



Agriculture

Requires:

Wisdom, Dilligence

Patience & Toil

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

Overview

Agriculture

Agriculture is the art of cultivating the land to grow food and was a primary occupation of people in the Bible.

The people of biblical times, both of the Old and New Testament periods, were essentially rural. Even those who lived in towns were close to the country and usually owned gardens or farms.

With the seasons as a background to their daily life, the religious calendar was partly based on the agricultural year with several festivals coinciding with significant events: e.g. Feast of Weeks or first fruits (of cereals, Exodus 32:11), Feast of Tabernacles or ingathering (of grapes, Leviticus 23:34). The primary crops of the Bible include grain, grapes, and olives (Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 7:13; Joel 1:10).

How were cereals cultivated? Grain crops were the staple food of rich and poor alike, although the poor may have had to consume barley bread rather than the more palatable wheat. Both were sown by scattering the grains into prepared land usually ploughed by draft animals. The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23; Luke 8:5-15) provides an interesting account of grain sowing and the subsequent fate of the seed.

Peasant agriculture, unlike modern farming practices, was unsophisticated with primitive implements often used in harsh conditions where rocky ground and vigorous weeds militated against a good yield.

Hence it would be normal for some of the scattered seed to fall on a path of compacted soil where it would not be covered and lie vulnerable to birds. Similarly, some seeds would fall at the margins of the fields where thorny thickets and rapidly growing thistles easily suffocated the germinating wheat.

Shallow soil and lack of moisture during the hot dry summer encouraged the withering of the seeds that did sprout into young plants on the field's outer borders.

Those seeds that fell on moist, deep soil grew and matured their ears ready for harvest.

The Book of Ruth provides a vivid picture of the harvesting scene that was carried out by whole families and extra hired men, followed by poor women gleaners picking leftovers.

Barley was harvested first during April and May, followed by wheat a month later. A sickle was used to cut off the ears which were held with one hand, and then bundled together in small sheaves to be carted off to the threshing floor (1 Chronicles 21:22)—a cleared area of stamped earth or stone. Animals, usually cattle, were driven over the spread-out stalks to trample out the grains.

Often a cartwheel or a heavy sledge with small stones inserted in the bottom was drawn round and round the floor to hasten the threshing.

The grains were swept together and separated from the useless chaff by winnowing—a process involving the throwing up of the grain in breezy weather so that the light scaly chaff is blown away, leaving a pile of clean grain ready for grinding into flour (Matthew 3:12).

A proportion of the crop was always kept aside and carefully stored in dry conditions for sowing the following year (Genesis 47:24).

How did the agriculture of Egypt differ from that of Canaan? The essential difference between Egyptian and Canaanite agriculture was that Canaan depended on rainfall (Deuteronomy 11:11), while Egypt depended on the River Nile and its annual flood (Amos 8:8).

In other words, Canaan was a rain-fed agriculture, while Egypt used irrigation agriculture. In July the Nile rose following rainfall in Ethiopia and flooded the land on both sides. (Now the modern Aswan Dam impounds the water and releases it evenly throughout the year).

The flood carried silt that enriched the farmland; and the water level fell later in the year, leaving behind pools of water that could be used for irrigation in channels small enough to be opened and closed by a farmer's foot (Deuteronomy 11:10).

Egypt was renowned for its rich harvests of wheat and vegetables which were missed by the Israelites fleeing the country via the desert of Sinai. There the Israelites longed for the succulent melons, cucumbers, garlic, leeks, and onions they left behind (Numbers 11:5).

Were vineyards for growing grapevines? The Bible presents two accounts of vineyards that describe them in some detail. In Isaiah 5:1-7 and Mark 12:1-9 we read how the hillside was fenced and terraced to provide deep stone-free soil where the rainfall could water the vines' roots in winter.

Dung and compost nourished the plants which needed to be trained over rocks or fences. Constant attention had to be given to the trailing branches of carefully chosen varieties in order to yield sweet green or black grapes.

As harvest time approached, the owners of the vineyards and their families camped near the vineyards in shelters (booths) or in stone-built towers (Isaiah 1:8) to protect the grapes from animals, such as jackals (foxes) and wild pigs (boar) (Psalm 80:13) and human thieves. When ripe, the grapes were picked for eating fresh (Isaiah 65:21), drying in the sun as raisins (1 Samuel 30:12), or crushed for wine.

Most vineyards had a winepress where the grapes were trodden under human foot (Nehemiah 13:15; Revelation 19:15), the juice collected in flagons or skins and fermented (Matthew 9:17). Fermentation was caused by naturally occurring yeast (Saccharomyces) breaking down the sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas.

During the winter, the long shoots of the previous year's growth had to be pruned away from the vines to leave a few buds for the next season (John 15:2).

How long do olive trees live? The huge trees in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36) on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem are hundreds of years old and could potentially stretch back to New Testament times.

During the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the Roman forces under Titus felled all the trees, presumably including the olives which could have sprouted again (Psalm 123:3) to yield the aged hollow trees still growing around Jerusalem.

Olive trees are not raised from seeds because the seedlings invariably produce very inferior ones similar to the wild stock. Selected cuttings are rooted or more often grafted on to the wild plant which has a better root system.

Olive roots spread widely to gain nourishment on rocky hillsides, hence the trees are often well spaced. Although flowering begins when the trees are less than ten years old, full yield of fruit is not reached until they are 40 or 50 years old, after which branches are pruned to encourage new fruitful growth.

Olives require a Mediterranean type of climate of moist cool winters and hot dry summers to be economically productive.

Olive groves usually had an oil press nearby where the heavy stone wheel crushed the fruit and its hard kernel. The pulp was placed in a press which extracted the precious yellow oil. This was used for cooking purposes as an essential part of diet (Deuteronomy 7:13 , 2 Kings 4:5 , 2 Chronicles 2:10). Olive oil was rubbed over skin and hair (Psalm 2:6; Psalm 23:5) and used for anointing guests (Luke 7:46 and 1 Kings 1:34).

Christ was God's "anointed" one (Psalm 2:2; John 1:41; Acts 4:27), anointing being symbolic of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1; Acts 10:38). Medicinally, olive oil mixed with antiseptic wine healed wounds (Luke 7:34 , James 5:14).

Taken internally, olive oil soothed gastric disorders and acted as a laxative. Olive oil was used as fuel for lamps with a wick made of flax, producing a bright flame when lit (Exodus 25:6; Matthew 25:34).

What animals were used in agriculture? Mainly cows (oxen) were used to pull carts (1 Samuel 6:7) and simple wooden plows (Job 1:14; 1 Samuel 14:14) tipped with iron, if the farmer could afford it (Isaiah 2:4).

Oxen and donkeys (asses) were driven over the harvested grain to thresh it. The use of horses and camels in agriculture appears to have been limited, presumably because they were more valuable animals, well adapted for carrying heavy loads and for use in time of war.

When pairs of animals were used, they were coupled with a wooden yoke across their shoulders (Jeremiah 28:13; Luke 14:19).

Reference: Holman Bible Dictionary

Divine institution of agriculture

Genesis 3:19

All your life you will sweat to produce food, until your dying day. Then you will return to the ground from which you came. For you were made from dust, and to the dust you will return."

Genesis 3:23

So the Lord God banished Adam and his wife from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made.

Practiced by Cain

Genesis 4:2

Later she gave birth to a second son and named him Abel. When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain was a farmer.

Practiced by Noah

Genesis 9:20

After the Flood, Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard.

Practiced by Elisha

1 Kings 19:19

So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field with a team of oxen. There were eleven teams of oxen ahead of him, and he was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and walked away again.

Practiced by David

1 Chron. 27:26-31

And over them that did the work of the field for tillage of the ground was Ezri the son of Chelub:

And over the vineyards was Shimei the Ramathite: over the increase of the vineyards for the wine cellars was Zabdi the Shiphmite:

And over the olive trees and the sycomore trees that were in the low plains was Baal-hanan the Gederite: and over the cellars of oil was Joash:

And over the herds that fed in Sharon was Shitrai the Sharonite: and over the herds that were in the valleys was Shaphat the son of Adlai:

Over the camels also was Obil the Ishmaelite: and over the asses was Jehdeiah the Meronothite:

And over the flocks was Jaziz the Hagerite. All these were the rulers of the substance which was King David's.

Practiced by Uzziah

2 Chron. 26:10

Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry.

Practiced by Solomon

Eccles. 2:4-6

I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

God to be acknowledged in agriculture

Jeremiah 5:24

Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

Hosea 2:8

For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

Requires wisdom

Isaiah 28:26

For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him.

Requires diligence

Proverbs 27:23

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.

Requires patience

James 5:7

Dear brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who eagerly look for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They patiently wait for the precious harvest to ripen.

Requires toil

2 Tim. 2:6

Hardworking farmers are the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor.

Persons engaged in, called husbandmen

2 Chron. 26:10

He also constructed forts in the wilderness and dug many water cisterns, because he kept great herds of livestock in the foothills of Judah and on the plains. He was also a man who loved the soil. He had many workers who cared for his farms and vineyards, both on the hillsides and in the

Planters of vineyards, exempted from military service

Deut. 20:6

Has anyone just planted a vineyard but not yet eaten any of its fruit? If so, go home! You might die in battle, and someone else would eat from it!

Fruits blasted because of sin

Isaiah 5:10

Ten acres of vineyard will not produce even six gallons of wine. Ten measures of seed will yield only one measure of grain."

Isaiah 7:23

In that day the lush vineyards, now worth as much as a thousand pieces of silver, will become patches of briars and thorns.

FACTS ABOUT AGRICULTURE

Genesis 8:22

As long as the earth remains, there will be springtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night."

2 Cor. 9:6

Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop.

Galatians 6:7

Don't be misled. Remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it. You will always reap what you sow!

FIGURATIVE

Fallow ground

Jeremiah 4:3

This is what the Lord says to the people of Judah and Jerusalem: "Plow up the hard ground of your hearts! Do not waste your good seed among thorns.

Sowing wheat, but reaping thorns

Jeremiah 12:13

My people have planted wheat but are harvesting thorns. They have worked hard, but it has done them no good. They will harvest a crop of shame, for the fierce anger of the Lord is upon them."

Parable

Of the sower

Matthew 13:3-8

He told many stories such as this one:

"A farmer went out to plant some seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them.

Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The plants sprang up quickly, but they soon wilted beneath the hot sun and died because the roots had no nourishment in the shallow soil.

Other seeds fell among thorns that shot up and choked out the tender blades. But some seeds fell on fertile soil and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted.

Of the tares

Matthew 13:24-30

Here is another story Jesus told: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field.

But that night as everyone slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat. When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew.

The farmer's servants came and told him, 'Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds!'

“An enemy has done it!' the farmer exclaimed.

“Shall we pull out the weeds?' they asked.

"He replied, 'No, you'll hurt the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds and burn them and to put the wheat in the barn.' "

Life application

The Lord will supply all of our needs, but since the fall of man, men must work at maintaining food through agriculture.

Cain was a farmer and he offered a sacrifice of his crops. The reason his offering was not accepted was because he did not offer it in faith.

Through agriculture, we can provide food for others. Be faithful. A slothful farmer is a reproach to God's creation.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Holdman Bible Dictionary