Agriculture in Palestine

The Israelites learned farming during their 400 years in Egypt. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been herdsmen, but the people under Moses and Joshua were mainly agrarian. They were prepared to make cultivation of the soul their main occupation in the land of promise.

The allotment of the land to tribes and families was on the understanding that all land was actually owned by Jehovah; so the soil could not be sold, given, or bequeathed to anyone outside the family except under special circumstances. The land reverted to the owner in the year of jubilee.

In a community, each portion of the land was marked off and divided according to the various products to be grown. Walls and hedges protected against animals. The land was burned off to destroy weeds. Ashes and manure were spread and the land was plowed with wooden plows pulled by oxen or donkeys. The ground was cleared of stones and thorns early in the year, and sowing among thorns was taken as a sign of a lazy farmer.

The plow was followed by men using hoes to break up the clods. In later times a harrow of sorts was used, usually in the form of a thick block of wood held down by the weight of a stone or a man. Seed was usually sown and harrowed in at the same time.

Crops

The principal crops of Palestine were wheat and barley. The Bible also mentions lentils, flax, cucumbers, melons, beans, etc. Hay was not used, so cattle ate barley with chopped wheat or barley straw.

The sowing of crops began after the Feast of Tabernacles (end of October, beginning of November), about when autumn rains were due. Crops for summer and fall harvest were planted in January and February.

Harvest began with barley, which ripens in Palestine two or three weeks before wheat. The law stipulated that harvest was to begin on the 16th Nisan. The month of Nisan corresponds to the period of March 15 to April 15 on our calendar.

Events of the Month of Nisan

day	event
1	Fast for Nadab and Abihu
10	Selection of paschal lamb (the lamb to be used in Passover; fast for Miriam and in memory of the scarcity of water in the wilderness
14	Paschal lamb is killed in the evening, Passover begins
15	First day of unleavened bread. After sunset a sheaf of barley is brought to the temple.
16	First fruits sheaf offered; harvest begins; from this date it is fifty days until the Feast of Pentecost.
22	Close of Passover; end of unleavened bread
26	Fast for the death of Joshua

Grain was harvested with a sickle, although it was known that grain was harvested by pulling up the roots to preserve all the straw. The cut grain was gathered in the arms, bound into sheaves, and laid in heaps to be threshed.

Threshing floors were placed in the open air, leveled and tramped hard, usually on elevated ground so that in the winnowing process the wind might carry away the chaff.

Threshing was done by oxen driven over the grain to tread out the kernels with their hooves. Sometimes machines were used made with planks which dragged across the threshing floor.

Winnowing was done in the evening when there were more breezes. The mass of chaff, straw, and grain was tossed into the air with shovels so that the chaff might be blown away. The chaff and stubble

in the fields were burned. The grain was sifted and stored.

Israel owed its possession of the land to God. It's fertility was also in God's hands. The Lord made a number of provisions in the Law to care for the land.

- Sabbath rest was to be observed
- Soil was to lie fallow on the seventh year and in the 50th year
- It was forbidden to yoke an ox and a donkey together, since an ox was a clean animal and the donkey was ceremonially unclean.
- It was forbidden to sow with mingled seed or with seed on which the carcass of a forbidden animal had lain.

Topic: Uncleanness in the Levitical System

- The corners of the field were not to be reaped, and gleanings were to be left for the poor to gather
- The first fruits of all crops belonged to Jehovah in recognition of His being the giver of all good things.
- The fruit of the orchard was not eaten for the first three years. On the fourth year, the produce was consecrated to God. The first eating by men was in the fifth year.

Every facet of the everyday work of the Israelite was a teaching mechanism for divine viewpoint. The faithful Jew had the opportunity to live every moment of every day as "unto the Lord". There would then be rich fruit in the soul as well as from the soil.

Grace Notes is a ministry of Village Missions International, Fredericksburg, Texas

For an index of topics, or information about regular Bible studies, write to:

Warren Doud
Grace Notes
1705 Aggie Lane
Austin, Texas 78757
E-Mail: wdoud@bga.com
URL: http://www.realtime.net/~wdoud/

There is no charge for Grace Notes materials. The work is supported by Christians who pray for the ministry and share in the expenses.