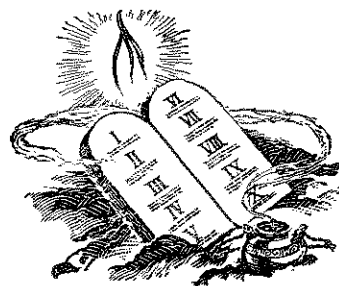


The Mission of John the Baptist



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*Inscribed to the religious mind and
especially for the consideration of
orthodox thought in America. - -*

BY THE AUTHOR

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THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

In the following presentation, reference is made to the King James version of the Bible, to the ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT by Hon. Francis Nielsen, and to writings of Professor Louis Wallis.

In a previous pamphlet on THE ECONOMICS OF MOSES it was developed that a main purpose of the establishment of the Hebrew nation was to set up a government on such principles as would produce the fullest degree of individual liberty and of economic justice by recognizing the equal rights of all to the use of the earth. See Eccles. 5:9—"The profit of the earth is for all."

A promise was given to this new nation (see Deut. 28:1), if they would diligently obey all the commandments (including the land covenant), that God would set them on high above *all* the other nations. They would be a light to the nations, and in them all other nations would be blessed.

The record shows that the nation did not obey the commandments; they did not drive out the Amorites and the Canaanites. See Deut. 20:17, Joshua 16:10, and Judges 1, verses 27 to 35.

The Hebrews worshiped false gods. They even served the landlord gods—the Baals—who ruled over Amoritish tribes.

Again and again the Hebrew prophets declared that the Hebrew nation had violated the covenant! What covenant? The covenant of economic righteousness. In its stead had been substituted the land-

monopoly system of Baalism. This had supplanted the liberty and justice of the Mosaic code—the common people had been led into economic slavery, misery and helplessness.

We come now to consider an event of great historic importance—the coming of a great prophet, John the Baptist. Liberty and justice had departed. Preceding prophets had given their message, but the Hebrew nation had forgotten the purpose of its founding, had forgotten the land covenant of economic righteousness; the nation had ceased to have independent existence.

At the time of John the world had long been in darkness, blinded and shackled by ignorance, held down by the greed of privileged classes.

The world needed light and more light. From time to time, light had been furnished, but it is sadly related in John 1:5, "The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

Moses had revealed the light of economic justice; the prophets had proclaimed the light of the covenant; but the people had comprehended it not. The forces of oppression "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The priests, while overlooking the fundamental law, had substituted hundreds of non-important regulations and were endeavoring to give to them the sanctity of law and the flavor of importance. The prophets had battled against this mass of inconsequential regulations and had sought to restore the vital Mosaic provisions of justice in land tenure.

The Roman authorities had imposed income taxes, sales taxes, inheritance taxes, improvement taxes, license taxes, tariff taxes, etc. There was undiluted spoliation and confiscation in the matter of tax collection as carried on by the publicans, the tax-gatherers.

The common people were also required to pay heavy tribute to the land-grabbing monopolists (Pharisees and such) in the land once described as "flowing with milk and honey." The common people were not getting very much of the milk and honey. The people were robbed by the Roman taxgatherers; they were robbed by the exactions of the priests. See Mark 11:17, also Luke 19:46. They were also robbed by the monopolistic land-grabbers who claimed to own the natural resources and the valuable locations in Palestine.

There was starvation and revolt; the people were discontented and desperate; guerilla bands roamed the outlying districts. One armed rebellion, led by Judas of Gaullon, had occurred about four years before the birth of John the Baptist. A name was coined for these *insurrectos*—they were called Zealots.

The rebellion under Judas of Gaullon was put down by Roman power; thousands were killed; but the spirit of revolt and resentment still lived on. The Zealots were often outlanders; they lived in the deserts away from the centers of Roman power, away from the seat of governmental and ecclesiastical tyranny and thievery.

Injustice reigned, and in the minds of

—that death is a transition from one sphere of activity over into what will be a higher sphere of knowledge and activity for those who are truly prepared, and otherwise for those not so prepared.

Another thread proclaims the existence of a Divine Intelligence, a Personality who rules and overrules—the Supreme Architect of the universe, with intelligence, power and purpose far beyond that of the human.

There is still another thread woven into the various parts of the Bible and throughout all history, indicating the necessity of an economic system founded upon justice—not founded upon charity or communism or monopoly. It is in connection with this brilliant thread that we call attention to that fearless hero and battler for liberty—John the Baptist, an important figure in world history.

What was the mission of this brave and rugged man who lost his life on account of his fidelity to principle? It is well to consider some events which transpired long before his public career.

He was ordained to be the messenger of the covenant! What covenant? This was the ancient covenant of economic truth in which the great reformers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were participants, and which related specifically to a Promised Land wherein economic justice was to be established as the foundation, and wherein the equal rights to the use of the land were to be duly implemented and perpetuated—the word given to a thousand generations.

This ancient covenant, when understood

and put in force, will bring the year of jubilee, will bring freedom and liberty for those who are properly prepared to exercise it.

In the truth of this Promised-Land covenant there will be equal and unbounded opportunity for all to reach their highest development—when judgment, justice and righteousness shall flow down like a river.

In a previous pamphlet on *THE ECONOMICS OF MOSES*, this covenant was explained, noting the fact that Moses, in prescribing the laws for the Hebrew nation, had ordained a system whereby perpetually the male Hebrews were to have guaranteed unto them, for generation after generation, their equal right of access to the land, and without payment of land rent to other individuals.

They passed over Jordan to possess the land. It was commanded and ordained by Moses that the people were to retain this effective and perpetual right of possession.

In another pamphlet on *THE WORSHIP OF BAAL* it is shown that the Hebrew nation forsook this covenant and disobeyed the laws of economic justice. But the great Hebrew prophets warned the people and implored them to return to the covenant and to obey the Jehovah of justice. Many students will agree that, after the death of Moses, the greatest of the battling prophets was Elijah.

You will recall the bitter conflict carried on by Elijah against the priests of Baal and against the worship and service of Baal—the Baals being the huge estate owners and monopolists of that day of apostasy.

They owned the fertile lands in the valleys. You will remember the bitter strife between Elijah and the land-grabber, renegade King Ahab. The message of Elijah was an imperative call to return to the economic righteousness of the Mosaic code. On the mount of transfiguration, the account indicates the presence of Moses and Elijah—two great characters of like purpose.

It is stated that John the Baptist was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah and was to be the messenger of the covenant, which covenant was an economic contract relating to a Promised Land and the right of access to it.

The mission of John the Baptist was, therefore, the same as the mission of Elijah, and it included the important matter of economic justice.

There is an important spot on the bank of the Jordan River. It is reported that Moses, near the end of his earthly life, went up on Mount Nebo, to the top of Mount Pisgah, and from there looked over the Promised Land and looked down on the Jordan near the point where it joined the Dead Sea.

Concerning this spot and concerning the passage over Jordan, (see Deut. 27), "Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep *all* the commandments which I command you this day. And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones . . . and thou shalt write upon them *all* the words of this law

. . . and thou shalt write upon the stones *all* the words of this law *very plainly*. . . Thou shalt therefore *obey* the voice of the Lord thy God, and *do* his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day. . . Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. . . Cursed be he that confirmeth not *all* the words of this law to *do* them."

Moses had indicated to the people that their very life depended upon keeping and observing the law. The law that had the most to do with preserving their lives was that same economic law or system which declared their right of access to the land. This particular spot on Jordan was to have a definite and important meaning.

As the sojourn in Egypt typified to the Hebrews that they were strangers and slaves in that land, and as the forty years in the wilderness was a period of transition and training; so, in the sequence of great events, the passage over Jordan was to symbolize the actual inheritance of the Promised Land and the achievement of liberty made possible by the provision that *all* would have an equal right of access to the land.

So Moses instructed that at this historic spot on the bank of Jordan there should be promptly erected great memorial stones or monuments; and on these monuments there must be written *very plainly all* the laws laid down by Moses—one of the most important being, "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark." In other words, Thou shalt not deny to thy neighbor his equal right to the use of the earth. "Cursed

be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark."

These great memorial stones, containing very clearly the words of the economic and moral law embracing justice as concerning access to land, are referred to on a number of occasions. These stones were to be a perpetual reminder of the covenant, which was a contract relating to land and its administration. The Promised Land was to be the inheritance and the estate of all. The land was not to be sold, or made the subject of sale, and there was to be no concentration of ownership (see Lev. 25:23). The equal rights of all to the use of the earth must be maintained in perpetuity, in full force and effect.

Such was the law as laid down by Moses. Such was the inscription on the great stones. But to how small an extent did the people grasp the significance of this far-reaching and beneficent law!

In the same way, how few are the Americans who have had an adequate comprehension of the breadth and scope of our great Declaration of Independence. This to us would be the passing over Jordan and the great memorial stones symbolizing liberty and how it could be secured and maintained, viz., by equality of natural rights.

As previously indicated, Elijah was the most noted prophet subsequent to Moses, and the one who conducted the most vigorous campaign to get the Hebrews to abandon the worship of the landlord Baals and to return to the covenant or Mosaic system of economic justice. Elijah devoted his life

to this cause—the cause of liberty—to which also Moses had dedicated himself. "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

To that same spot on Jordan where the waters had been divided to enable the Hebrews to cross over, to that same spot where Moses had looked and where he had ordered the erection of the great memorial stones—to that same spot came Elijah. Again the waters were divided, and the great prophet was taken from the banks of Jordan in a chariot of fire. There also, in the waters of Jordan, the Christ was baptized by John the Baptist and declared that this baptism was a fitting thing thus "to fulfil all righteousness."

The baptism of John at this spot on Jordan was a baptism symbolizing repentance unto the remission of sins—repentance or turning away from sin. May we inquire, What sin? The answer might be *all-inclusive*. However the common people, being in misery and bondage, were especially suffering as a result of the violation of the covenant of economic justice.

Repent or turn away from economic injustice. Bring back the covenant of righteousness. Nehemiah in his day had really accomplished a reform of this character (see Neh. 5:11).

In addressing the crowds at this spot on Jordan, John no doubt had in mind the words of Isaiah 5:8—"Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place." Isaiah, the great prophet, had pronounced this particular

woe against the land-grabbers. This same prophet Isaiah had said: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

At this very point on Jordan, symbolizing liberty and the great stone of economic justice on which the Hebrew nation had been founded—at this very point repentance was experienced by the multitudes.

John baptized them into a great reform movement. What sin did he especially want them to renounce and abhor? The sin of violating the economic covenant laws, thus bringing the people into an intolerable condition of servitude and poverty, accompanied by ignorance, sin and crime. It is interesting to note that John directly referred to the great stones which had been set up as monuments at this same area on Jordan. Note the third chapter of Matthew.

John noticed that many Pharisees and Sadducees had come for purposes of obstruction and opposition and not with any desire to repent of their evil propensities of land-grabbing and grafting. He addressed them directly and vigorously thus: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He told them plainly to bring forth "fruits worthy of repentance . . . for I say unto you, That God is able of *these stones* to raise up children unto Abraham."

This admonition stressed the necessity for their repentance, and their subsequent producing of works different entirely from their previous output. These Pharisees and Sadducees were the people whom he was

opposing. These were the ones upon whom wrath was to come. These were the ones who had subverted the covenant of righteousness. These were the ones who had nullified the Mosaic laws of justice as to equality of right in the land.

He warned them that it would avail them nothing to claim a physical or lineal descent from Abraham. They could not in that manner escape from the wrath to come.

John pointed out that from those great stones or from those who would accept and honor the principles shown thereon—from the men who were faithful to those principles, the true descendants of Abraham were to be selected. God is able of *these stones* to raise up children unto Abraham. These Pharisees and Sadducees were the ones who had "omitted the weightier matters of the law," the parts that had vital meaning and importance. These were the ones claiming to be eminently respectable, parading their minor virtues. These could show a hypocritical observance of certain regulations and traditions, many of which were of no apparent worth. But underneath all this show and pretense of piety, they maintained and upheld an economic system of injustice which was an utter denial and negation of the Mosaic system.

These were the monopolists and the land-grabbers, the successors to the Baals, who fattened through the processes of injustice and who were supported on the misery and deprivation of their disinherited neighbors.

Concerning these Pharisees, the cousin

of John said: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?" He called them an evil generation. He said to the Pharisees, "Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven *against* men." He said that the Pharisees and their proselytes were the sons of Hell and that they had left undone "the weightier matters of the law," justice, etc. So it is clear, on this contemporaneous evidence, that the Pharisees were *not* good, although they alleged that they were. The appellation, Sons of Hell, is rather revealing.

Whereas Moses, Elijah and John endeavored to establish economic justice and thereby prepare the way for the kingdom of Heaven, the Pharisees, on the other hand, were engaged in "shutting the kingdom against men."

It is clearly seen that John the Baptist was on one side of the conflict—a great leader in the cause of Moses and the prophets—a sort of reincarnation of Elijah. John was clearly a battler for freedom and for the covenant of economic righteousness. It is plainly seen that on the other side were many of the scribes, Pharisees and priests—the upholders of a system devoid of justice—those who had substituted a mass of tradition and who actually upheld the cause of monopoly power. John was to proclaim the covenant and its meaning boldly, so that all the people would understand their equal rights in the Promised Land. He was to proclaim *deliverance* from *enemies* and to enjoin a loyal obedience to the commandments of the Righteous One—Jehovah.

It is unfortunate that none of the speeches

of John have been preserved to us in their entirety. Matthew 3 shows flashes of his power of speech. If any of his speeches were taken down it is easy to understand that in the nineteen centuries since then, the forces of privilege and of injustice would have been keenly desirous to destroy his message. They would have been keenly alert to any opportunity to conceal, obscure or minimize his message. They might even attempt to reverse his meaning and try to make out that this vigorous, far-seeing Zealot was not delivering any clear and convincing attack on economic injustice but that he contented himself with theories and metaphysics. His enemies would be eager to destroy or subvert his message.

The results would probably have been more apparent if John could have had a few more years in which to advance his mission. St. Luke indicates that *his* report on John the Baptist is quite incomplete (see Luke 3:18), stating that John had many other exhortations in his preaching of good tidings to the people. Luke indicates that John was preaching the word of God. See Luke 3:2.

The burden of his addresses to the disinherited and despoiled multitudes was this: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He saw that repentance was needed. Repentance for what? The most important sin that required repentance was the sin of violating the economic covenant of equality of possession in the Promised Land. This sin was the one which called forth a definite and specific curse, viz.,

"Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark."

John preached the gospel of repentance and he did it with power. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." He evidently believed that an era of justice was to begin and that it would be regnant. He apparently had no thought that the coming of this kingdom of justice might be delayed for centuries. To John, the kingdom of Heaven meant an order of society—a political unit occupying a geographical area on the earth's surface and embracing men or nations living in just and orderly relations with one another. He wanted that kind of a society—he wanted it soon—he knew how it could be achieved; for this cause he was willing to live and to die.

He said, "Repent"—in other words turn away from economic injustice—substitute justice in place of injustice. Justice would prepare the way to usher in the kingdom of Heaven. Do it now, in haste; it is at hand. Prepare the way; make straight the path. How effectively did he preach this message? Let us see!

In our day, ministers may have difficulty in attracting large audiences, even though the sanctuary may be comfortable, the music may be soothing, and the transportation may be well-nigh perfect. In our day, many lecturers may have difficulty in drawing a crowd, even when the lecture is free and is delivered in a large city, near to millions of people.

But read again the facts regarding John. He dwelt in the wilderness! He was not

dressed in the height of fashion! He had no appearance of affluence! His diet was neither elaborate nor fastidious! He had no comfortable auditorium to entice an audience! There were no pews and no cushions, no choir and no organ! He spoke not in soft and pleasing phrases, calculated to disarm or to appease. But he had a message, and he delivered it with power! And though there were no street cars, busses, or automobiles, the people came. Presumably they walked. They walked not on smooth paved streets nor along beautiful parkways. They came in numbers, and they were not attracted by bright lights.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa. . . . Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan." Matt. 3.

What a man and what a message! The people heard him gladly. The poor had the gospel preached unto them. They were told why they were poor. In most instances they were poor because they had been robbed of their right of land access.

They repented; they turned; they were willing to join with him in his immediate project to usher in the reign of justice, to assist in securing the kingdom of Heaven.

As a symbol of their repentance, as a sign and token that they would embark with him in this great reform for liberty, they were baptized by John in the river Jordan at that historic spot to which we have referred—that spot being sacred to the covenant and law as prescribed by Moses and

as inscribed there on the great memorial stones as a perpetual witness. This baptism was their enlistment ceremony. This was indeed a fitting place for dedication to the cause of human liberty.

It had been prophesied that John was to go in the spirit and power of Elijah. This meant that he was to be another Elijah. He was to turn the disobedient so that they would walk in the wisdom of the just. In other words he was to condemn injustice and uphold the majesty of justice. He was to instruct the people concerning a means of *redemption* from virtual slavery.

John, in his brief and dynamic mission, gathered to himself the young and vigorous patriots, those lovers of liberty who prayed for emancipation from the shackles of economic slavery. He enlisted those who would uphold the Mosaic system of justice.

As an illustration of this fact, he had among his followers two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. These two impetuous Zealots were nicknamed Boanerges, i.e., "sons of thunder." This was indicative of their spirit and their purpose. The mission of John the Baptist was a mission calling for a recognition of the commands of Deity—a mission for justice and human liberty. It was thus very similar to the missions of Moses and Elijah.

John aroused a segment of the people to a comprehension of the great sin of violating the Promised-Land covenant. He preached the gospel of repentance from this sin. As a sign of this repentance and as a symbol of dedication to the cause of justice and

the covenant, he baptized in Jordan at the memorial point of passage. He thus built up a following dedicated to economic justice.

It was the conviction of John that a greater leader than himself would arrive on the scene, would take command of this group so dedicated to liberation. Also that this Greater Leader would fill them with greater zeal, and would endue them with supernatural power to proceed at once to institute a return to the Mosaic code as to land tenure.

He believed that this would make possible the advent of the kingdom of Heaven as a definite state of human relationships in a definite area. This kingdom of Heaven was something long-wished-for and was the subject of ardent hopes.

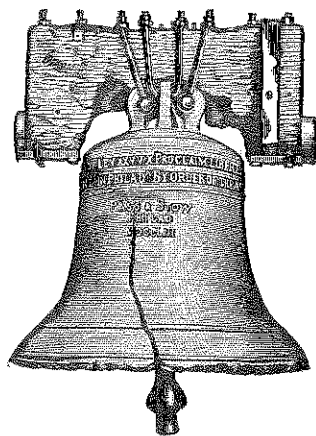
John believed earnestly that this should be and would be accomplished without delay. He felt so sure of the logic of his position, so sure of the righteousness of his cause, and so sure that this great reform was absolutely necessary and that delay would be disastrous, that he felt his program would gain following and would succeed.

He said: "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." In thus referring to an institution that was to be hewn down and destroyed because of its evil fruit, he was referring to an institution utterly at variance with the Mosaic code, viz., the institution of private monopoly in land resources.

The program of John was a noble and

inspiring one. It is to his everlasting credit that he undertook such a stupendous and fundamental task. Nineteen centuries have passed since then, and his ideal has not yet come to fruition. The kingdom of Heaven, as he visualized it, has not yet been established on this earth. We too can repeat his message: "Repent . . . for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It devolves upon those now living to dedicate effort to the attainment of that rule of justice which John had in mind when he said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The effort of course should not now be limited to Palestine or to any one nation but should have application to *all* nations and *all* peoples.

In the truth of his message and in its practical realization on earth, "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose!"



"PROCLAIM LIBERTY UNTO ALL" Lev. 25:10.

REFERENCES AND AUTHORITIES

Aristotle—"Formerly, in many States, there was a law forbidding anyone to sell his original allotment of land."

Tiberius Gracchus—"The private soldiers fight and die to advance the wealth and luxury of the great, and they are called masters of the world, while they have not a foot of ground in their possession."

Exodus 20:12—"The land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

Ezekiel 33:24—"The land is given us for inheritance."

I Kings 21:3—"And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

Micah 2:2—"They covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away."

Micah 4:4—"They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree."

Isaiah 5:8—"Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place."

Isaiah 11:4—"With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth."

Isaiah 65:21, 22—"They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat."

Nehemiah 5:11—"Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses."

Psalms 115:16—"The earth hath he given to the children of men."

Eccles. 5:9—"The profit of the earth is for all."

Jesus—"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Matt. 5:5.

Jesus—"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." Matt. 23:14.

Jesus—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." Matt. 6:33.

Turgot (France)—"Land is always the first and only source of all wealth."

Herbert Spencer—"After all no one does implicitly believe in landlordism. The world is God's bequest to mankind. All men are joint heirs to it."

Tolstoi (Count Leo)—

"The land is common to all. All have the same right to it."

"Use your autocratic power to abolish landed property in Russia, and to introduce the Single Tax System."

Catholic Bishop of Meath, Ireland (1881)—
"The land therefore of every country is the common property of the people of that country."

Thomas Jefferson—"The earth belongs always to the living generation."

Thomas Jefferson—"The earth belongs in usufruct to the living."

Emerson (1841)—"Grimly the spirit of progress looks into the law of property and accuses men of driving a trade in the great, boundless providence which has given the air, the water, and the land to men to use and not to fence in and monopolize."

Mark Twain—"The earth belongs to the people."

Mark Twain—"I believe in the gospel of the Single Tax."

Bishop C. D. Williams (Episcopal)—"Equity insists that we cease levying taxes on the fruits of human toil, and make the monopoly value of land the exclusive basis of taxation."

Rev. Father Edward McGlynn—"There was a man sent by God and his name was Henry George."

Joseph Fels—"The taxation of land values is essential for the complete solution of the housing problem."

Theodore Roosevelt (1913)—"The burden of municipal taxation should be so shifted as to put the weight upon the

unearned rise in the value of land itself rather than upon the improvements."

Francis Neilson—"The world owes Henry George a debt which it can never repay."

Frances E. Willard—"I see in Henry George's proposal an effort to establish a principle which, when established, will do more to lift humanity from the slough of poverty, crime, and misery than all else; and in this I recognize it as one of the greatest forces working for temperance and morality."

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