christians have the gift of tongues, but all Christians who have received the second baptism will evidence this fact with at least an initial experience of speaking in tongues.

The clear teaching of the Epistles is being overturned by a poor understanding of the book of Acts. Luke refutes this “two-baptism” view in Acts 11:17 when he declares the tongues “experiences” of chapters 2 and 10, which were signs, as gifts. Tongues in the early Church were “sign-gifts.”

Opposition is also found in Ephesians 4:5, which says that there is *only one baptism*. The distinction between “by” and “with” cannot be sustained. The same Greek preposition *en* is used both in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and in Acts 1:5. In 1 Corinthians 12:7-13 we are told that God has already given the gifts as He wills. He tells us that we do not all have the same gifts (read 1 Corinthians 12:4, 7-11, 14-18, and 28-31).

In all of the New Testament, only 1 Corinthians 12:13 explains the purpose of the baptism of the Spirit, which is to bring us into the body (Church) of Christ. To claim that its purpose is to give us power from God and is evidenced by speaking in tongues is without biblical basis.

THE PURPOSE OF BIBLICAL TONGUES

Most New Testament scholars agree that tongues in the New Testament were foreign languages — not gibberish. Acts 2:4-8 is the only passage in the New Testament that sheds light on the nature of tongues. Those who heard tongues spoken by the apostles on Pentecost were able to understand them in their own language. The apostles evidently spoke in languages they did not understand — but they spoke in known languages, understandable to the listeners.

There has been much debate over why God used tongues in the early Church. The major theories are:

The First Theory: Church Edification. The idea is that the gift of tongues was and is given for the edification of other believers. However, the intent of 1 Corinthians 14:1-28 is to emphasize that tongues without an interpretation were worthless for this purpose.

The Second Theory: Evangelization. It was the message of the Gospel pro-

claimed by Peter — not tongues — that brought people to Christ on Pentecost. With Cornelius (Acts 10) it was new Christians who spoke in tongues and no unsaved people were present. At Ephesus there was no indication that any unsaved people were present when tongues were spoken (Acts 19:6). Tongues at Corinth were clearly not evangelistic. In fact, Paul remarked that unbelievers observing them would likely be repelled, just as they were at Pentecost (1 Corinthians 14:23 and Acts 2:13).

The Third Theory: Proof of Spirit Baptism. In the New Testament many believers are said to be filled with the Holy Spirit with no mention of them speaking in tongues. Spirit baptism always has reference to our baptism into Christ. The difference between baptism and filling is found in Ephesians 5:18. We are commanded to be filled. Therefore, it is not universal among Christians, whereas baptism is.

The Fourth Theory: Devotional. Paul said that he would rather pray and sing with his spirit *and* his mind than with just his spirit alone (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). The purpose of tongues is as a sign (Mark 16:17), not for personal spiritual growth.

The Fifth Theory: Apostolic Authentication. Because, according to Jesus, tongues were a sign, it remains only to determine of what they were a sign (Mark 16:17). In 2 Corinthians 12:11-13, Paul appeals to signs and wonders as the proofs of the apostolic office. If that is what they were, then that is their purpose. No unusual manifestation of the Spirit's presence ever occurred except in the presence of an apostle or by those who had been directly ministered to by an apostle.

The Sixth Theory: Condemnation or Judgment. According to 1 Corinthians 14:21, which quotes Isaiah 28:11-12, tongues were a sign to the nation of Israel that God was bringing judgment upon them for their sinfulness and rejection of Christ.

It is this author's conviction that a combination of these final two theories rings true. That is, tongues, as a sign gift, point out two things: the

judgment of Israel, and in a secondary sense, to the authority of the apostles.

SUPPORT FOR THE APOSTOLIC AUTHENTICATION THEORY

There are five important facts that show the distinctive character of the apostles:

- The Church was founded upon them (Ephesians 2:20).
- They were eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:22 and 1 Corinthians 15:7-9).
- They were special authorized agents (Luke 6:13).
- The fact of their appointment was authenticated by signs. The absence of miracles would invalidate the claim of one who asserted that he was an apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12 and Acts 5:11-13).
- They established the doctrine and practices of the Church (Acts 2:42; 2 Peter 3:2,15-16; and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14).

As noted above, tongues were given as a sign gift. The testimony of Scripture addresses this in several passages, including:

Mark 16:17-20 — While the canonical authority of this text is questionable, we nevertheless find that signs were to be manifested by the apostles and by those to whom they ministered. In verse 20, Mark already (by A.D. 68) considered these signs past.

Acts 2:14-21; 4:3 — Only the apostles spoke in tongues or performed signs on these occasions.

Acts 8:13 — Philip was not an apostle, but had the apostles' "hands" laid upon him (Acts 6:6). However, his converts performed no signs or wonders. Only when apostles came from Jerusalem and laid hands upon Philip's converts was there any unusual demonstration of the Spirit's presence in them (Acts 8:15-17).³

Acts 10 — God employed a series of supernatural visions in order to have Peter be the one to present the Gospel to Cornelius.

Acts 19 — Verse 2 should be translated, "Did you receive the Holy

Spirit when you believed?" These men were not yet converted. In verse 6 tongues came to authenticate Paul as an apostle.

2 Corinthians 12:12 — Some at Corinth who had been converted under Paul received the gift of tongues to validate Paul's claim to apostleship.

It is also important to emphasize that all signs are temporary. Jesus predicted signs only in association with the apostolic ministry. As noted, Mark considered the signs as past (A.D. 68). Hebrews 2:3-4 was written around the same time and the author also considered the signs as past.

The last recorded miracles in the New Testament took place about A.D. 58 (Acts 28:3-9). In A.D. 60 Epaphroditus became sick, but he was not healed miraculously (Philippians 2:25-30). About A.D. 62 Timothy had a stomach ailment which remained uncured (1 Timothy 5:23). Around A.D. 64 one of Paul's associates was so seriously ill that Paul had to leave him behind — and uncured (2 Timothy 4:20). Yet earlier Paul had been instrumental even in restoring life to the dead (Acts 20:9-10).

Equally significant is that some gifts also were temporary. All signs may be considered as spiritual gifts, but not all spiritual gifts were signs. The gifts of miracles, healings, and tongues were sign gifts. All the sign gifts were temporary (compare Acts 11:17 with Mark 16). As with the miracles of Jesus, they served to authenticate the position and authority of the apostles.

SUPPORT FOR THE JUDGMENT UPON ISRAEL THEORY

The argument runs as follows: God had warned Israel on several occasions (Isaiah 28:11-12; 33:19; Deuteronomy 28:49-50; Jeremiah 5:15) that when they found themselves invaded and surrounded by those speaking in languages they did not understand, it was a sign to them that they were being judged by God for their disobedience. When, at Pentecost and in the early years of the Church, tongues were spoken in the presence

of Jews, it would be a sign to them that judgment was coming because of their rejection of the Messiah. That judgment came with the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and Diaspora of the Jewish people in A.D. 70. At that point the purpose of tongues (as a sign to disobedient Israel) had been fulfilled and therefore tongues ceased.

TONGUES HAVE CEASED

Therefore, if the purpose of tongues was not Church edification, evangelization, proof of Spirit baptism, or devotional, but rather for apostolic authentication and judgment against Israel, it can be maintained that those purposes have been realized and tongues have ceased. A review of the biblical evidence is not only helpful, but necessary:

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 — "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (NASB).

This passage, written sometime around A.D. 55, clearly states that tongues shall cease. The important question is when? The answer to that question is often seen as hinging on the meaning of the word "perfect" in the text.

What is that which is perfect? While interpretations vary, the three most prominent views include:

- *The Rapture* (a view often held by tongue-speakers). However, the term "when the perfect comes" cannot refer to the Lord because of the neuter articles. It can be translated "when the perfect thing arrives." This view also contradicts other Scripture which states that there will be prophecy after the rapture — during the Tribulation (Revelation 11:3-13) and during the Millennial Age (Joel 2:28).

- *The Canon of Scripture*. Yet even the New Testament — in its completed state — does not allow us to know fully, as there is much that we still do not know.

• *The Eternal State.* This is when we will see face to face, and is the best understanding of “perfect.” The passage is therefore teaching that both prophecy and supernatural knowledge will cease forever at the point when God ushers in the eternal state. But carefully notice that tongues are not named among those gifts which are said to be made inoperative by the arrival of the perfect. Therefore, tongues could cease prior to this event.

With prophecy and knowledge the verb “done away,” meaning “to lay aside” or “render inoperative” is used. However, with tongues a different verb is used meaning “to stop” or “they will cease.” It carries with it the idea of a natural cessation.

It is also important to note the voice changes: “will be done away” is in the passive voice, meaning that they will be forced to stop by an outside agent (i.e., that which is perfect). However, “cease” is in the middle voice which allows for the possibility that they could cease in and of themselves naturally when their purpose is fulfilled.

This passage of Scripture does not give definitive evidence that tongues have ceased and are no longer operative today — but it does allow for such a view. Paul implies that tongues will cease when their purpose is fulfilled. If, as demonstrated above, the purpose of tongues was to authenticate the apostles and their message, and to serve as a sign to Israel of judgment for rejecting their Messiah, then tongues have fulfilled their purpose. Phrased another way, because there are no longer apostles to authenticate, and because Israel has already been judged (in A.D. 70), tongues no longer have a purpose in the Church today.

The cessation of tongues should then be expected with the passing of the apostles and the judgment of Israel. Having summarized the testimonies of Scripture, it helps to know that Church history also verifies this fact. For example, there is no record of anyone speaking in tongues in the New Testament after A.D. 70.

CHURCH HISTORY EVIDENCE

It is significant that the gift of tongues is rarely alluded to, hinted at, or found in the Apostolic Fathers. The Fathers wrote to defend Christianity, to correct Christians, to explain doctrines, and so forth — all after the passing of the apostles. Yet they did not mention tongues in a favorable light and, for the most part, ignored them. Here are some notable examples and exceptions:

- Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) wrote about spiritual gifts, but never wrote about tongues. He never mentions anyone speaking in tongues.

- Montanus (A.D. 126-180) did speak in tongues, but was regarded as demon-possessed by Christians of his day.

- Irenaeus (A.D. 140-203) said he had heard that some spoke in tongues. However, he had been influenced by the Montanists and neither spoke in tongues nor apparently witnessed it.

- Tertullian (A.D. 150-222) was converted to Montanism for a period of time. He wrote about one lady who spoke in tongues and was a Montanist. This was the last witness to tongues-speaking by any of the Apostolic Fathers.

- Origen (A.D. 185-253) said that in his day no one spoke in tongues.

- Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) made no mention of tongues being spoken in his day.

- Augustine (A.D. 354-430) did not write of tongues being spoken during his lifetime.⁴

It is critical to stress that Church history does not prove any doctrinal issues. However, in this case Church history verifies what we would expect from a study of the New Testament: that tongues, having fulfilled their purpose, ceased to exist by A.D. 70, and were not found in the history of the Church.

THE GIFT OF TONGUES TODAY

The present-day phenomenon of speaking in tongues has more than

one origin. Tongues can be demonic, as is demonstrated by documented tongues-speaking in pagan religions. Tongues can be faked for the purpose of peer-approval. However, the majority of tongues-speaking in the modern Church is a learned response. People are being taught, either directly or indirectly, how to speak in tongues.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MODERN MOVEMENT

It is helpful to comprehend the nature of tongues. Clearly, tongues in the New Testament were languages, understood by those who knew the language being spoken. This is not the case today. Linguists have described modern tongues as a form of ecstatic speech, similar to that which occurs all over the world in many religious practices.

The first Pentecostals believed they were speaking in foreign languages for the purpose of propagating the Gospel on the mission field. Some early Pentecostals even rushed to foreign countries without any language training and began preaching the Gospel, trusting that the listeners understood them. When it became obvious that they were not understood, these zealous missionaries had to come home and revise their understanding of this phenomenon. The editors of *Christian History* magazine report:

“Early leader Charles Parham said, ‘I had felt for years that any missionary going to the foreign field should preach in the language of the natives, and that if God ever equipped his ministers in that way [by *xenolalia*], he could do it today.’ Though many anecdotes of *xenolalia* exist, none have been confirmed.”⁵

In an article in the same magazine, Ted Olsen writes:

“In developing his ‘Apostolic Faith’ theology, Parham promoted a revolutionary but short-lived theory — which even Christian and Missionary Alliance leader A.B. Simpson would toy with. Simply put, Parham believed God would supernatu-

rally give known, earthly languages to baptized believers so they could quickly evangelize the world. This end-time revival, accompanied by believers speaking in known languages they had never learned (*xenolalia*), would bring to an end the church age and bring back a triumphant Christ. Even Parham's missionaries — and those later sent out from Azusa Street — found difficulties when it came to putting this belief into practice. For example, A.G. Garr, the first white man to speak in tongues at Azusa, went to India expecting the Spirit to enable him to speak Hindi. When this did not happen, Garr and his wife went to Hong Kong and studied Chinese. Though Parham never gave up his belief that he and his followers had spoken in earthly foreign languages, his followers discovered that if foreigners understood them, it was an exception rather than the rule."⁶

We must also contrast the absence of spontaneity in modern tongues with those at Pentecost. Contrary to the spontaneous and surprising reception of tongues in the book of Acts, modern-day promoters of tongues present formulas and instructions designed to teach people how to speak in tongues. Usually these instructions include a prescription to begin by making sounds of some kind, such as by repetition of a phrase.

Charismatics present speaking in tongues as an act of faith. It is something which one must knowingly begin and trust that God will continue. Larry Christenson, a Lutheran minister, said:

"In order to speak in tongues, you have to quit praying in English. ... You simply lapse into silence and resolve to speak not a syllable of any language you have ever learned. Your thoughts are focused on Christ, and then you simply lift up your voice and speak out confidently, in the faith that the Lord will take the sound you give him, and shape it

into a language. You take no thought of what you are saying; as far as you are concerned, it is just a series of sounds. The first sounds will sound strange and unnatural to your ear, and they may be halting and inarticulate (have you ever heard a baby learning to talk?)."⁷

Harald Bredesen, who has been regarded as "the father of the modern Charismatic movement," gave these instructions to tongues seekers at Yale:

"(1) to think visually and concretely, rather than abstractedly: for example, to try to visualize Jesus as a person; (2) consciously to yield their voices and organs of speech to the Holy Spirit; (3) to repeat certain elementary sounds ... such as 'bah-bah-bah,' or something similar. [Bredesen] then laid his hands on the head of each seeker, prayed for him, and the seeker did actually speak in tongues."⁸

John Kildahl, in his interesting book entitled *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, offers an alarming correlation:

"When I hypnotize someone, I begin by saying to my subject 'Lie back ... shut your eyes ... relax ... breathe deeply ... and listen to the sounds of your breathing. As you relax, you can feel yourself getting tired and drowsy ...' In the dimly lit fire-side room of the First Presbyterian Church, a small circle of members quietly listened to their pastor say, 'The Lord is in your presence ... He is with you now ... open yourself to him ... empty yourself of all other thoughts ... wait upon him ... let all your anxieties flow out of you. ... The Lord wants to give you the gift of his Holy Spirit. ... Open your mouth, and he will give you utterance' The standard reference work by Ernest Hilgard, *Hypnotic Susceptibility*, makes it clear that hypnosis and glossolalia are induced in a similar manner."⁹

There is also the concern of disillusionment. Christenson cites two universal tests with regard to tongues. One is artificiality: "It is the temptation to think, 'I am just making this up.'"¹⁰ He instructs believers to repel this temptation with all vigor. "As you continue to use the gift, you will pass through this test and come to the confidence that this gift will become to you all that Scripture promises," he writes.¹¹ The second temptation, he tells us, is ineffectuality — when the enthusiasm of tongues has dimmed, a person may begin to neglect or cease to use tongues. Christenson maintains that every gift of God involves stewardship and therefore one must resolve to use it all the rest of his life.¹²

This amounts to saying that the "gift" which was sought and begun by artificial means, must be continued at all costs, even when common sense says it is a hollow mockery.

Kildahl claims that when tongues are an important life goal, there is always a relationship to a leader or a group that conveys a feeling of acceptance and belonging. If confidence is lost in the authority figure then quite often the person will stop speaking in tongues. Kildahl labels this "The Dependency Syndrome," and, based upon his studies, observes:

"The principal difference between tongue-speakers and non-tongue-speakers was that the glossolalists developed deeply trusting and submissive relationships to the authority figures who introduced them to the practice of glossolalia. Without complete submission to the leader, speaking in tongues was not initiated. ... There were no loners among the tongue-speakers. They banded together and were mutually supporting. We never met a deeply involved tongue-speaker who did not have some leader to whom he looked for guidance. Even in casual questioning about their glossolalia experiences, tongue-speakers very quickly mentioned the name of the person whom they revered as their model for tongue-speaking."¹³

He further discloses:

“In our interviews with persons who had formerly spoken in tongues and were now indifferent to the experience, the common cause in each case was a falling out with the leader of the tongue-speaking group.”¹⁴

THE MODERN GIFT OF INTERPRETATION

If tongues-speaking is problematic, the interpretation of tongues is more so. While tongues can be faked, or explained as a heavenly language, interpretations are not so easily handled. The interpretation of tongues is the supernatural ability to understand and interpret a message in tongues for the benefit and edification of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:5-19).

The progression should be: God gives a message in tongues to Joe, who speaks that message at a church service, but doesn't understand it. Sally is then given the ability to understand what Joe has said and relays it to the church. It is at this point that the modern gift of tongues breaks down most dramatically. A number of studies have been done that are anything but supportive of the charismatic position.

Tongues-speaking has been recorded and then played back to those claiming the gift of interpretation. In every such experiment of which this writer is aware, these recorded messages have been interpreted differently by each interpreter.

In one instance, John 3:3 was recited in the German language, but the interpreter claimed that Acts 19:2 had been recited in French. Another time, Psalm 23 was recited in Hebrew, but the interpretation had nothing to do with Psalm 23. Sometimes the interpretation contradicts the clear teaching of the Lord. Interpretation has always been found wanting.¹⁵

Kildahl and his researchers taped several people speaking in tongues for interpreters. He reveals that:

“In no instance was there any similarity in the several interpre-

tations. The following typifies our results: one interpreter said the tongue-speaker was praying for the health of his children; another that the same tongue-speech was an expression of gratitude to God for a recently successful church fund-raising effort. When confronted with the disparity between their interpretations, the interpreters offered the explanation that God gave to one person one interpretation of the speech and to another person another interpretation.”¹⁶

Such studies poke gaping holes in views held by Charismatics and reveal tongues for what they are: a learned response, not a supernatural gift from the Holy Spirit.

There are also natural reasons. Consider these possible explanations for the modern tongue movement:

- A motor automatism. Some tongues are the result of a trance-like condition.
- Ecstasy. Some tongues result from a strong and unusual emotional excitement.
- Hypnosis. Due to repeated suggestions as to what is expected of one and the repeated appeals to yield oneself to the “power.” Many writers, including Kildahl, have concluded that hypnotism is frequently involved in causing tongues.

• Psychic catharsis. In his research Kildahl also discovered that anxiety was a prerequisite for developing the ability to speak in tongues. Additionally, persons with a low level of emotional stability tended to be extreme in their affirmation of the benefits of glossolalia.

Research proved that “glossolalists are more submissive, suggestible, and dependent in the presence of authority figures than non-tongue-speakers.”¹⁷

This was important because one has to follow a leader's suggestions to be hypnotized. Research also proved that tongue-speakers think about some benevolent authority figure when they began to speak in tongues.

As Kildahl explains:

“Hypnotizability requires that the subject be trusting enough to turn himself fully over to someone else and place his destiny in his hand. ... If one can be hypnotized, then one is able under proper conditions to learn to speak in tongues.”¹⁸

And Kildahl further wrote:

“It is our definite opinion that those who have the necessary psychological characteristics can *learn* to speak in tongues. This gives rise to the question, ‘If it is truly a gift of the Holy Spirit, why must it be demonstrated and taught?’ ... I have observed the same routine everywhere I have been: (1) a meeting devoted to intense concentration on tongue-speaking, followed by (2) an atmosphere of heightened suggestibility to the words of the tongue-speaking leader, after which (3) the initiate is able to make the sounds he is instructed to make. It is the same procedure that a competent hypnotist employs. Like the hypnotist, the tongue-speaking leader succeeds with some subjects and with others does not. I have reached the conclusion that tongue-speaking is a learned phenomenon.”¹⁹

OTHER MATTERS

The current interest in tongues stems from a longing for genuine religious expression in the midst of a secularized society. People long for an authentic relationship with God, but they are not as interested in knowing God in truth. If spiritual maturity can be attained by attending emotionally charged meetings and receiving instantaneous supernatural experiences that deliver spirituality, why labor at the hard work of Scripture study, memorization, prayer, and walking by the Spirit? The charismatic movement has offered a shortcut to godliness. That this shortcut leads to a dead end is often not recognized until one has faced disillusionment. By then many have lost their way and have no scriptural compass to guide them safely back to the truth.

But Scripture says, “do not forbid to speak with tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:39) and Charismatics will often cite the above words to anyone who disagrees with their view. It must be remembered that these words were written in A.D. 55 to a group of people who had received this gift from the Holy Spirit to authenticate the apostleship of Paul, and to warn Israel that judgment was coming for their rejection of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit had not yet ceased giving the gift. The gift was still relevant.

OTHER CONSEQUENCES

We must also realize that there exist other effects of charismatic doctrine upon theology. It undermines the teachings of Scripture and authentic Christian living. Below we will briefly outline how the teachings of the Charismatics taint, to some degree, every doctrine found in the Word of God. The following are some examples:

Foremost is theology in general. Those who teach charismatic doctrines tend to downplay theology. John Wimber said, “When are we going to see a generation who doesn’t try to understand this book [the Bible], but just believes it?”²⁰

Charismatic doctrine places experience above the truth of Scripture. Former Dallas Theological Seminary professor-turned Charismatic Jack Deere says, “The idea that fallen humanity, even redeemed fallen humanity, can arrive at pure biblical objectivity in determining all their practices and beliefs is an illusion.”²¹ Deere’s proposed solution is experience and modern prophecies.

Charismatic revival leader John Arnott says, “John Wimber preached a message several years ago in the context of prophetic ministry that really impacted me: *God will offend your mind to reveal your heart.*”²²

What both Arnott and Wimber are describing is a reference to the charismatic view that the Holy Spirit will often do an end run around our rational thinking ability, including the understanding of Scripture, to reveal truth to us. Arnott further teaches, “Do not take control, do not resist, do

not analyze; just surrender to His love. You can analyze the experience later; just let it happen.”²³

This is a sure recipe for disaster.

There are several concerns here. Charismatic doctrines undermine the authority of Scripture. For example, Deere, in a workshop titled “A Demonic Doctrine Illustrated,” said:

“In order to fulfill God’s highest purposes for our lives we must be able to hear His voice both in the written word and in the word freshly spoken from heaven ... Satan understands the strategic importance of Christians hearing God’s voice so he has launched various attacks against us in this area. One of his most successful attacks has been to develop a doctrine that teaches God no longer speaks to us except through the written word. Ultimately, this doctrine is demonic even [though] Christian theologians have been used to perfect it.”²⁴

A central theme among Charismatics is that they believe in extrabiblical revelation. Faith healer Benny Hinn once told his congregation:

“Please, please, please don’t think OCC [Orlando Christian Center] is here to repeat something you’ve heard for the last fifty years. ... If we quit giving you new revelations, we’re dead.”²⁵

And Deere further tells us:

“Today, after years of practical experience and intense study on the subject of God’s speaking, I am convinced that God does indeed speak apart from the Bible, though never in contradiction to it. And he speaks to *all* of his children, not just to specially gifted prophetic people. And he will speak to us all in amazing detail.”²⁶

This is the error of all cults as well as the Roman Catholic Church. Charismatics tell us that as long as the revelation does not contradict Scripture, then it is from God. However,

that leaves the door wide open for every kind of error. For example, while the Roman Catholic Church’s doctrine of purgatory and its various doctrines concerning Mary are not supported by Scripture, for the most part they simply attempt to add to the divine revelation. The Mormon’s view that *The Book of Mormon* is the story of the Gospel coming to America is the same type of error.

It is also the belief of Charismatics that modern-day prophets make mistakes. We are told:

“Anyone who has experience in helping to nurture ‘baby prophets’ realizes that they have difficulty in distinguishing the words that the Spirit speaks from those that come from their own hearts or even from evil sources. At first they make many mistakes. ... Prophets are, of course, human beings. *As such, they can make mistakes and lie.* They need not cease to be prophets for their mistakes and failings.”²⁷

This view of revelation throws the believer into a sea of subjectivity. God considered the authenticity of His Word so important that He required the death of any Old Testament prophet whose prophecies did not come true (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). While Charismatics give lip service to the authority of Scripture, in practice their “words of knowledge,” prophetic revelations, and messages in tongues reign supreme. Thus the undermining of the Word of God is perhaps the greatest error that Charismatics have fostered among God’s people.

Another doctrinal casualty of charismatic theology is soteriology, the understanding of salvation. There are many gospel messages among Charismatics because Charismatics are found in every type of denomination and church background. Even in denominations such as the Vineyard Church, the Gospel often takes such a backseat to the “gifts and phenomenon of the Spirit” that the content of the Gospel is muted at best.

For example, John Wimber, in his book *Power Evangelism*, never once

discusses what the Gospel is. The book is devoted instead to what Wimber believes to be the only authentic New Testament evangelism, something he calls “power evangelism.” In Wimber’s mind “proclamation evangelism,” in which a person is shown from Scripture the message of salvation, just won’t work. To win substantial numbers of people to Christ one must first soften them up by performing some miracle or by giving a “word of knowledge.”

Not only does “power evangelism” miss the boat scripturally, it also serves to confuse the unsaved. The emphasis is upon signs and wonders rather than Christ. Some are being attracted to the show rather than the cross.

Ecclesiology also suffers. Many within charismatic circles hold to some form of dominion theology, which confuses the Church with Israel and teaches that we are looking for a latter-day revival that will sweep multitudes into the kingdom and transform society before the return of Christ.

In addition, the majority of Charismatics are highly and unbiblically ecumenical. Many are actively pursuing reunification with the Roman Catholic Church and some even consider the pope (past and present) to be an evangelical Christian.

The purpose of the Church is often distorted as they concentrate on the sign gifts (miracles, tongues, and prophecies) rather than the balanced functioning of the body.

One may also add eschatology to the list as some Charismatics are not looking for the return of Christ, but for the “latter rain” in which they believe there will be a special outpouring of the Spirit that restores the supernatural gifts to the Church and brings a great revival. They do not believe that Christ can return until the world is prepared for Him by the “latter rain.”

The “new wave” or “latter rain” breed of Charismatics says that the pretribulational rapture position is a heresy inspired by Satan to rock the

Church to sleep. Jewel van der Merwe describes, in part, the essence of the Kingdom Now theology:

“If you do not believe in a literal ‘catching away’ or ‘rapture’, a literal anti-Christ, a literal tribulation, a literal Armageddon, etc., then you will get caught up in the words of today’s prophets who are telling you a very different Gospel that has come from allegorizing and spiritualizing the Word of God. Their agenda is political, with a view to take over the earth. Naturally, to take it over for Jesus.”²⁸

Thomas Ice, Associate Professor of Religion at Liberty University, also explains the “latter rain” influence upon pentecostalism with regard to the end times:

“Based upon current trends it seems obvious that the overall movement is clearly moving away from dispensationalism. This was clearly illustrated to Robert Dean and I when we had a four-hour discussion with three leaders from the Kansas City Fellowship of Churches in the early 1990’s. They informed us that out of approximately 45 staff members, not one currently held to the pretrib rapture. Very likely, almost all had held the view a few years earlier.”²⁹

There is also a defective pneumatology. As had been earlier demonstrated, many believe in a second work of grace often called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” This baptism gives the believer special powers and gifts. Others, such as the Vineyard movement, would not agree with the term “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” but teach essentially the same thing. They say the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives is powers, signs, and wonders.

Finally, we see a deviant view of angelology and demonology. Angels, demons, and “spiritual warfare” are popular today in charismatic circles. Based upon experience, rather than Scripture, a whole new theology has been developed concerning angels

and demons that misrepresents the teachings of the Word.³⁰

So the charismatic movement is not just a harmless segment within evangelical Christianity, but a devastating error that undermines many of the cardinal truths of the Word of God and biblical Christianity.

Endnotes:

1. John R.W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*. Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1975, pp. 18, 37, italic in original. While Stott was an esteemed and respected Bible teacher, and is correct in his evaluation of the book of Acts, it is important to note that he was a conditionalist, denying the biblical view of eternal punishment.
2. It is of further importance to note that the verses immediately following 1 Corinthians 12:13 (vv. 14-26) point out that not all speak in tongues.
3. Acts records new groups (Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and Old Testament believers) in the initial act of receiving the Holy Spirit which would later be the mark of all Christians (Romans 8:9).
4. Also see, G.R. Osborne in Walter A. Elwell, editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1984, “Tongues, Speaking in,” pp. 1100-1103, esp. pg. 1102.
5. Editors, “The Rise of Pentecostalism: Did You Know?,” *Christian History* magazine, Issue 58, pg. 2, brackets and italics in original.
6. Ted Olsen, “American Pentecost,” in *ibid.*, pg. 12, italic in original.
7. Larry Christenson cited by Robert Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, pg. 41, ellipsis in original.
8. Harald Bredesen cited in *ibid.*, pg. 42.
9. John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972, pg. 37, ellipsis in original.
10. Larry Christenson, *Answering Your Questions About Speaking in Tongues*. Bloomington, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 2005, pg. 131.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.
13. *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, op. cit., pg. 50.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 53.
15. See Don Basham, *A Handbook on Tongues, Interpretation & Prophecy*. Springdale, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1971, pp. 80, 95-96.
16. *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, op. cit., pg. 63.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 40.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 54.
19. *Ibid.*, pg. 74, italic in original.

20. John Wimber cited in Don Lewis, "Accessing the Wimber Phenomenon." Charlotte, N.C.: Christian Research Institute, CRI Statement, Article ID: DV020, brackets in original.
21. Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993, pg. 46.
22. John Arnott, *The Father's Blessing*. Orlando, Fla.: Creation House, 1995, pg. 182, italics in original.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 127.
24. Jack Deere cited in Mark Thompson, "Spiritual Warfare: What Happens When I

- Contradict Myself," *The Briefing*. Sydney, Australia: St. Matthias Press, April 24, 1990, Issue 45/46, pg. 11, ellipsis and brackets in original.
25. Benny Hinn, Orlando Christian Center broadcast, Trinity Broadcasting Network, Dec. 9, 1990.
26. *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, op. cit., pg. 214, italic in original.
27. John White in David Pytches, *Some Said It Thundered: A Personal Encounter with the Kansas City Prophets*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991, pp. xiv, xvi, italics in original.

28. Jewel van der Merwe, *Joel's Army*. Holly, Mich.: Discernment Ministries, 1991, pg. 20.
29. Thomas Ice, "The Latter Rain Revival Movement," Rapture Ready website. Document accessed at: www.raptureready.com/featured/ice/TheLatterRainRevivalMovement.html.
30. See further, M. Kurt Goedelman and J. Greg Sheryl, "Obsessed with Demons: A Call to Discern Today's Deliverance Movement," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2014, pp. 4-16, esp. pp. 5-8.

JONATHAN CAHN

(continued from page 1)

such as these: "His teachings ... are known for their prophetic significance and their revealing of deep mysteries of God's Word."⁷

Another of Cahn's favorite words is "ancient," which is used at least 116 times in his latest book, often coupled with the word "mystery" as in "ancient mystery." His use of these words and others such as "secret" and "revelation" marks him as a sensationalist and clever marketer.

CAHN'S BACKGROUND

Cahn's ministry website says:

"Jonathan Cahn is President of Hope of the World ministries, Senior Pastor and Messianic Rabbi of the Jerusalem Center/Beth Israel in Wayne, New Jersey. ... His teachings are widely known for revealing the deep mysteries of God's word and for the restoring of the new covenant message to its original biblically Jewish richness and power."⁸

Cahn is in his mid-fifties.⁹ He is the youngest of three children.¹⁰ He was born in New Jersey¹¹ and was raised in a Reformed Jewish home.¹² A brief account of his life, including his conversion, is presented in chapter 25 of *The Harbinger Companion with Study Guide*. There we are told:

"Jonathan Cahn ... was born into a Jewish home, of the line of Aaron. His father came from Germany having escaped the

Holocaust. His mother's family came from Russia, having escaped the czar. Both his parents were scientists. As a boy he attended the synagogue from an early age. While in grade school he began to question what he was being taught. He perceived a disconnection between the God and faith of Bible times, where God appeared real and alive in people's lives and in the history of Israel, and what he saw in modern synagogue life. So at the age of eight he became an atheist."¹³

Cahn's "atheist period" lasted until age 13, by which time he had become disillusioned. He sought answers by reading about "science, religion, the supernatural, the occult, UFOs," and so forth.¹⁴ He picked up Hal Lindsey's 1970 book on Bible prophecy, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, thinking it to be a book on UFOs. As a result, he began searching the Scriptures and became convinced that Jesus had to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.¹⁵

Despite his intellectual conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, he resisted committing himself to Christ out of fear that he would have to give up life's pleasures. Eventually, he made a bargain with God: "The deal was this: if God would grant him a long life, he would turn his life over to God to follow Him ... when he was about to die, on his death bed."¹⁶

Soon after, Cahn had two close brushes with death in car accidents. In the second one, when he was 19,

his Ford Pinto was on railroad tracks in the path of an oncoming train. Cahn said he cried out to God. The car was demolished, but Cahn emerged without a scratch.¹⁷ Realizing his life could end at any time, Cahn resolved to follow the Lord. About eight months later, on his 20th birthday, "he committed his life to following God."¹⁸ Elsewhere it says:

"Jonathan was in college [at Purchase University¹⁹], majoring in history, when his life changed. Outside of college he worked as a night watchman, doing schoolwork and studying the Scriptures. Soon he realized he was called into full-time ministry. He was asked to lead a Bible study, which he did for years. He started an outreach to the homeless of New York City, bringing them food and the Word of God. Upon graduating from college, he decided not to go on to postgraduate work but to find the calling the Lord had for him. He asked the Lord to give him a job that the Lord would have done. He was given a job working with disabled children. At the same time he was asked to help start an outreach called Beth Israel."²⁰

Jonathan agreed to this, stipulating that his involvement there would be temporary, until such time as he entered full-time ministry. However, when the leader of the ministry left a few years later, Jonathan was asked to take over, which he eventually agreed to do in 1988.²¹ Although, at this point, the congregation consisted of

around 35 people, it grew and flourished under his leadership, so much so that it eventually “became one of the largest Messianic congregations in the world”²² and had to successively move into larger and larger buildings.²³

Although Beth Israel (also known as the Jerusalem Center) in Wayne, N.J., is a Messianic Jewish congregation, it has both Jewish and Gentile believers. They have regular services on Friday nights and Sunday mornings. “It is here that Jonathan regularly teaches the Word and where he first shared the message of *The Harbinger*.”²⁴

At some point (presumably, post-conversion), Cahn attended the Nazarene Church.²⁵ Since 2005, he has been married. His wife’s name is Renata.²⁶ They have two children.²⁷

CAHN’S FIRST BOOK: *THE HARBINGER*

As noted above, Cahn gained wide recognition in 2012 through the publication of *The Harbinger*. According to an article by the book’s publisher, Charisma, the book was “Published on Jan. 3, 2012, ... debuted on the *NYT* best-seller list on its first week of release and has gone into reprint 22 times, selling over 1.2 million copies.”²⁸ At one point, Cahn wrote, “As far as its story or narrative part is concerned, hardly a week has gone by where I haven’t received an offer that it be made into a motion picture.”²⁹

The 2012 fall issue of the *The Quarterly Journal* featured a lengthy editorial critiquing *The Harbinger*.³⁰

THE STORYLINE OF *THE HARBINGER*

Cahn uses *The Harbinger*’s fictional narrative as a vehicle to convey things he believes the Lord has shown him regarding warnings of God’s judgment to the United States, utilizing a point-for-point correspondence of the warning God gave to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in Isaiah 9:10. Isaiah 9:8-10 says:

“The Lord sent a word against Jacob, and it has fallen on Israel. All the people will know —

Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria — who say in pride and arrogance of heart: ‘The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.’”

In the story, a journalist named Nouriel Kaplan visits the office of media executive Ana Gorem to share encounters he has had with a mysterious figure whom he refers to as “the prophet.” This prophet has shared with Kaplan nine clay seals bearing symbolic messages connected with God judging America, based on the judgments God gave to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in Isaiah 9:9-10. The nine symbolic warnings are referred to as “harbingers.”

Cahn writes that Kaplan relates to Gorem the encounters and conversations he has had with “the prophet.” These accounts are interrupted by occasional interjections, questions, or other actions by Gorem. God’s warnings follow the “pattern” or “template” (Cahn’s words) of judgment that God gave to Israel in Isaiah 9:9-10.

On the surface, the skeleton of Cahn’s storyline in *The Harbinger* resembles that of the 1993 New Age book by James Redfield titled, *The Celestine Prophecy*, which also features a fictional story about a man trying to track down nine insights contained in an ancient (in that case, Peruvian) document. While it cannot be said with any measure of certainty that Cahn cribbed his storyline for *The Harbinger* from *The Celestine Prophecy*, it is interesting that the two storylines are so similar on the surface.

Cahn’s “nine harbingers” are:

1. The Breach — Referring to the breach in 732 B.C. in God’s hedge of protection around Israel.

2. The Terrorist — Referring to the Assyrians’ assault on Israel in 732 B.C.

3. The Fallen Bricks — Referring to the words in Isaiah 9:10: “The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores are

cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.”

4. The Tower — Referring to the same words from Isaiah 9:10.

5. The Gazit Stone — Referring to “hewn stones” in Isaiah 9:10.

6. The Sycamore — Referring to “the sycamores have been cut down” in Isaiah 9:10.

7. The Erez Tree — Referring to “cedars” in Isaiah 9:10.

8. The Utterance — Uttering the “vow” expressed in Isaiah 9:10.

9. The Prophecy — Supposedly, the “fallen bricks” (harbinger #3) and the “utterance” (harbinger #8), result in the ancient nation of Israel experiencing God’s judgment.

Cahn posits that these nine characteristics of ancient Israel’s situation find a parallel in what has happened in America, beginning with the September 11, 2001, attacks on America by the Muslim hijackers.

The August 2014 issue of *Charisma* magazine contained a half-page color ad for Cahn’s latest book and the September through January (2015) issues each contained full-page color ads for it. The cover story of the October 2014 issue featured an article by Cahn titled “The Mystery of the Shemitah” in which he spoke about his latest book.³¹ Included within the article was an interview by *Charisma* with Cahn titled “Jonathan Cahn: America’s Prophet for the Times?”³²

Another sensationalist publisher who has promoted Cahn and his works (including producing *The Harbinger*-themed DVD, *The Isaiah 9:10 Judgment*³³), is Joseph Farah, founder of the website WND.³⁴ Farah recently wrote, “I count Jonathan Cahn among my closest friends.”³⁵

CHRISTIAN REACTION TO *THE HARBINGER*

Some Christian media personalities have received *The Harbinger* favorably. Pat Robertson, Sid Roth,³⁶ and David Regan³⁷ have been supportive of Cahn’s message. However, some discernment ministries, including Per-

sonal Freedom Outreach³⁸ and Thomas Ice,³⁹ have criticized Cahn's exegesis in *The Harbinger*. Other apologists (and their ministries) who were critical, such as T.A. McMahon of The Berean Call,⁴⁰ David James of The Alliance for Biblical Integrity,⁴¹ and Berit Kjos of Kjos Ministries,⁴² expressed at least some appreciation for the thrust of Cahn's book, which was a call for America to repent, lest God bring severe judgment upon her.

The most thorough critique of *The Harbinger* is the book, *The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*⁴³ by David James, who is Executive Director of The Alliance for Biblical Integrity. James wrote that he and Cahn "have corresponded on several occasions [prior to James writing his book]. On April 4, 2012, I also had the privilege of engaging in a personal discussion with him by phone that was moderated by Jimmy DeYoung (and is available for listening on ProphecyToday.com)."⁴⁴ James' book was released in August 2012.

CAHN'S RESPONSE

Cahn has responded to his critics. For instance, in addition to the phone discussion with James, Cahn responded on a website called "Rapture Ready"⁴⁵ to a critique of *The Harbinger* posted by T.A. McMahon of The Berean Call.⁴⁶ Other online responses included an e-mail he sent to Christian blogger Amy Spreeman, which she posted on her Stand Up For the Truth! website⁴⁷ and a 10+ minute YouTube video titled "Jonathan Cahn Answers His Critics."⁴⁸ In this video, Cahn displays a winsome sense of humor, but doesn't try to respond to every criticism.

Cahn's second book, *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, also contains attempts to clarify some things in his first book that Cahn believes have been misunderstood and to answer some criticisms.⁴⁹

ATTACKS ON THE HARBINGER'S CRITICS

Cahn's *direct* responses to his critics are never "below the belt." It is unclear, however, whether or not

Cahn is responsible for those who defend him more vehemently.

In August 2012, after The Berean Call had published James' book, *The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*, Cahn's publisher, Charisma Media, threatened to sue The Berean Call for copyright violations.⁵⁰ One alleged violation involved the artwork on the original cover of James' book that resembled *The Harbinger's* cover. That original cover art was subsequently replaced. The other involved the use of quotations from *The Harbinger*. Such an action by Charisma and its founder and publisher Stephen Strang clearly violates scriptural teaching against Christians taking other Christians to court (1 Corinthians 6:1-11). Charisma eventually dropped the matter. When asked whether Cahn was involved with or approved of this threatened action, James wrote:

"Concerning the lawsuit over copyright infringement — we were never sued, only threatened with several letters. Although they claimed that I had quoted too much of *The Harbinger* and thus violated the fair use doctrine, we knew that we easily met all four fair use criteria. This was confirmed by a copyright lawyer who carefully looked at the case. When we decided to go public with their threats in early 2013, they went silent and we haven't heard from them since. It is interesting to note that Jonathan Cahn has indicated that he was only aware of the threatened lawsuit, but knew no details. This raises the obvious question of how the Charisma Media lawyers could have threatened a lawsuit without Cahn's explicit knowledge and consent since he is the sole copyright holder and therefore would have been the sole plaintiff in any lawsuit involving copyright infringement."⁵¹

A second example of harassing attacks against critics of *The Harbinger* has come through an associate and friend of Cahn, Jose Bernal.⁵² In various blogs on his website, "The

Pepsters Post: A Voice in Cyber Space,"⁵³ Bernal has aggressively responded to critics of *The Harbinger*.⁵⁴ In 2013, Charisma Media published Bernal's book, *The Truth about the Harbinger*.⁵⁵ In it, Bernal attempts to defend *The Harbinger* and answer what he believes were misguided criticisms of Cahn's book. Some of what Bernal writes is useful and informative, but he also castigates Cahn's critics, comparing their objections to those of the Pharisees.⁵⁶ He calls the critics "enemies of the gospel"⁵⁷ and the criticism as attacks from the devil⁵⁸ and "a kind of spiritual McCarthyism."⁵⁹ He charges that:

"...they tend to be prone to committing the greatest blasphemy of all. They miss God's work. They miss God's heart. They miss His presence. They miss His voice. They miss His call. And worst of all, when He comes in their midst ... they tend to crucify Him."⁶⁰

Reading Bernal's criticisms reminds one of a book review in which the reviewer observed:

"[The book's author] does not seem to have made up his mind whether those whom he attacks so tenaciously are fools, or only knaves; his language indeed frequently suggests that they are both!"⁶¹

CAHN DESCRIBES HIS WRITING PROCESS

In his latest book, *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, Cahn offers his description of how *The Harbinger* came to be written:

"*The Harbinger* is a book that reveals an ancient biblical mystery manifesting in modern times. It is a message of warning concerning coming calamity. How and when did it come forth?"⁶²

Cahn wrote that sometime following the attacks of September 11, 2001, during a time of prayer, he "was led" to the ninth and tenth chapters of Isaiah.⁶³

Cahn wrote that later on:

“I was standing on a plot of soil near where the towers had fallen. My attention became transfixed on an object. The object was a [sycamore] tree that had been struck down by the force of the calamity. I heard an inner voice say, ‘There’s a mystery here. You must seek and find it.’ So I began to search into the mystery that had so drawn my attention. I was immediately led to the same section of Isaiah to which I opened in the wake of 9/11. But this time my attention was drawn to one specific verse in Isaiah’s prophecy, the verse that would open the door to the revelations that would be known as *The Harbinger*. The revelation concerned nine prophetic signs of warning and judgment. The fallen tree was the first puzzle piece of an ancient mystery that kept growing bigger and bigger. One by one, each of the nine signs were revealed. Whenever the mystery seemed to come to a standstill, the next leading would be given. It would come in the form of someone saying a word that proved to be the next key in the puzzle. At other times it would come by an inner sense, which, upon investigation, would prove true. Still, at other times it would come in the form of ‘accidents’ — something appearing out of the blue on my computer screen that contained the key I had been searching for, or, at other times, what I had *not* been searching for.”⁶⁴

In 2005, Cahn began to share the message of *The Harbinger* with his congregation, whom he says received it with amazement and believed that this was a message that needed to be shared with the nation. Cahn also predicted a collapse of Wall Street (which he notes occurred in 2008). However, it wasn’t until two years after he initially gave the messages that Cahn began writing them out in book form and during this time, the collapse of Wall Street occurred in September 2008, which resulted in Cahn receiving insights (or, as he

prefers to style them, “a new stream of ancient mysteries and revelations”⁶⁵), including that of the Shemittah.⁶⁶ Cahn states that he was subsequently “led” to present his insights in the form of a narrative. He continues:

“The entire story came to me in a matter of hours. As soon as I began committing it to writing, with the voice of the prophet bringing forth each of the revelations, the words came out in rapid-fire succession. With no struggle and little effort the text flowed onto the pages. *The Harbinger* seemed to write itself. And in a relatively short time it was finished. From that moment onward the message of *The Harbinger* has taken on a life of its own. From the story of how it became a book to the way it went forth to the nation, it has proceeded apart from anyone’s planning and has involved several uncanny events in defiance of any natural explanation. It has now been read, seen, or heard by millions and has reached the highest echelons of government — to the point of being spoken of on Capitol Hill by members of Congress and presidential candidates. From the moment of its inception until now, it has borne the marks of another’s fingerprints.”⁶⁷

Reading Cahn’s explanation of how *The Harbinger* was written and came to be published and subsequent events, the reader is led to conclude at least two things:

First, God was clearly behind its writing and publication, and that it carries divine sanction (both things which Cahn clearly believes).

Second, that Cahn is either a prophet and/or a man of unusual sensitivity to God, who regularly receives revelations from God that rival, or exceed, those of the New Testament apostles and prophets.

A few pages earlier, Cahn had likewise given the impression that *The Harbinger* was essentially and mani-

festly written by God, with Cahn almost being a passive recipient:

“I take no credit for [*The Harbinger*] or the revelations therein. I wasn’t looking to write a book, nor was I seeking to come up with any message or revelation. It began without being sought after and then basically wrote itself.”⁶⁸

However, what actually happened was less supernatural-sounding. A staff member from Cahn’s Hope of the World ministry gave this explanation:

“(Jonathan) originally attempted to write a non-fiction book from around autumn 2007 to 2009 — polishing it into 2010 — But in late spring of 2010 — he was led to write again, but this time to present the information in a narrative form. Once he did this, the words flowed rapid fire and the book virtually wrote itself. Thus *The Harbinger*, as we know it, was finished in four months.”⁶⁹

So the writing of *The Harbinger* wasn’t quite as supernatural as Cahn makes it sound.

In an interview, Cahn related one thing that seemed to confirm his conviction that *The Harbinger* was a message from God:

“The Harbinger just flowed out and was finished in a few months time. The week I finished it, I was scheduled to speak at Promise Keepers in Dallas. My flight took me to Charlotte, North Carolina. There I prayed, ‘Lord, The Harbinger is your message. I don’t want it to go forth by the ways of man. It’s yours. You get out the word Your way.’ I opened my eyes. There was a man sitting next to me. He begins to speak to me. Then he begins to prophesy over me. He tells me I will publish a book, and more than one — that God is about to do something big and it will change my life. It turns out that before we met, the man was just brought together

with the president of Charisma Media, Steve Strang. He sends word to him. A little while later, I received contact from Steve Strang, telling me he heard what happened at the airport. He heard about *The Harbinger*, and he's interested. That's how *The Harbinger* became published — not by the plans or hand of men, but totally supernaturally. In fact, that whole scene at the airport was a recreation of a scene in the book where a man meets 'a prophet.'"⁷⁰

While this sounds supernatural, an earlier version of the story that *Charisma* magazine reported in December 2011 was less dramatic:

"There was also a prophetic element to *The Harbinger's* acquisition by Charisma Media. Having finished the manuscript, Cahn had someone in mind to speak with about finding a publisher. 'I wanted it to get out God's way,' he says. 'There's conventional wisdom in publishing that you have to promote yourself, but I didn't want to do that.' Mulling things during an early morning layover at a North Carolina airport on his way to speak at a Promise Keepers conference, Cahn bowed his head and prayed that the Lord would get the message of *The Harbinger* out His way. When he looked up from praying and reading his Bible, he noticed a man sitting to his left. 'He was looking at me,' Cahn says, 'and he said, "What's the good word?"' I figured he was a businessman who didn't know the Lord, so I started witnessing to him.' Cahn was half right. The man was Hubie Synn, a New York accountant — a believer with a prophetic gifting. Synn had once told client David Tyree, a devout Christian and wide receiver for the New York Giants, that God was going to highlight his skills. [Later, Tyree made a spectacular catch in the 2008 Super Bowl.] ... When Cahn realized that Synn was a

fellow believer, the two began talking. 'Then he began to prophesy over me,' Cahn says, 'telling me that God was about to do something big.' When Cahn later mentioned that he had been working on a book, Synn suggested that he contact Charisma Media founder Steve Strang, whom he knew for having published Tyree's book, *More Than Just a Catch*. Synn recalls being at the airport because his flight had been delayed and initially being reluctant to follow the nudging he felt by the Holy Spirit to speak to Cahn, because he was preoccupied with family concerns. 'The way my gift works, I don't really know what I say, it just blows right through me,' Synn says. But when he bowed to God's prompting and finished telling Cahn that an important book he had written would be published, Cahn told him he had been praying to know what to do about his book. 'God literally answered his prayer right way,' Synn says, 'because he opened his eyes and I was there.'"⁷¹

CAHN'S SECOND BOOK: *THE HARBINGER COMPANION* WITH STUDY GUIDE

This is the shortest of Cahn's three books and perhaps the best one-stop guide to understanding what Cahn was trying to convey in *The Harbinger*. It even includes a guide to the geographical sites mentioned in *The Harbinger*.

CAHN'S THIRD BOOK: *THE* *MYSTERY OF THE SHEMITAH*

*The Mystery of the Shemitah*⁷² is an expansion of chapter 17 of *The Harbinger*.⁷³ Being slightly longer than his first book, it's quite an expansion. Cahn explains:

"*The Harbinger* contains fourteen major revelations or mysteries. One of these revelations is that of the Shemitah. From the moment the book was released, I've been deluged with questions concerning America's future and that of

the world. In particular, *The Harbinger's* seventeenth chapter, which reveals the link between the ancient Shemitah and the events of modern times, has prompted a whirlwind of speculation. With the approach of the next Shemitah, the amount of speculation has increased exponentially. In view of this, Front-Line, publisher of *The Harbinger*, strongly felt that a book had to be written to open up the mystery of the Shemitah. They approached me with the idea."⁷⁴

Cahn then explains that he was originally reluctant to write such a work, because he didn't want the message of his first book "to get lost in date-setting."⁷⁵ However, he states that it would actually require an entire book to adequately disclose the mystery of the Shemitah:

"What could not be revealed before will be revealed now. In fact, as it was with *The Harbinger*, most of the mysteries to be revealed in the following pages have never up to this point been revealed."⁷⁶

Cahn asserts that the so-called mystery of the Shemitah "may sound like something one would expect to find in a Hollywood fantasy or science fiction — but it's real — as real as any phenomenon could be. Much that will be revealed in this book has never before been revealed in written form. Most people have never heard of the word *shemitah*, much less the mystery that surrounds it. Yet their lives have been critically impacted, altered, or determined by its manifestation."⁷⁷

Cahn promises his book will reveal the answers to the following questions and more:

"Could there be an ancient phenomenon lying beneath some of the most critical events of modern times? Could this phenomenon be operating behind some of the most dramatic and monumental collapses of Wall Street and the global economy? Could this phenomenon underlie some of the most colossal events of

modern times? Could this phenomenon from ancient times be so precise that it has not only determined events in the modern world but also ordained their timing, down to exact dates, hours, even minutes? Could this phenomenon already be affecting, shaping, and altering our lives and the lives of virtually everyone we know? Does this ancient mystery hold the key to what the future holds, what is yet to come? Are there signs and harbingers warning us of what lies ahead? Will the American age as we know it continue for many more years, or will we witness its end? Is America in danger of a coming calamity, a collapse, even judgment? What does the future hold for the world?"⁷⁸

With such a dramatic buildup to his latest book, he obviously believes that he is on to something. But is he really?

WHAT IS THE SHEMITAH?

The "mystery" of the Shemitah wouldn't have been nearly so mysterious had Cahn simply used the English equivalent, "sabbatical year."

The Shemitah is the sabbatical year that God ordained for the Israelites to observe every seventh year. There's no "mystery" to it at all. With the buildup Cahn has given it, one would assume that the Shemitah must be an important biblical doctrine, heretofore unrevealed until Cahn came along. But the Shemitah is not a major biblical doctrine. It isn't even a *minor* one.

There are at least four significant time periods in the Old Testament related to the number 7:

1. The Sabbath — The seventh day, ordained by God to be a day of rest for the sons of Israel. This is a subject that the Bible says a lot about, in both the Old and New Testaments (Exodus 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; Leviticus 23:3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Matthew 12:1-13; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Mark 2:23-28; John 5:16-18; 7:22-24; Romans 14:5-6; Colossians 2:16-17; and Hebrews 4:1-11).

2. The Shemitah — This took place every seventh year, during which debts were forgiven and the land was allowed to lie fallow. During this time, there was not to be any sowing of the land, nor any reaping or pruning of vineyards. During this

year, there was also supposed to be a public assembly where the Mosaic Law was read to the sons of Israel — which is a feature of the sabbatical year that Cahn significantly omits from his book (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22; 26:32-35, 43 cf. with 2 Chronicles 36:20-21; Deuteronomy 15:1-11; 31:9-13 cf. with Nehemiah 8:1-18; Nehemiah 10:31).

3. After six years of service, Israelite slaves were to be released from their slavery — although this might or might not happen during a sabbatical year, depending upon what year the slave began serving his master (Exodus 21:2-6 cf. with Jeremiah 34:8-22; Deuteronomy 15:12-18).

4. The Jubilee Year — Every 50th year — i.e., the year following seven times seven years; or said another way, the year following seven consecutive sabbatical years. (Cahn refers to the Jubilee as "a super Shemitah."⁷⁹) The Jubilee year had both some similarities with, and some differences from, a normal sabbatical year (Leviticus 25:8-17, 25-55; 27:16-25; also see Numbers 36:1-12).

Scripture says very little regarding the Shemitah. We have no record of Jesus or the apostles teaching any-

Hebrew Shemitah Years Since 1900 by J. Greg Sheryl

The "Shemitah" (also called the "sabbatical year") is the seventh year of a seven-year cycle when the Hebrew people were required by Torah to waive all outstanding debts between Jewish debtors and creditors (Deuteronomy 15:1-20) and allow the land to have a Sabbath rest (Leviticus 25:4). In *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, author Jonathan Cahn argues that for at least the last century, God has been sending cataclysmic events upon the United States to warn of impending judgment — all because of the mystery of the Shemitah. In the past 115 years, there have been 17 Shemitahs. Only five of these sabbatical years could possibly correspond to catastrophic occurrences like wars or stock market crashes. Twelve of the Shemitahs since 1900 have been uneventful. Listed herein are the Shemitahs since 1900, provided in Hebrew years and their Gregorian calendar equivalents:

5663 Oct. 2, 1902 – Sept. 21, 1903
 5670 Sept. 16, 1909 – Oct. 3, 1910
 5677 Sept. 28, 1916 – Sept. 16, 1917
 5684 Sept. 11, 1923 – Sept. 28, 1924
 5691 Sept. 23, 1930 – Sept. 11, 1931
 5698* Sept. 6, 1937 – Sept. 25, 1938
 5705 Sept. 18, 1944 – Sept. 7, 1945
 5712 Oct. 1, 1951 – Sept. 19, 1952
 5719 Sept. 15, 1958 – Oct. 2, 1959

5726 Sept. 27, 1965 – Sept. 14, 1966
 5733* Sept. 9, 1972 – Sept. 26, 1973
 5740 Sept. 22, 1979 – Sept. 10, 1980
 5747* Oct. 4, 1986 – Sept. 23, 1987
 5754 Sept. 16, 1993 – Sept. 5, 1994
 5761* Sept. 30, 2000 – Sept. 17, 2001
 5768* Sept. 13, 2007 – Sept. 29, 2008
 5775 Sept. 25, 2014 – Sept. 13, 2015

*Shemitah years which may correspond to wars, recessions, etc.



thing about it. The New Testament seems silent on the subject. Most likely this is because the sabbatical year was only prescribed for the nation of Israel. Cahn seems to admit this fact.⁸⁰ This admission should have concluded the book, but that would have left Cahn with no “mystery” to reveal and no book to publish.

Nevertheless, Cahn insists that the Shemitah is relevant to America and perhaps other nations. Consider Cahn’s words following his “admission” that the sabbatical year was given to Israel:

“But we are not dealing here with the Shemitah as an observance but as a prophetic sign — particularly as a warning or manifestation of national judgment. Such a prophetic sign could be given to any nation as long as that nation in some way matched the description or shared the attributes of ancient Israel in 586 BC.”⁸¹

Cahn determines that the Shemitah can function as a prophetic sign for any nation that matched the description or shared the attributes of ancient Israel (the Southern Kingdom of Judah) in 586 B.C. by the following prophecy to Israel regarding the sabbatical year:

“I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall rest — for the time it did not rest on your sabbaths when you dwelt in it. ... The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; they will accept their guilt, because they despised My judgments and because their soul abhorred My statutes” (Leviticus 26:33-35, 43).

The Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon in 586 B.C., and this

prophecy from Leviticus was historically fulfilled during the time that Judah was carried away into captivity to Babylon, as is described in 2 Chronicles:

“And those who escaped from the sword, he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

In Leviticus, the Lord told Israel that as part of His judgment on them for their unfaithfulness, He would scatter them and pursue them with the sword and their land would lie desolate and enjoy its Sabbaths for the sabbatical years Israel had failed to observe. And 2 Chronicles tells us that this was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar took Judah captive into Babylon for 70 years. During that period, the land of Israel did finally enjoy the sabbatical years that Israel had never given it. This presumably is the “prophetic sign” of the sabbatical year that Cahn believes may continue to apply to America and to other nations as well.

CAHN’S VIEWS OF THE SHEMITAH

Cahn shows how he believes this “mystery,” this “prophetic sign” that was already fulfilled historically and was never prophesied to apply to any nation except Israel can nevertheless apply to America and to other nations as well. He tries to show that this has happened historically in the form of stock market crashes in or around sabbatical years;⁸² a “mystery” of sevens, occurring in connection with these;⁸³ the rise and fall of “towers” (skyscrapers) in America in connection with sabbatical years;⁸⁴ and future suggestions that this Sabbath year’s “mystery” may continue to play out *perhaps* — and he is careful to hedge his bets here⁸⁵ — during the current sabbatical year which accord-

ing to Cahn extends from sunset on September 24, 2014 to September 13, 2015.⁸⁶

Cahn believes that America fits the bill for the Shemitah to apply to as a prophetic sign. He goes to great lengths to show a “link” between America and Israel. He has titled a chapter “Fourth Key: The Secret Israel.”⁸⁷ Later in this same chapter, he refers to America as “the Second Israel.”⁸⁸ He states:

“America’s link to ancient Israel has undergirded its national identity, in one form or another, consciously or unconsciously, from the time of its inception onward. ... There is no nation in the modern world so deeply linked to ancient Israel as America. There is, therefore, no stage or platform on earth so well suited for the manifesting of the mystery of the Shemitah as America. Is the Israel connection necessary for the mystery to manifest? No. It could manifest to any nation, just as God could send a warning of national judgment to any nation. No unique connection to ancient Israel is needed for America to be given a biblical sign of national judgment. But the fact that America does bear such a deep connection to ancient Israel makes it all the more striking and fitting for the same signs used to warn Israel of judgment to warn America.”⁸⁹

Yet Cahn seemed baffled and distressed when critics accused him of saying that Isaiah 9:10 was prophesying about America or that he was teaching that America had “replaced” Israel.

Cahn earlier said he was merely stating that Isaiah 9:9-10 was a “pattern” or “a template” that was replaying in America, that Isaiah 9:9-10 wasn’t prophesying about America, nor was he teaching that America had somehow “replaced” Israel.⁹⁰ Yet in his latest book, he speaks of America having such a close “link” to Israel to the point of referring to America as “the secret Israel” and “the second Israel!”

Cahn also devotes "Part 1" of the book's Epilogue to briefly speaking about "black suns" (solar eclipses) and "blood moons" (lunar eclipses) in relation to the sabbatical year that we are currently in. The reason for Cahn's interest in solar eclipses is partly because "the ancient rabbis saw solar eclipses as signs of judgment."⁹¹ He also notes some specific Scriptures (Isaiah 13:9-10; Joel 3:14-15; Matthew 24:29; Genesis 1:14) which seem to indicate that darkening of the sun and/or the moon is sometimes associated with significant biblical events or signs.⁹²

Cahn further notes that there will be two solar eclipses in 2015 — one on March 20, "the precise mid-point of the Shemitah year"⁹³ and the other on September 13, "the very day that constitutes the Shemitah's climactic end, the Day of Nullification [i.e., forgiveness of debts owed — *in ancient Israel*]."⁹⁴ And he also makes passing mention of four lunar eclipses — so-called "blood moons" — taking place during the current sabbatical year.⁹⁵ However, he doesn't seem particularly concerned with the lunar eclipses.

Cahn makes guarded predictions about the future, based on "the mystery of the Shemitah." He always couches his predictions in such a cautious manner that, if something significant happens similar to what he predicted, he looks good. However, if nothing significant happens it looks like he was not wrong.⁹⁶

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Cahn's relationship with the Lord and his sincerity in believing what he teaches are not in question. Cahn comes across as likable and personable, and someone who is willing to dialogue with his critics.

However, the way Cahn handles Scripture leads one to believe that Cahn sees the Bible as a code book, full of mysteries waiting to be deciphered by a person who has the spiritual insight and sensitivity to do so. While it is true that, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness

to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14), the Bible's contents are not a secret to be understood by the few.

While no one can properly understand the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit, all who are Christians have the Spirit of God living within them. The Bible says:

"Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Romans 8:9).

First Corinthians 6:19 and 2 Timothy 1:14 also confirm that the Holy Spirit lives within every believer.

It is also true that God has given different believers different spiritual gifts, such as teaching, administration, and so forth.

While the Bible *is* an endless source of truth for the believer who diligently reads and studies it — and while parts of it *are* mysterious — God has given His revelation in the Bible so that people might understand His truth, not so that it might be a book full of "mysteries" based on obscure, minor areas of His revelation within it.

Cahn's hermeneutics are consistent with a charismatic-type method of relying on subjective leadings, hunches, intuitions, inner voices, and so on. This is indicated by his fondness for using terms such as "revelation(s),"⁹⁷ and his use of expressions such as, "I was led,"⁹⁸ "I heard an inner voice say,"⁹⁹ and "[the leading] would come by an inner sense."¹⁰⁰ However, as Lutheran author Don Matzat once said, "You cannot replace sound exegesis with 'The Lord showed me'."¹⁰¹

Near the beginning of the guide to Bible interpretation, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, pentecostal New Testament scholar Gordon Fee wrote:

"Let it be said at the outset — and repeated throughout, that the aim of good interpretation is not uniqueness; one is not trying to discover what no one else has ever seen before. Interpretation

that aims at, or thrives on, uniqueness can usually be attributed to pride (an attempt to 'out clever' the rest of the world), a false understanding of spirituality (wherein the Bible is full of deep truths waiting to be mined by the spiritually sensitive person with special insight), or vested interests (the need to support a theological bias, especially in dealing with texts that seem to go against that bias). Unique interpretations are usually wrong. This is not to say that the correct understanding of a text may not often *seem* unique to someone who hears it for the first time. But it is to say that uniqueness is *not* the aim of our task. The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the 'plain meaning of the text.' And the most important ingredient one brings to that task is enlightened common sense. The test of good interpretation is that it makes good sense of the text. Correct interpretation, therefore, brings relief to the mind as well as a prick or prod to the heart."¹⁰²

It has been said regarding the Bible that, "The plain things are the main things; and the main things are the plain things." To inflate minor teachings in Scripture and into something immensely significant doesn't honor the God Who gave His revelation to man to lead and guide him into a deeper relationship with the One about Whom all Scripture centers, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul instructed his spiritual son Timothy with these words:

"As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our

instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions" (1 Timothy 1:3-7, NASB).

Paul also wrote:

"Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Jesus' words on date-setting, while given as a specific response to His disciples, still have relevance to us:

"And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority'" (Acts 1:7).

Let all date-setters heed these words of our Lord!

Endnotes:

1. Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery That Holds the Secret of America's Future*. Lake Mary, Fla.: Front-Line, 2011. Despite the copyright date of this book being 2011, it was actually published in 2012.
2. His second book was Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*. Lake Mary, Fla.: FrontLine, 2013. His latest book is Jonathan Cahn, *The Mystery of the Shemitah*. Lake Mary, Fla.: FrontLine, 2014.
3. Jonathan Cahn, "The Mystery of the Shemitah," *Charisma*, October 2014, pg. 26.
4. Examples are Rabbi Jonathan Cahn, *The Isaiah 9:10 Judgment*. Chantilly, Va.: WND Films, 2012 and Rabbi Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger Decoded*. Charisma Media/Fusion Productions, 2013. Additionally, one can order an 8 DVD (or CD) set of "The Harbinger Mysteries: The Full Revelation," as well as an abridged 3 DVD version, or a set consisting of a single DVD entitled "The Harbinger" plus the book *The Harbinger* from Jonathan Cahn's hopeoftheworld.org website. All these items accessed at: www.theharbinger-jonathancahn.com/ and related webpages.
5. Jose Bernal, *The Truth About the Harbin-*

ger. Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2013.

6. All these titles were publicized in Joseph Farah, "Hanukkah's lessons for today," WND e-mail. Accessed at: http://email.wnd.com/HM?a=ENX7CqqNVCG28SA9MKJqmIvnGHxKLm5W3_cStGb5lw8W0bBhOG5mpqVsje_Hhe-ud1lj.
7. *The Harbinger*, op. cit., back cover.
8. "About Jonathan Cahn" section of Beth Israel Worship Center website. Accessed at: www.bethisraelworshipcenter.org/aboutjonathan.htm.
9. Andy Butcher, "Bearer of the Harbinger," *Charisma* online post dated 12/29/2011. Accessed at: www.charismamag.com/site-archives/1485-0112-magazine-articles/features/14741-bearer-of-the-harbinger.
10. Ibid.
11. Jonathan Cahn bio page from "Unofficial" Cahn website. Accessed at: www.joncahn.com/bio.html.
12. Molly Noble Bull, "Interview With Jonathan Cahn," online post dated May 13, 2012. Accessed at: <http://writersrest.blogspot.com/2012/05/interview-with-jonathan-cahn.html>.
13. *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, op. cit., pg. 195.
14. Ibid., pg. 196.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., pg. 197, ellipsis in original.
17. Ibid., pp. 197-198.
18. Ibid., pg. 198.
19. Jonathan Cahn bio page from "Unofficial" Cahn website, op. cit.
20. *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, op. cit., pp. 198-199.
21. Jonathan Cahn bio page from "Unofficial" Cahn website, op. cit.
22. *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, op. cit., pg. 199.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., pg. 200, italic in original.
25. Jonathan Cahn bio page from "Unofficial" Cahn website, op. cit.
26. "Interview With Jonathan Cahn," op. cit.
27. From e-mail with a staff member at Cahn's Hope of the World ministry, dated 12/5/14. Copy on file.
28. Ann Carroll, "'The Harbinger' Spends 100 Weeks on NYT Best-Sellers List," *Charisma* online post dated 12/27/2013, italic in original. Accessed at: www.charismanews.com/us/42227-the-harbinger-spends-100-weeks-on-nyt-best-sellers-list.
29. Jonathan Cahn, "The Harbinger: Jonathan Cahn Responds to T.A. McMahon," Rapture Ready website. Accessed at: www.raptureready.com/soap/cahn.html.
30. See G. Richard Fisher, "The Harbinger: The Cahning of the Church," *The Quar-*

terly Journal, October-December 2012, pp. 2, 21-22.

31. "The Mystery of the Shemitah," *Charisma*, op. cit., pp. 18-20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30.
32. Ibid., pg. 26.
33. Rabbi Jonathan Cahn, *The Isaiah 9:10 Judgment*. Chantilly, Va.: WND Films, 2012.
34. Calling WND a sensationalist publisher is simply a statement of fact. This isn't to deny that WND offers some valuable and insightful material as well.
35. Letter in "Your Feedback" section of *Charisma*, December 2014, pg. 10.
36. Positive comments from both of these were carried in *The Harbinger*, op. cit., n.p. (if this page had been numbered, it would have been pg. i).
37. David R. Regan, "In Defense of a Prophetic Voice," pp. 7-9. *The Lamplighter*, May-June 2013, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3. Document accessed at: www.lamblion.com/xfiles/publications/magazines/Lamplighter_MayJun13_Cahn.pdf.
38. "The Harbinger: The Cahning of the Church," op. cit.
39. Thomas Ice, "A Critical Look at The Harbinger," Prophecy Today Premium Resource Center website. Accessed at: <http://prophecytoday.com/premium/2012/06/critical-look-at-harbinger/>.
40. T.A. McMahon, "The Harbinger-A Matter of Critical Discernment," The Berean Call website, June 1, 2012. Accessed at: www.thebereancall.org/content/harbinger-matter-critical-discernment
41. David James, "The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?," The Alliance for Biblical Integrity website, April 26, 2012. Accessed at: www.biblicallintegrity.org/2012/04/26/harbinger-fact-fiction/.
42. Berit Kjos, "What's Wrong with The Harbinger's 'Ancient Mystery'?" Kjos Ministries website, July 5, 2012. Accessed at: www.crossroad.to/articles2/2012/harbinger.htm.
43. David James, *The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?* Bend, Ore.: The Berean Call, 2012.
44. Ibid., pg. 12. (The 74-minute broadcast referred to was accessed at: <http://media.prophecytoday.com/interviews/cahninterview.mp3>.)
45. "The Harbinger: Jonathan Cahn Responds to T.A. McMahon," op. cit.
46. "The Harbinger-A Matter of Critical Discernment," op. cit.
47. Amy Spreeman, "Harbinger Author Johnathan [sic] Cahn Answers Questions," Stand Up For The Truth! website, June 30, 2012. Accessed at: <http://standupforthetruth.com/2012/06/harbinger-author-jonathan-cahn-answers-questions/>.
48. "Jonathan Cahn Answers His Critics," YouTube video, December 23, 2012. Accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMnraI7H08o.
49. See, for example, *The Harbinger Com-*

panion With Study Guide, op. cit., pp. 3-9, 158-165, 171-178.

50. David James, "Threatened Lawsuit by The Harbinger Publisher & Author," The Alliance for Biblical Integrity website, January 31, 2013. Accessed at: www.biblicalintegrity.org/2013/01/31/threatened-lawsuit-harbinger-publisher-author/.

51. From e-mail to author from David James, dated 11/30/14. Copy on file.

52. In response to "A Warning About 'The Harbinger'" by Jonathan Cahn (accessed at: <http://hatchcreek.com/2013/02/11/a-warning-about-the-harbinger-by-jonathan-cahn/comment-page-4/>), Bernal stated, "It is both an honor and a privilege to be an active part in the ministry of Beth Israel [the church Jonathan Cahn leads], and to know Pastor and Messianic Rabbi Jonathan Cahn, and to call him both brother and a dear and beloved friend." In responding to a post on another website, Bernal wrote: "I know [Jonathan Cahn] personally, and have known him for over ten years, and serve as biblical instructor at the Arise and Shine Academy at Beth Israel's Jerusalem Center." Accessed at: <https://davemosher.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/heretical-harbinger-author-jonathan-cahn-who-is-he-and-what-does-he-really-believe/>.

53. Tim Challies, "Challies' Chattle on The Harbinger," The Pepster's Post: A Voice in Cyber Space blog, January 16, 2015. Accessed at: <http://avoicyber.blogspot.com/>.

54. For just one example of Bernal's aggressive posture toward David James, see Jose Bernal, "A Reply to the Article: Threatened Lawsuit by The Harbinger Publisher & Author," The Pepster's Post: A Voice in Cyber Space blog, February 22,

2013. Accessed at: <http://avoicyber.blogspot.com/2013/02/below-are-postings-on-david-james-web.html>.

55. *The Truth About the Harbinger*, op. cit.

56. *Ibid.*, pg. 31.

57. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.

58. *Ibid.*, pg. 56.

59. *Ibid.*, pg. 135.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77, ellipsis in original.

61. C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *Church and the Tribulation*. London: Pickering and Inglis Ltd., 1938, pg. 11, cited by Robert Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, Inc., 2005, pg. 124.

62. *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, op. cit., pg. 8.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, pg. 9, italic in original.

65. *Ibid.*, pg. 10.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

69. From e-mail with a staff member at Cahn's Hope of the World ministry, dated 1/14/15. Copy on file.

70. "Interview With Jonathan Cahn," op. cit. This story is also told in Cahn's book, *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, op. cit., pp. 192-194.

71. "Bearer of the Harbinger," op. cit., italic in original.

72. Alternate spellings for *shemitah* are *shmita* and *shemittah*.

73. *The Harbinger*, op. cit., pp. 153-177.

74. *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, op. cit., pg. 4.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

77. *Ibid.*, pg. 2, italic in original.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6, bullets deleted from original.

79. *Ibid.*, pg. 262.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 55.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

82. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-153.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-153.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-187.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-240, 272.

86. *Ibid.*, pg. 239.

87. *Ibid.*, pg. 55.

88. *Ibid.*, pg. 60.

89. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.

90. For examples of Cahn's emphatic denials that he is teaching that America has replaced Israel and/or that Isaiah 9:9-10 was prophesying about America, see *The Harbinger Companion With Study Guide*, op. cit., pp. 3, 5-8, 173-174.

91. *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, op. cit., pg. 255.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

93. *Ibid.*, pg. 260.

94. *Ibid.*, see also pg. 240.

95. *Ibid.*, pg. 257.

96. For examples of his guarded predictions about the future, see *ibid.*, pp. 77, 103-104, 233-244, 255-260, 272.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4, 9.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9, 10.

99. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.

100. *Ibid.*

101. Don Matzat, *Inner Healing: Deliverance or Deception?* Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1987, pg. 155. The citation above by Matzat doesn't imply my full agreement with what he says in this book (or elsewhere).

102. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, pp. 13-14, italics in original.

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

permits, but not citizenship. For a time it was "hands off" the squatters of Dimona.

Since 2009, the group's relationship with the Israeli government has thawed, perhaps because of its business success, persistence, longevity, and members' willingness to serve in the army. Members are now being offered a five-year track for individual citizenship. There were no figures available for the number or gender of those applying. But the question of their true Jewishness is being ignored.

Some reports say that Carter's real name is Gerson Parker, but there is no reliable documentation available. However, what is real is that Ben Carter is no longer Ben Carter. Through personal reinvention he became Ben Ammi Ben-Israel. Ammi in Hebrew means "my people"

or "my nation." The whole name translates as "son of my people — son of Israel." It also has been reported that Carter was influenced by the strong Black Nationalism teachings of Marcus Garvey. Garvey believed that African nations could be redeemed and prosper with the demise of European Colonialism.

In time Carter became convinced that African-Americans are biblical Israelites, descended from the fabled, dispersed lost tribes. Of course, many groups claim the same distinction. In 1966, Carter claimed to have received a vision of the angel Gabriel instructing him to take his followers to Israel. Initially, he took more than 300 followers to Liberia for a cleansing period. Most went back to the United States in less than three years. The remnant moved on to Israel.

Carter and his followers lived in less than ideal circumstances and in their own world that they called The Village of Peace. They had their own district on the

outskirts of Dimona in overcrowded apartments. Some have called it a ghetto.

Those who left Carter and Dimona alleged that Carter ran a coercive and overbearing patriarchal cult with child beatings, deprivation, and domination of the people by the leaders along with polygamous marriages with men taking up to seven wives. Carter had four wives. Officially the group stopped polygamy in 2006, but some hope it will be reinstated. According to *The Times of Israel*, existing polygamous families were allowed to remain intact. The group is marked by highly festive and brightly colored clothing. They try to have a polished and sanitized exterior, but critics question what really takes place within the inner circles. Horror stories of cult-like behavior continue to appear.

What the Black Hebrews believe and practice seems to be a subjective buffet of dogmas (some good and others definitely unbiblical) pulled randomly from the Old and New Testaments and cobbled together by the mind of Carter. Among the highlights:

1. Mandatory fasting every Sabbath and the keeping of Old Testament feasts.
2. No smoking.
3. No drinking alcohol.
4. No drug use.
5. Selective use of the Old Testament, imposing varied purity rituals from Leviticus on their women.
6. A vegetarian lifestyle; a pre-Fall diet.
7. Carter was the sole ruler and the voice of God to them.
8. Followers wear cotton, wool, or linen clothing.
9. The wearing of leather shoes is prohibited.
10. Any use of birth control is forbidden.
11. Marriages are decided by the group's leaders.
12. Followers must adopt a Hebrew name.
13. Israel's return to the land as prophesied in Jeremiah 23:7-8 is directly fulfilled by Carter's followers.

Teachings of this type — elevated to mandatory belief — that control followers is a strong indicator that a group is a cult. Devotion to a single leader is also a strong indicator. On the Black Hebrews website, Carter was called the representative of God on earth and the Messianic leader of the Kingdom of God. (See the "Our Leadership" tab at: africanhebrewisraelitesofjerusalem.com.) For the serious Bible student, this is troubling. Is Jesus our representative of God (John 1:18) and our Messianic leader (Hebrews 12:2) or is Carter? Is Jesus the leader of the Kingdom of God or is Carter?

Paul warns against enforced fasting in 1 Timothy 4:1-6 and states clearly that a law imposing fasting is not good or godly doctrine.

Carter's website also offers extrabiblical books for sale. One can purchase *The Book of Jasher*, *The 6th and 7th Books of Moses*, *The Gnostic Gospels*, the Apocrypha, and *The*

Forgotten Books of Eden. The descriptions of these books on the website include no warnings or disclaimers regarding the books' contents.

Years ago Dave Breese wrote *Know the Marks of Cults - The 12 Basic Errors of False Religion*. Carter exhibited many of those errors. In addition to presumptuous messianic leadership and an enslaving organizational structure, Carter's group makes claims of special discoveries and extrabiblical revelation. Carter's supposed angelic appearance and information from the other side certainly qualifies for both. The books being offered for sale also qualify as a mark in that they promote false teaching.

A final important concern to consider is the matter of Jesus and salvation. If one has it wrong about Jesus and salvation, then they have everything wrong. The Scriptures are very clear that salvation comes by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9). Those who call on His name shall be saved (Romans 10:13). His atoning work on the cross has secured salvation for all who trust Him as Savior. Carter has a different gospel and a different way of salvation.

In a video lecture by Carter called "The Target," available on YouTube, he claimed that the Holy Spirit came to him to reveal the formula for everlasting life and physical immortality. His teachings and elaborations have nothing to do with repentance, faith, grace, or Jesus. Carter said that everlasting life can only come by using Jah (which he pronounces Yaw) as the correct and only name of God. Carter alleged that there is a worldwide conspiracy to use other names for God, but everlasting life is only available to those who use God's correct name. He also said that *there is no power in the name of Jesus*. The Apostle Paul would strongly differ on that matter (Philippians 2:9-11). Jesus' name is above every name and one day all in the universe will bow the knee to Him and that name. Peter tells us, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The reality, though, is that Black Jews are not Jews at all, but rather misled Gentiles involved in wishful thinking. They are not Semitic. They are not Jews by birth or by genetics or by conversion, but rather pseudo-Jews; pretend Jews. They may be sincere, but sincerity alone does not make a true Jew.

In the end, Carter — or Ben Ammi Ben-Israel — went the way of all other self-proclaimed and false messiahs. Members of the group he left behind said, "We're going to continue on, we're going to continue to develop our community to show how much we loved him. It's a shock and it's painful, but we are determined to continue." However, sadly they continue on having no Gospel and having been misled by a misguided and misinformed false teacher. We need to pray that the eyes of Carter's followers are opened.

—GRF

refuse to blame, refuse to gossip, show grace to leaders, be grateful, and to keep their eyes on Jesus.

The problems for Mars Hill and Driscoll reached a pinnacle last August when several former members staged a protest outside the church's main campus calling attention to Driscoll's admitted "divisive" leadership. One online news report stated that charges of Driscoll's abuse of power had been lodged against him by 21 former pastors. On August 24, Driscoll announced that he was stepping down for a minimum of six weeks while an examination of the charges against him was being made. In October, Driscoll declared that his resignation was permanent and then it was later stated that Mars Hill would dissolve.

Apparently Driscoll's misfortunes will not keep him from the public eye or stifle his comeback to ministry. Long before Mars Hill's final service and closing of its doors, "reliable sources" from within the church indicated in November that Driscoll was exploring a return to ministry in either Texas or California. Driscoll already has a visible presence on the Internet with his own website (markdriscoll.org) where visitors can blog, listen to sermons, receive free e-books, or make a donation to "host and distribute Pastor Mark Driscoll's past and future Bible teaching and resources."

—MKG

POPE FRANCIS IS A DOG'S BEST FRIEND

A number of years ago Hollywood weighed in on one of the many religious matters it customarily addresses by way of an animated feature and its sequel which told viewers that *All Dogs Go to Heaven*. That belief is one that theologians have mused and discussed for years. But now for Catholics, the question is a bit more settled — at least for the time being.

According to *USA Today Network*, "During a recent public appearance, [Pope] Francis comforted a boy whose dog had died, noting, 'One day, we will see our animals in the eternity of Christ. Paradise is open to all of God's creatures.'"

Yet Francis' declaration addresses a topic that his predecessors have flip-flopped on for centuries. *The New York Times* explained that Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) affirmed that dogs and other animals have no souls, whereas Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) reversed Pius' judgment saying animals do have souls. More recently, Pope Benedict (2005-2013) appeared to take a middle of the road view, maintaining that when an animal dies it "just means the end of existence on earth" — a statement that could sanction either belief.

The current pope's remarks should not be of any great surprise as he selected his papal name from Francis of Assisi, whom Catholics regard as the patron saint of animals. Many Catholic churches, as well as some Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Episcopal, Unitarian Universalist, and liberal Protestant churches, celebrate the feast of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4 (or on the Sunday nearest that date) by conducting a special ceremony called the "Blessing of Pets."

The pronouncement, while unlocking the pearly gates for dogs, also opens other challenging questions for Catholics, most notably, will bad dogs have to suffer in purgatory before going to heaven?

—MKG

MYLES MUNROE PERISHES IN PLANE CRASH

Bahamian megachurch pastor and international speaker Myles Munroe, 60, died along with his wife, Ruth, and seven others in the crash of a private jet on November 9, 2014. The group was traveling to Freeport, Bahamas, to attend the Global Leadership Forum, a conference organized by Munroe. Bad weather is believed to have been a factor as the Lear 36 executive jet exploded and crashed when it hit a construction crane during an attempted landing at Bahamas International Airport.

Munroe was a well-known figure within pentecostal and charismatic circles. He was a frequent guest on CBN's *The 700 Club*, part of the "family" of the Trinity Broadcasting Network, and a contributing writer for *Charisma* magazine. He was also a past speaker for the Promise Keepers organization. Munroe received a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Education, and Theology from Oral Roberts University. He also served as an adjunct professor of the Graduate School of Theology at ORU.

Several video clips of Munroe teaching questionable and unbiblical theology at various venues are available on YouTube. One of the posted videos shows Munroe declaring, "The main reason for Jesus coming to earth was not to go to the cross." Munroe maintained that Jesus "said the reason why I came was to deliver to you a kingdom."

During a eulogy at the Munroes' funeral, televangelist Creflo Dollar said that three days after the plane crash he had a prophetic dream in which Munroe appeared to him "leading his own home-going celebration." Dollar claims that Munroe said in the dream, "Now, I'm really going to show you how this ought to be done."

Munroe was the founder of the Bahamas Faith Ministries International (BFMI) and Myles Munroe International (MMI). He wrote more than 38 books, many of them motivational.

—MKG



Books in Review

OUT OF FORMATION

by Gary E. Gilley

Evangelical Press, 292 pages, \$14.99

A number of years ago, popular author Kenneth Boa wrote two companion volumes titled *Face to Face*, which were daily devotions of Scripture passages adapted into personal prayers. They were excellent works. Then just a few years later Boa released another devotional series, *The Trinity: A Journal* and *The Psalms: A Journal*. Based upon the wholesome content of those earlier devotionals, it was a shock to find out that those latter volumes were the polar opposite — taking readers on a mystical detour into spiritual formation. Boa's transformation is indicative of the shift that is taking hold of the 21st-century Church. This is why Gary Gilley's book is strategic for believers who affirm the teachings and practices given to us in Scripture.

Perhaps there are some who are unaware — or unconcerned — of the effects and prevalence of the spiritual formation movement. However, they should be both aware and concerned. The intent and consequences of these revived ancient mystical practices leads one away from a proper biblical path of spiritual discipline.

Spiritual formation proponents and teachings are highly visible, not only in the Christian marketplace, but also within many prominent Bible colleges and seminaries. And this influence goes well beyond just the SFM promoters. Gilley tells us: "Rare is an evangelical author who does not quote from the Christian mystics and/or recommends some of these ancient practices as a fresh means of spiritual growth" (pg. 9). So, one does not have to even read a book specific to spiritual formation and its disciplines to come under its influence.

Gilley acquaints his readers with many of the contemporary players in the movement including Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, Bruce Demarest, Dan Kimble, Brennan Manning, Eugene Peterson, Mark Yaconelli, and yes, Kenneth Boa. He also introduces the protagonists from yesteryear — those from whom the current advocates harvest their practices. These bygone mystics include Madame Guyon, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Ávila, and Ignatius of Loyola. And there are a lot more names in between.

Gilley adds, "Prior to the publication of Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* in 1978, virtually all spiritual and mystical literature was produced by Catholic and Orthodox publishing houses such as Paulist Press or the Jesuits. Not anymore as evangelical publishers are rushing to get to press with these bestselling books and authors. NavPress, InterVarsity, Thomas Nelson and a host of others have entered the market. Christians, who had grown accustomed to trusting these publishing houses, are being caught off-guard by what they are reading from them today" (pp. 11-12).

Out of Formation is presented in two main sections. Part one contains the players and the practices of the spiritual formation movement. Those "spiritual disciplines" include contemplative prayer, sacred reading (or *Lectio Divina*), solitude and silence, fasting, and other methods.

In this first section, the vital matter of discernment and revelation is also considered. Gilley here speaks to the importance of discernment in regard to the view of God speaking to Christians outside the Scriptures themselves. He reminds us that, "Despite the fact that the majority of conservative evangelical Christians since the Reformation have held to a cessationist (that present-day revelations from God no longer take place) position with regard to Divine revelation, true cessationists are rapidly disappearing" (pg. 137). This chapter has a survey of the identifiable views of ongoing revelation among Evangelicals and presents an effective argument for cessationism.

In part two of the book, Gilley sets right the unbiblical SFM components by examining true biblical discipleship. He expounds upon prayer, the Scriptures, fellowship, and the transformed life (or progressive sanctification).

While some may assert that not all the disciplines espoused by the SFM are harmful, Gilley explains that "while some of these have a bit of basis in Scripture, others have none, and even those which seem to be drawn at least in part from the Bible go beyond the Word in either their actual practice or what they promise or both" (pg. 273).

Readers of *Out of Formation* will hear echoes of various articles written by Gilley that have appeared over the past many years in *The Quarterly Journal*. This book brings them all together in a single volume with a whole lot more analysis and exposition. It is a necessary volume for the Christian who desires to remain faithful to the charge of *sola Scriptura* and biblically contend against the mystical offensive aimed at the modern Church.

—MKG

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