

THE INFLUENCE OF ZIONISM ON THE DISPENSATIONALISM OF ARNO C. GAEBELEIN

Arno Clemens Gaebelein (1861-1945), a self-taught German immigrant, became one of the leading figures in the spread of dispensational theology in North America in the first half of the twentieth century.¹ A one-time Methodist missionary to Jewish immigrants in New York City and pre-tribulational leader during the latter days of the Niagara Bible Conference, the busy Gaebelein edited *Our Hope* magazine, one of the leading dispensational periodicals of the century. In addition, he maintained almost a half-century ministry of itinerant teaching in Bible conferences, churches, and schools from the east to the west coast. Gaebelein's vast knowledge of Jewish literature and customs caused him to be in high demand. This contribution endeared him to congregations and students who were interested especially in Old Testament prophecies concerning the nation of Israel.²

Consequently, a study of Arno Gaebelein's ministry and teaching reveals something of the relationship between Jewish theological backgrounds, modern Jewish developments including political Zionism, and the bent of dispensational theology. This relationship will be studied below under three headings. First, the Jewish influence upon Gaebelein's theology will be established especially as it relates to his adoption of premillennial eschatology. Second, Gaebelein's shift from Messianic Judaism to mainline fundamental, dispensational views of present-day Jewish believers will be highlighted. Third, his theological reaction to the political movement known as Zionism will be outlined. Finally, an appendix is provided which discusses the enigmatic responses of Gaebelein to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and his general anti-Semitic stance.

Jewish Influence on the Premillennialism of Gaebelein

Gaebelein's own interest in the nation of Israel began during the time of his outreach ministry to the mostly orthodox Jews in New York City. By his own testimony, the year of his ministry at the Hebrew Christian Mission (1887) marked Gaebelein's conversion from postmillennialism to a premillennial view of eschatology. It had been six years since the father of a Methodist minister named Wallon had shown him a copy of Émile Guers' premillennial book *La Future D'Israël*.³ Gaebelein recalled Wallon's influence, "However, I believe the old saint must have prayed earnestly for me, for six years later the light on unfulfilled prophecy came to me, and one of the first things I did was to order that French book [by Guers] for home study."⁴

¹ This paper is based largely on information, including whole sections, from the author's dissertation, "The Theological Method of Arno C. Gaebelein," (Dallas, Texas: Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992).

² David Rausch, *Arno C. Gaebelein 1861-1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 62-63.

³ Guers was the pastor of a Genevan congregation and personal disciple of John Nelson Darby. The long title of his work which Gaebelein cited is *Israël aux Derniers Jours De L'Économie Actuelle ou Essai Sur La Restauration Prochaine De Ce Peuple, Suivi D'Un Fragment Sur Le Millénarisme*, (Genève: Émile Beroud, 1856).

⁴ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Half a Century: The Autobiography of a Servant*, (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1930), 5-6. See the author's dissertation cited earlier, 83-100.

Gaebelein, in the above statement, did not say how the light of unfulfilled prophecy came to him, but his later comments were clear and forceful:

This initial attempt to bring the Gospel to the Jews led me deeper into the Old Testament Scriptures. I began to study prophecy. Up to this time I had followed in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy the so-called “spiritualization method.” Israel, that method teaches, is no longer the Israel of old, but it means the Church now. For the natural Israel no hope of a future restoration is left. All their glorious and unfulfilled promises find now their fulfillment in the Church of Jesus Christ. But as I came in closer touch with this remarkable people, those who are still orthodox, I soon had to face their never-dying hope. As I began to read their *Machsorim*, their rituals and prayers, I found the expressions of hope and longing for Messiah’s coming. Do they not say each time *Pesach* is celebrated, commemorating their supernatural deliverance out of Egypt’s slavery, “This year here, next year in Jerusalem”? Many an old, long-bearded, orthodox Hebrew assured me that the Messiah, the Son of David, the Bethlehemite, will surely come to claim David’s throne. In the beginning it sounded foreign to me, but as I turned to the Bible I soon discovered the real hope of Israel and the truth of the promised return of our Lord, and the earthly glories connected with that future event were brought through the Spirit of God to my heart. Then the study of the Bible became my most fascinating occupation, and as I continued in my search, I knew that the Lord wanted me to turn aside from the regular ministry and devote myself to work among God’s ancient people. Now all seemed to become clear as to why the Lord prevented my going to the regions beyond.⁵

Several significant points come out of this declaration by Gaebelein. First, he asserts that his new found position is based upon a deeper study of the Scriptures under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Gaebelein would reject the suggestion that he merely adopted the view of the Old Testament held by the orthodox Jews he was ministering to. However, the contact with them forced him to reexamine the prophecies in Scripture which in turn led to his premillennial convictions.

Gaebelein acknowledged a measure of dependence upon Jewish thinking about the restoration of Israel to the land of Palestine in his writings over the next several years. In August, 1895, in an article entitled “The Prayers of Orthodox Judaism” found in *Our Hope* magazine, Gaebelein said:

Sometimes on a Friday night when the Jewish Sabbath commences, and in the many Hebrew homes around us the festive candles are lighted, I take the Hebrew prayer-book and read in the original some of their prayers, and more than once my eyes were dimmed with tears, and I called upon Him who is the Hope of Israel in the words of the inspired King, “Have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favor her, yea, the set time has come.”⁶

These statements by Gaebelein demonstrate the spirit with which he had entered into the Jewish world that he was trying to reach with the gospel. His use of Jewish insight into theological

⁵ Ibid., 20-21. This quotation may be the most remarkable and revealing single paragraph in Gaebelein’s autobiography in terms of his theological thinking.

⁶ Arno C. Gaebelein, “The Prayers of Orthodox Judaism,” *Our Hope*, 2 August 1895): 38.

interpretations of Scripture, especially eschatological passages, can be seen in a series of articles in *Our Hope* published over a period of six months dealing with the topic of Jewish views of eschatology.⁷ Gaebelein commented, referring to the teachings of traditional Judaism, that “there can be no doubt that the Spirit of God did enlighten many of the old Jewish writers, and they foretell the conditions correctly which will prevail when the King of Glory comes.”⁸ Showing breadth and depth of knowledge concerning rabbinical writings, he explained for his readers the traditional Jewish understanding that when Messiah returns to earth He will find “the world in a sad state and Israel in deep misery and ungodliness.”⁹ In another place, he justified the identification of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3-12 as Moses and Elijah based upon Jewish predictions about the future comings of the two famous prophets.¹⁰

However, the most revealing words of Gaebelein in this series of articles showed the great delight he found and the large confidence he placed in much of the traditional literature of his Jewish friends:

Old Testament prophecy has been much better understood by the old synagogue than by most Christian commentators. Many a Christian Doctor of Divinity has with a few sentences dismissed the “carnal” expectations of the Jews and the literal interpretations of the Rabbis, and erected his own phantom, but nevertheless, the Jew with his “carnal” expectations and literal interpretations holds the truth. Yonder old orthodox Jew faithfully keeping the law and daily expecting his Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel, waiting for Him and His kingdom, believing in all the prophets said concerning the restoration of all things and Israel’s glory, is a far more inspiring sight to us than many a professing Christian, who has very little knowledge of the Word, and none at all of God’s purposes, and who moves in a little, narrow circle . . . There are many orthodox Jews who wait as eagerly for the Messiah as the true and orthodox Christian waits for God’s Son from heaven. The Jew has in his many and ancient writings a wonderful treasure, which a Christian never dreams of. The Targumim, Medrashim and the Talmudic literature is filled with valuable suggestions, read and understood by not many Gentiles. The Jew has in these writings a wonderful eschatology or teachings on the last things, the end of this present age, and the world to come, which will no doubt astonish many of our Christian friends.¹¹

Consequently, the impact of the orthodox Jews who had become part of Gaebelein’s life can be easily established. However, the recent convert to premillennialism would still insist that these people simply forced him to take a longer and deeper look at the Bible.

Gaebelein’s Rejection of Messianic Judaism

⁷ Arno C. Gaebelein, “Jewish Eschatology,” *Our Hope* 5 (July 1898): 9-13; (August & September 1898): 48-51; (October 1898): 108-12; (November 1898): 149-52; (December 1898): 188-91.

⁸ Gaebelein, “Jewish Eschatology,” *Our Hope* 5 (August & September 1898): 50.

⁹ Gaebelein, “Jewish Eschatology,” *Our Hope* 5 (July 1898): 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

When Gaebelein teamed with Ernst Stroeter in the early days of *Our Hope* (1894), he held to the view of Messianic Judaism. This practical and theological position involves a belief that a Jew who converts to Christianity should not be Gentilized.¹² Under the heading of Christian Judaism, the first edition of *Our Hope* in July, 1894, explained the idea in these terms:

For the Jew, then, to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah does not mean the adoption of a new religion entirely, it means simply the acceptance of the divinely appointed, covenanted Israelism, as it will be restored or reestablished under Messiah, the King, Jesus, the son of David. The Jew does not, like the heathen, have to turn from idols . . . The Jew who accepts Jesus of Nazareth as his personal and his nation's true Messiah and Lord, is in the "true apostolic succession." There is absolutely no necessity of his doing or becoming anything else.¹³

A later issue of *Our Hope* clarified these principles in terms of ecclesiastical connections:

The Jew had no need whatever of the organizations or institutions of historical (i.e., Gentile and denominational) Christianity. All he needs is personal, saving faith in his own Jewish Messiah, the Christ of God, nothing more. And all that was Divinely given him through Moses he has full liberty to retain and uphold as far as possible when he becomes a believer in Jesus Christ.¹⁴

Ernst Stroeter in a passionate article entitled "Does the Jew, In Christ, Cease to be a Jew?" answered his own question with an emphatic "No!" His discussion also tied the entire question together with the overall issue of premillennialism.¹⁵

However, a few years later in 1899, Gaebelein abandoned this particular way of looking at Jewish believers in Christ. It is interesting that in his autobiography, his presentation of this change came before his discussion of his withdrawal from the Methodist Church. In fact, the entire chapter covering this strategic year in his theological life blurred the rejection of Messianic Judaism, his rejection of his own denomination, and his new awareness of what he believed to be superior ecclesiology due to his increasing contacts with Darbyite brethren.¹⁶ Not surprisingly then, Gaebelein went through a time of genuine soul-searching concerning his convictions in this matter.

¹² Rausch provided a caution regarding use of the term: "Today, this same emphasis is found in the modern Messianic Jewish congregation movement. One must differentiate this modern movement from fundamentalism's Jews for Jesus and other such Hebrew Christian enterprises. Furthermore, one is impressed with the fact that pure Messianic Judaism goes back to a much earlier period than scholars had suspected. The term is used in the nineteenth century; the concept is considerably older" (Rausch, *Irenic Fundamentalist*, 35). See also David Rausch, *Messianic Judaism: Its History, Theology and Polity* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982). For a Jewish perspective on Gaebelein's early Jewish outreach and his abandonment of Messianic Judaism see Yaakov S. Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel*, 243-56.

¹³ "Christian Judaism," *Our Hope* 1 (July 1894): 8. It is not clear whether Stroeter or Gaebelein wrote this section, but one can safely assume that both had input.

¹⁴ "The Principles of the Hope of Israel Movement," *Our Hope* 3 (November-December 1896): 149-50. Again, it is not clear who wrote this article. Since Stroeter was the official editor of the magazine at this time, it was probably his actual work. However, Gaebelein, no doubt, helped to formulate the principles.

¹⁵ Ernst F. Stroeter, "Does the Jew, In Christ, Cease to be a Jew?" *Our Hope* 2 (January 1896): 148-54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 75-85.

Gaebelein's break with Stroeter and Messianic Judaism was announced in *Our Hope* in September 1899:

The principles which teach that a Jew who has believed in Christ and is therefore a member of His body, the church, should or may continue as under the law, practice circumcision, keep the seventh day (Saturday), eat only clean food as commanded by Moses and keep the different feasts, the writer does no longer believe to be scriptural. The great revelations of the Lord in the Church Epistles concerning His body are entirely ignored in these principles.¹⁷

At this point Stroeter and Gaebelein parted on friendly terms, yet decidedly in disagreement. The change on Gaebelein's part may have been necessary for his future national ministry to develop along the lines that it did.¹⁸

Gaebelein claimed that Scripture passages in the New Testament, especially the Pauline doctrine of the church as a body, had forced him to reevaluate his ecclesiology in theory and in practice. He noted that it was the prophetic portions of the Old Testament that had caused his shift to premillennialism twelve years earlier. Apparently, now an adjustment within premillennialism was occurring as he saw the church as a body of all believers in the present age whether Jew or Gentile. This concept forced a sharper distinction between Israel as a nation and the Church as the body of Christ.

The Hope of Zionism

Introduction

By reading the pages of *Our Hope* and other writings which the productive Gaebelein penned, especially the reports on current events in the world, one easily recognizes that the love for the Jewish people that began to be shaped in the late 1880's never dissipated as Gaebelein's

¹⁷ Arno C. Gaebelein, "A Short Review of Our Mission and the Principles of the Hope of Israel Movement," *Our Hope* 6 (September 1899): 69. Gaebelein then cited several New Testament passages concerning the doctrine of the church to substantiate the change (e.g., Eph. 2:14-18, Col. 2:11-18). That Gaebelein quoted at length and verbatim in his autobiography concerning this decision shows he was clearly aware of the ramifications of such a choice (*Autobiography*, 76-77). See also, Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel*, 255.

¹⁸ Rausch noted: "It is debatable whether or not Arno Gaebelein would ever have become the fundamentalist leader that he did if he had not changed his view on Messianic Judaism. The cry that Messianic Jews were 'rebuilding the wall of partition' would echo throughout the fundamentalist-evangelical movement during the twentieth century. Fundamentalism would join liberal Protestantism and most of the Jewish community in combating the Messianic Jewish 'heresy,'" Rausch, *Irenic Fundamentalist*, 59.

ministry progressed.¹⁹ One manifestation of that feeling for the Jewish people was Gaebelein's attraction to the political movement known as Zionism.²⁰

Although Gaebelein kept an analytical eye on the happenings of the world scene, he was never more alert than when judging events touching the Jewish people. When writing for *The Fundamentals*, Gaebelein singled out the Jewish nation for special treatment. In general terms, he noted:

When Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, asked the court chaplain for an argument that the Bible is an inspired book, he answered, "Your majesty, the Jews." It was well said. The Scriptures are filled with predictions relating to Israel's history. Their unbelief, the rejection of the Messiah, the results of that rejection, their world-wide dispersion, the persecutions and sorrows they were to suffer, their miraculous preservation as a nation, their future great tribulation, and final restoration—all these were repeatedly announced by their own prophets.²¹

Israel's role in history was prominent in Gaebelein's thinking because he saw that role exalted in the Bible.

A biblical passage that arrested Gaebelein's attention was Deuteronomy 28. In this chapter Gaebelein saw "pre-written the sad history" of Israel.²² Moses had predicted the scattering of the nation, suffering, tribulation, and ultimately, a final restoration for the Jews, "the enigma of history."²³ This last point is pivotal for Gaebelein's view of things. He asserted strongly in his commentary on Deuteronomy 30 in *The Annotated Bible* that "the Old Testament is practically a sealed book to every person who does not believe in a literal restoration of Israel to their land."²⁴

Thus, it is not surprising to see the Zionist movement, headed up by Theodor Herzl, become the focus of an intent gaze from the editor of *Our Hope*. From 1894 to 1897, the pages of *Our Hope* were given over to extensive reporting about the Jewish people and the Zionist efforts.²⁵ In January 1898, reference is made to the gathering of materials for a temple in Jerusalem.²⁶ The same

¹⁹ Rausch's chapter on the Holocaust years is probably the best contribution that he makes in the coverage of Gaebelein's life. See Rausch, *Irenic Fundamentalist*, 161-89. The issue of anti-Semitism has already been taken up. This section on Zionism will reinforce the idea that Gaebelein had no personal animosity at all toward the Jews as a people.

²⁰ David Rausch notes that the term *Zionism* has been widely debated as to definition. See David A. Rausch, *Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism: A Convergence of Two Traditions* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 59-65. When Zionism is discussed in this study with respect to Gaebelein, Rausch's simple notion of Zionism as "the philosophy of the Jewish people's restoration to Palestine" is meant. See also David A. Rausch, *Building Bridges* (Chicago: Moody Press 1988), 155-58.

²¹ Arno C. Gaebelein, "Fulfilled Prophecy a Potent Argument for the Bible," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. Reuben A. Torrey (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1910), 11:60-61. The story about Frederick the Great's question to the court chaplain made the rounds frequently in fundamentalist circles. Gaebelein may have first heard it from James Brookes. See Rausch, *Zionism*, 270.

²² *Ibid.*, 62.

²³ *Ibid.*, 62-65.

²⁴ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*, (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1913), 1:432.

²⁵ Rausch, *Zionism*, 237.

²⁶ Arno C. Gaebelein, "Material For the Temple Ordered," *Our Hope* 4 (January 1898): 242.

month Gaebelein published a letter he received from his Russian friend Joseph Rabinowitz. In the letter Rabinowitz complained about the two-edged sword the Zionist movement appeared to be.

At first glance it seems as if Zionism is a sign of the times by which the work in the Lord's vineyard could be helped, because they feel their national need. But alas, it is a pity to say, the Jews in general become very arrogant under the speeches of the ungodly leaders of the congress [on Zionism] and one can see from the Jewish papers that Zionism is at present very hostile to Christianity, leaning entirely towards Turkey and Islam. The Zionists desire to be a kind of Messiah themselves, to possess a State, a land, and a Zion, but without Jehovah.²⁷

Thus, Gaebelein at an early date was filled with mixed feelings about the Zionist movement.

However, most comments are positive. Later in the same year Gaebelein spoke in accepting terms as he noted that the "national awakening of the Jews in our country becomes very marked."²⁸ Following the progress of the Zionist movement in detail, Gaebelein gave the following significant remarks in 1905:

As known to most of our readers who are interested in the Jewish question, England made an offer to Zionism last year to permit Hebrews to settle in East Africa and establish there and independent "Jewish State." Orthodox members of the great Zionistic movement protested at once against this scheme, though in certain quarters it was highly recommended. We believed and stated before that the East-African scheme would be completely abandoned. This has now come to pass. The Federation of American Zionists assembled lately in Philadelphia with almost 250 delegates. The convention declared that Palestine was the only place for the colonization of Hebrews. They also adopted a resolution that the coming Zionistic Congress, to be held this month in Basle, should reaffirm the original programme as laid down by Dr. Herzl in 1897. This Congress will undoubtedly bury the East Africa project forever out of sight. This is significant. It proves that Zionism is alive and moving in the right direction.²⁹

This observation by Gaebelein is typical of the numerous comments given periodically in the pages of *Our Hope*. One can see Gaebelein's identification of two forces working in the Zionist movement, the orthodox Jews who sought a home in Palestine and the non-orthodox Jews who simply sought a homeland regardless of location.³⁰ In addition, the report by Gaebelein raises the question of what is legitimate Zionism. For Zionism to be "alive and moving in the right direction" it must be a Zionism focused on the literal promised land in Palestine. Gaebelein's scriptural expectations would allow no other options.

²⁷ Arno C. Gaebelein, "The Hope of Israel Movement," *Our Hope* 4 (January 1898): 246.

²⁸ Arno C. Gaebelein, "Jewish Notes," *Our Hope* 5 (December 1898): 287.

²⁹ Arno C. Gaebelein, "Editorial Notes," *Our Hope* 12 (August 1905): 71.

³⁰ This perceived dichotomy within Judaism fits with Gaebelein's understanding of the battle with communism as well, ("Current Events in the Light of the Bible," *Our Hope* 27 (June 1921): 734-35).

Gaebelein's understanding and use of Zionism was most clearly shown in two of his books. *Hath God Cast Away His People?* (1905) and *Hopeless, Yet There Is Hope* (1935). The two books, separated by thirty years, demonstrate that Gaebelein's approach to the Jewish Question and the settling of Palestine did not significantly change during the course of his ministry.

Hath God Cast Away His People?

In *Hath God Cast Away His People?*, Gaebelein began with nine expository chapters on Romans 11.³¹ The first verse of Romans 11 supplied the name of the book. At the outset Gaebelein plainly defined the issue at hand:

In it [Romans] the Holy Spirit unfolds the purposes of God concerning the earthly people He has chosen for Himself. The knowledge of Israel's place and position in God's revealed plan is of incalculable importance. All the confusion in doctrine and practice we see about us, is more or less the result of a deplorable ignorance which exists throughout Christendom about Israel's place and future. The carnalizing of the professing church has been the sad fruit of this ignorance.³²

The future of God's earthly people, the nation of Israel, must be understood. It is one of the central truths of the Bible.

Following the exposition of Romans 11, Gaebelein gave a survey of prophetic passages in the Psalms involving Israel, a detailed discussion of the prophecies about Israel given by Balaam in the Book of Numbers, and an exposition of Isaiah 11 and 12.³³ In all of these Gaebelein's goal was to establish that the ethnic, political nation of Israel has a future.

Four chapters provided a correlation of the scriptural promises discussed in Romans 11, the Psalms, Balaam's prophecies, and Isaiah 11-12 with current events. The first one of these was dedicated to the beliefs of orthodox Jews. Showing his great depth in Jewish literature outside of the Bible, Gaebelein cleverly demonstrated that orthodox Jewish expectations are often rooted in the Bible and should be respected.³⁴ Specifically, mention was made of the return of the Jews back to their homeland in Palestine as an act of God. With respect to the contemporary Zionist movement Gaebelein's analysis was that the "restoration which we are privileged to see in our times in the Zionistic movement seems to be a mock restoration—that is, one in unbelief—which is likewise foretold in prophecy. The true restoration will come after the King has been manifested in His glory."³⁵ In addition, two chapters gave population statistics for Jews living throughout the world and in Palestine.³⁶

³¹ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Hath God Cast Away His People?* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1905), 7-81.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 85-152.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153-78.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 172-73.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 205-28.

A significant chapter, entitled “Zionism, The Great Jewish National Movement,”³⁷ was begun joyfully by Gaebelein, “Never has there been such a wonderful and worldwide movement for national restoration among the Jews, since the day when Jerusalem fell, at the beginning of this Christian age.”³⁸ He recited a history of the Zionist movement and briefly surveyed the life and attainments of Theodor Herzl, the founder of the modern Zionist cause. Several pages were given over to addresses made by Herzl at the various Congresses of the Zionist movement as well as excerpts from Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat*.

Finally, Gaebelein furnished his assessment of the whole matter.

What significance has this great national revival among the Jews for us Christian believers? Has it any prophetic meaning? Is there anything in the prophetic Word, which foretells such a movement? These are the questions often asked by interested students of the Word of God. That Israel is to be restored to the land of the fathers, and a remnant of His people to possess the land and receive the long promised blessing, has been clearly proven by the Scripture expositions contained in this volume. Zionism, we wish to say, is not the divinely promised restoration of Israel. That restoration is brought about by the personal, visible and glorious coming of the Son of Man. Zionism is not the fulfillment of the large number of predictions found in the Old Testament Scriptures, which relate to Israel’s return to the land.³⁹

Thus, Gaebelein unmistakably denied that the contemporary political movement of Zionism was fulfilling the Old Testament promises of the restoration of Israel to the land. He lamented the absence of the Word of God from the leadership of the movement and the political rather than religious overtones of the effort. The movement was one of “unbelief and confidence in themselves instead of God’s eternal purposes.”⁴⁰ Only the return of Christ would usher in the real restoration of the nation of Israel.

In light of such statements one wonders why Gaebelein would focus on the Zionist movement at all. Fortunately, he clarified the issue.

If Zionism succeeds, and not doubt it will, it will be a partial return of the Jews in unbelief to their land. Is such a return anywhere foretold in the Scriptures? We do not know of a single passage which tell us that such should be the case and yet it is evident by all the predicted events which fall into the closing years of this present age, that in order that these events can be fulfilled, a part of the Jewish nation must be back in the land; while among them is the believing remnant, the great majority will be unbelieving.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., 179-204. Three postscript chapters are added by Gaebelein. One written by himself identifies the power of the North in biblical prophecy as Russia (231-41). Note that this is pre-Bolshevik. One article by Scofield on the Messianic Question is added (245-70). Adoniram J. Gordon’s “Three Weeks with Joseph Rabinowitz” marks the end of the book (273-79).

³⁸ Ibid., 181.

³⁹ Ibid., 200.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 201.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Gaebelein then noted the future building of a Jewish temple which was necessary for prophecy to be fulfilled (Dan. 11:31). Passages from Zechariah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Matthew were also cited as requiring part of the Jewish people to be in Palestine.⁴²

Consequently, while the overall thrust of the Zionist movement did not demonstrate the ultimate situation that must be attained for biblical prophecy to be realized, there were inferences from the prophecies that a partial restoration leading up to the final and full restoration was possible and perhaps likely.

Hopeless Yet There is Hope

Gaebelein's 1935 book entitled *Hopeless Yet There is Hope* demonstrated the balance between pessimism and optimism that the writer attempted to maintain. Part I dealt with the hopeless state of affairs for the twentieth century as Gaebelein saw it.⁴³ Gaebelein first traced the decline of morality in the early 1900's, the rise of socialism, and the buildup of military armament before World War I. Second, he outlined the gruesome events of the World War itself. A third chapter focused on the years from 1922 to 1928 in which Soviet terrorism along with the rise of crime in the United States dominated current events in the opinion of Gaebelein. He also spoke out against the continuing inroads made by liberalism in Christian institutions.

The next chapter mentioned the financial crash of 1929 and continued a discussion of the Soviet attempt to spread world revolution along with the rise of anti-Semitism under Hitler in Germany. Two final gloomy chapters combined fears of Soviet advancement in light of American recognition of that country, moral and religious decline, and the failure of the New Deal. In short, the Depression days of the 1930's justified in Gaebelein's eyes, both at home and abroad, a dismal outlook. In his mind, the postmillennial optimism at the turn of the century had completely been demolished by current events.

Fortunately, Gaebelein added the second part to his book. Optimism was possible based on an understanding of three points outlined in the three remaining chapters. First, Israel continued to be the nation of hope.⁴⁴ In light of the morbid picture Gaebelein had painted, he showed that the survival of the Jewish longing for a home land through centuries of persecution pointed out that the "Jewish Hope is a never dying Hope."⁴⁵ In this example, the world should take hope.

However, the world should take hope precisely because the fulfillment of the hope of Israel was flickering on the horizon. In the second chapter of this section on optimism Gaebelein again broached the topic of Zionism. A detailed chronology of the movement through 1935 was provided for the reader. Interestingly, Gaebelein acknowledges some theological communication between himself and early elements of the Zionist cause.

The writer had a special deep and sympathetic interest in the Jewish people during the years 1889 to 1899, giving them a Gospel testimony, and also in welfare work. He met from time to time orthodox Hebrews, Bible-believing and Messiah-expecting, who were

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Hopeless Yet There is Hope: A Study in World Conditions and Their Solution*, (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1935), 13-149.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 153-65.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 157.

members of the “*Choveve Zion*” (lovers of Zion) organization. This society had come into existence in 1884 in Kattowitz, we believe, and was composed mostly of orthodox Jews. Branches sprang up everywhere. When traveling in Russia in 1895 we conversed with some of them and they were delighted to find a Gentile who believed in the Jewish Hope . . . The Choveve Zion Societies were the harbingers of the greater, now world-wide organization known as “*Zionism*.”⁴⁶

This shows that Gaebelein was influenced by contact with Zionists just a few years after his conversion to premillennialism in 1887.

As in his earlier work, Gaebelein here rejected the modern political Zionist cause as the ultimate fulfillment of biblical prophecy about the restoration of the nation of Israel: “We state at once without any further arguments that Zionism is *not* the realization of the great ‘Hope of Israel,’ nor will it result in bringing the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, ‘In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”⁴⁷ Gaebelein gave two conditions that were necessary concerning the return of Israel to the land. Without these the ultimate fulfillment has not arrived. The first was the “whole-hearted return of Israel to the Lord, expressing faith in and obedience to Him.”⁴⁸ The modern Zionist movement failed on this point since its character was overwhelmingly secular and political without reference to Jehovah God of the Old Testament although individuals existed within the group who believed the promises of the Old Testament.⁴⁹

The second condition involved the Messiah as “acknowledged by the orthodox Jewish interpretations of the Old Testament Scriptures.”⁵⁰ It was imperative that “Messiah must come and through Him and His power, through His enthronement and reign as King, Israel’s blessing and glory will be accomplished.”⁵¹ For Gaebelein Jesus would have to return to earth before he would acknowledge that the national restoration of the Jews according to the Bible was fulfilled. However, Gaebelein would add that the presence in Palestine of unbelieving Jews by the hundreds of thousands constituted evidence that the day of the Lord, a day of tribulation and calamity, was not far away. This day of tribulation was to be followed by the coming of the Messiah.⁵²

In summary, Gaebelein throughout his ministry watched the Zionist movement with the understanding that it was not the national restoration of Israel that would lead to world blessings. It was only the foreshadowing of an ultimate restoration based upon the coming of Christ. A pessimistic world could look with hope at the partial restoration knowing that the biblical return to the land with the accompanying promises of blessing could not be far off.

Conclusion

⁴⁶ Ibid., 166-67.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Arno C. Gaebelein, *World Prospects, How is it All Going to End? A Study in Sacred Prophecy and Present Day World Conditions* (New York: Publication Office “Our Hope,” 1934), 52-53.

In the light of the previous discussion, it would be much too simplistic to suggest that Arno C. Gaebelein merely followed the direction of orthodox understandings of the Old Testament promises to Israel or uncritically followed the developments of modern political Zionism. The fact of his abandonment of Messianic Judaism implies that it is clear that he allowed other factors, such as his growing involvement with the Niagara Bible Conference, C. I. Scofield, and various Plymouth Brethren, to influence his thinking as he wrestled with his interpretation of the Bible. However, it is possible to suggest that four observations can be made concerning the possible influence that the Zionist movement had on Gaebelein's thinking.

First, as was shown above, there can be no question that in the early formative days of his premillennialism, Gaebelein had contact with Zionists. This was a normal by-product of his outreach to Jews in New York City, many of whom were orthodox Jews who longed for the restoration of Israel. Furthermore, the spirit of Gaebelein's discussions about Zionism betray a camaraderie with these people that he did not reserve for even some Bible-believing premillennialists like Robert Cameron, the posttribulationist.⁵³

Second, and related to this, is the reliance of Gaebelein, at times, upon the orthodox Jewish interpretations of the Old Testament which overlapped Zionist tendencies. As noted earlier, Gaebelein's reading of Guers was coupled with his constant contact with the Jewish understanding of the Old Testament posed by his Jewish friends. Both forced him to reexamine the Old Testament prophecies as they touched upon the nation of Israel. Zionism, as part of this overall thrust, would undoubtedly cause him to focus on the future restoration of the nation of hope.

Third, Zionism with its partial restoration was one of many current events which constituted the signs of the times. The coming of the Lord with the attendant events would come about in a premillennial fashion just as the Bible declared, according to Gaebelein's understanding. In the same way that the day of the Lord or tribulation was foreshadowed by the rise of anti-Semitism, the national restoration of Israel was typified by the political movement of Zionism. Thus, Zionism served a confirmatory use in Gaebelein's mind.

Fourth, Gaebelein's interest in Zionism also points one in the direction of influence from another quarter. The early 1890s saw Gaebelein's first contacts with the men of the Niagara Bible Conference. Those men were already alert to the possibilities of a future national restoration of Israel and the developing Zionist ideas among the Jewish people in the nineteenth century. Rausch has shown that Gaebelein's interest in Zionism was not an isolated one in fundamental premillennial circles.⁵⁴

The fact that Gaebelein was in the mainstream of fundamentalism in this matter is bolstered by the fact that Gaebelein was one of over a dozen speakers at a Bible conference at the end of World War I sponsored by the Chicago Hebrew Mission. The entire conference was given over to "The Jew in History and Prophecy."⁵⁵ As Rausch noted, Jewish interests in general and Zionism in particular constituted part of the fabric of fundamentalism.⁵⁶ Thus, Gaebelein's interest in Zionism reflected his growing attachment to the Bible Conference movement in the 1890s as well as his own

⁵³ Robert Cameron was the major post-tribulationist antagonist during the latter days of the Niagara Bible Conference. He was aligned against Scofield and Gaebelein on the pre-tribulationist side. See Stallard, "Theological Method,"

⁵⁴ Rausch, *Zionism*, 53-270

⁵⁵ *The Jew in History and Prophecy: Addresses Delivered at a Conference on Behalf of Israel*, with a Foreword by Robert M. Russell (Chicago: The Chicago Hebrew Mission, 1918).

⁵⁶ Rausch, *Zionism*, 53.

contacts with the Jews.⁵⁷ In short, it is easy for a dispensationalist like Gaebelein, with his interest in the national and land promises to Israel, to be drawn with interest to historical developments that highlight any Jewish move to Zion.

⁵⁷ Ariel underestimated the influence of Zionism in Gaebelein's thinking and gave only a short section on it. See Yaakov S. Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes Toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945*, with a Preface by Martin E. Marty, Chicago Studies in the History of American Religion, no.1 (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 114-16. He did not like the passivity of Gaebelein when compared to other fundamentalists like William Blackstone who actively lobbied to help the Jews find a homeland. It is true that Gaebelein's interest remained primarily theological and theoretical. Most likely the influence of the orthodox Jews he encountered played a role here. Since the Zionist movement was primarily political and not religious, Gaebelein kept his distance. Yet it must be remembered that a theological friend is still a friend. Gaebelein did not lack compassion on the Jews as his welfare work in New York City and his continual warning about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism prove.