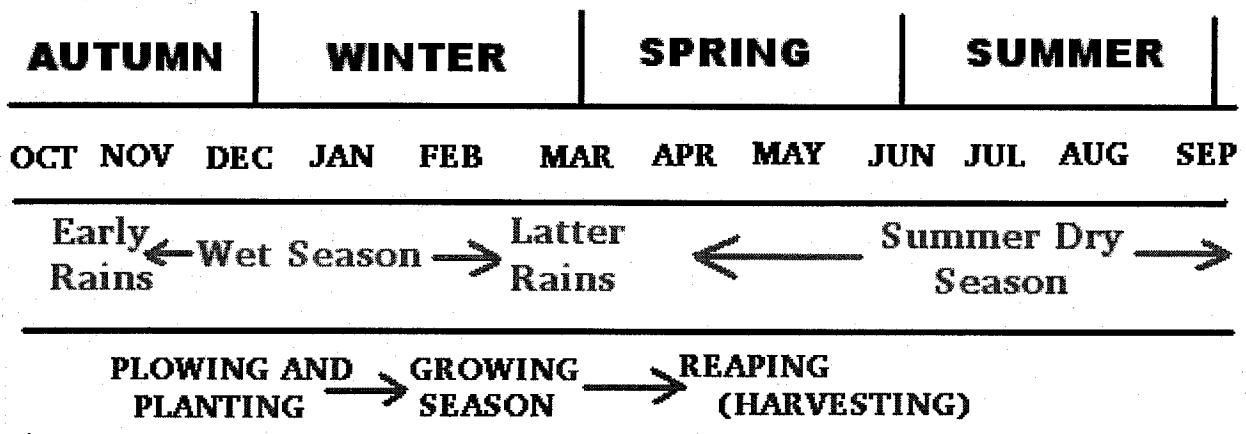


CHAPTER 6

FARMING

Today in our country, most farming is done by the use of modern machinery. Very little is done by man or by animal. In Bible times farming was not done by sitting on a tractor. It was done by hand and sometimes with the help of a beast.

To understand farming in Palestine, we need to know something about the climate and seasons of this land. Rain or water is an essential part of successful farming. It would be very unusual for us to go several months without any rain at all. But for those living in Palestine, this happens almost every year. During this dry and hot season (the summer months) there is hardly any rain. During the other half of the year rain does fall and it is colder. This is the wet season. The following chart shows the different seasons in relationship to farming in Palestine:



Remember, winter in Palestine is not nearly as cold as winter in New England. Sometimes it would snow (Isaiah 1:18), but this did not happen very often.

Rain is certainly a great blessing from the God of heaven (see Deuteronomy 11:11). In Bible times rain was a cause of great rejoicing (Joel 2:23). When is the last time you sat home on a rainy day and thanked God for the blessings of rain? It is true that rain sometimes causes problems--the picnic, ballgame and hike all must be cancelled--but what problems would we soon face if we had no rain?

The God who sends the rain knows what He is doing!

Now let us consider some of the important aspects of farming:

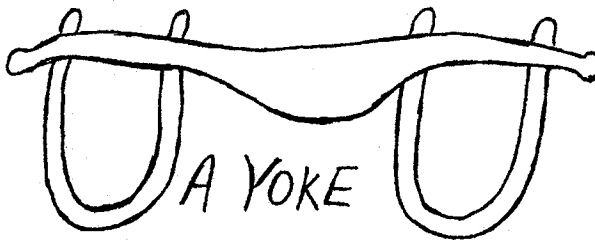
Plowing

The ground must be prepared to receive the seed. In Palestine the summer months are very hot and dry and the soil becomes almost stone-hard. Before the seed is planted something must be done to soften the soil.

God Himself does the first thing to soften the earth. In the last part of October or the first part of November God sends rain which softens the earth: "Thou makest it _____ with showers" (Psalm 65:10). These are called the *early rains*.

Once God has done His work, then man is ready to do his work of plowing. The farmers always wait for the first or early rains before beginning to plow. Once the rain has come, the hard-working farmer will start plowing. Will the lazy man plow (Proverbs 20:4)? _____ Will he have anything at harvest time? _____

The plow used by the farmer was a very simple instrument. It was a wooden stick with a small metal point. Usually the plow would be pulled by two oxen (bulls) that would be joined together by a yoke:



Whom does the Lord
Jesus want us to yoke
up with (Matthew 11:29-
30)?

Those who are yoked up together are on the same team. They labor and work together. They both go in the same direction. The Bible says that believers "are labourers together with _____" (1 Corinthians 3:9).

As the oxen pull, the farmer has one hand on the _____ (Luke 9:62) and the other hand holds a long wooden rod with a sharp point at one end (this long stick is called a "goad"). The farmer uses the goad to prick the slow-moving oxen and get them moving faster. God was pricking Saul and Saul was kicking and fighting against the goad until finally Saul surrendered (see Acts 9:5). God won and Saul was saved!

As the plow cuts through the ground, it would loosen and break up the soil. The blade of the plow would cut into the ground to a depth of about three or four inches. The soil must be prepared to receive the seed.

The Bible tells us that seed can be compared to the _____ of _____ (Luke 8:11). God wants to plant His seed (God's Word) into the soil of our hearts (see James 1:21 where "the engrafted word" means "the implanted word"). But our hearts must be prepared to receive God's Word!

Think of a dirt road where the soil is packed down and almost as hard as rock. Will seeds take root in this kind of soil? _____ Why does God's Word not take root in the hearts of many men? What is the problem (Ezekiel 3:7; Mark 10:5; 16:14; Romans 2:5)?

_____ God wants a SOFT and
TENDER and OPEN and RECEPTIVE HEART.

Did Lydia have a soft and open heart (Acts 16:14)? _____ Did the Berean people have soft hearts (Acts 17:11)? _____ Did Ezra have a soft and tender heart that was ready to receive the seed (Ezra 7:10)? _____ Do **you** have a soft and broken heart that is ready to receive the seed?

Before the worship service begins on Sunday morning, what can you do to prepare your heart for God's Word? Before you open your Bible at home, what can you do to prepare your heart for God's Word?

When the ground is hard, the seed does not go in. When the heart is hard, the Word does not go in. How can I tell if my heart is hard?

_____ not paying attention in Sunday School Class
_____ bored with family devotions

Planting or Sowing

To sow means to scatter seed over the ground. After the ground is plowed, the farmer is ready to plant the seed. The farmer would carry the seed in a basket or in a pouch attached to his waist. He would then take a handful of seed and throw or scatter the seed with a sweeping motion of the hand and arm. The seeds would fall on the prepared soil.

After sowing the seed, the farmer would then plow the field again so that the soil would cover the seed (otherwise the birds would eat the seed). Sometimes the farmer would do this by dragging branches or a log behind a team of oxen.

The most important grains were barley (John 6:9) and especially wheat. These were the main crops.

Every Christian is to be a farmer. Every believer is to sow seed. We are told in Luke 8:11 that the seed is the _____ of _____. We are to take this Word and spread it and scatter it and plant it in God's field. The field is the _____ (see Matthew 13:38). What are some of the ways we can sow the seed of God's Word?

_____ by handing out tracts

There are some things that the farmer can do and there are some things that only God can do (see 1 Corinthians 3:6). Can a farmer plant the seed? _____ Can a farmer put water on the plant? _____ Can a farmer make the plant grow? _____ Believers can sow the seed of God's Word, but only God can do the work of saving a soul and making a believer grow and increase. We need to

do our part. Will God do His part? _____

Dangers To The Crops

There were many things that could ruin a crop. Here are some of the major dangers which often threatened to destroy the harvest:

1. The latter rains would sometimes fail. These rains usually fell in March or April and gave the plants much needed water.
2. The hot easterly wind would sometimes come and scorch the plants. This wind came from the desert and was extremely hot and dry. It would sometimes come in March or April, and if it stayed long it could ruin the crops.
3. Palestine is known for its rocky soil which made farming difficult. There is an Arabic story which goes like this: When Allah (the Arabic or Islam name for God) was creating the world, he entrusted all the stones to two angels, each with one bag full. As the angels were flying over Palestine, one of the bags broke and spilled out on this tiny land, and so half the stones which were intended for the whole world ended up in Palestine!
4. Weeds like tares and thorns would choke the good plants.
5. Birds would eat up the seed that was sown. See Matthew 13:4.
6. Harmful insects would devour the plants. The most harmful pests were worms (cankeworms and palmerworms), caterpillars and locusts. Read Joel 1:4. Do you think much was left after these creatures were finished? _____ Probably the most dreaded creatures were the locusts (see Deuteronomy 28:42). In just a few days they could devour a whole countryside. These grasshoppers would travel together in immense numbers and this vast army would eat up every plant in its way!

In Matthew 13:4-7 Jesus pointed out three reasons why seed did not bring forth a good harvest. What were these reasons?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

According to Matthew 13:18-22, what are three problems that keep people from having God's Word bring forth much fruit in their lives?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Can you think of other things which keep God's Word from doing its work in our lives?

Harvesting or Reaping

By about the middle of April the grain was ripe and ready to be cut down. To "reap" means to cut down the grain. This was done by using a sharp sickle (a hand sickle). The farmer would hold the stalks in his hand and would cut them off close to the ground with the sickle. The fallen stalks would then be bound into sheaves or bundles.

According to Revelation 14:14, who has a sickle in His hand?

_____ See Revelation 14:15-16. This passage is talking about the time when Jesus Christ will **cut down** the wicked in a terrible judgment. Those who do not receive Christ as **Saviour** NOW must meet Him as **Judge** THEN.

Harvest time was a time of great joy. Can you find two verses in Psalm 126 which show that the time of reaping was a time of great rejoicing? _____

Another great spiritual truth that we learn from farming is found in Galatians 6:7: "Whatsoever a man _____, that shall he also _____." If a farmer sows no seeds, how much will he reap? _____ If a farmer sows pumpkin seeds, what will he reap? _____ If a man sows evil, what will he reap? _____ If a man sows good, what will he reap? _____ If a student studies hard, can he expect to reap better grades than if he did not study hard? _____ Can you think of other illustrations or examples of this truth?

Threshing

To "thresh" means to separate the wheat or barley kernels (or grain) from the stalk. The kernels of wheat or barley are used in making bread. The stalk is not used for food.

Threshing was done in two ways. For small quantities the sheaves (bundles) were beaten with a stick (Ruth 2:17) and this would force the grain to separate from the stalk. For large quantities the sheaves would be placed on the ground and oxen would trample on them. These animals would trample out the grain.

Sometimes God crushes the believer with trials and troubles (1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12). Why does God do this? He crushes us, not to destroy us, but to separate the good from the bad. God wants to remove all the worthless things from our lives, just as the farmer wants to remove the worthless stalk from the valuable grain. God wants to bring forth the good and remove the bad!

Winnowing

After threshing, the worthless stalk (called chaff) and the grain are all crushed and are lying together. Winnowing is the method the farmer uses to separate the good from the bad.

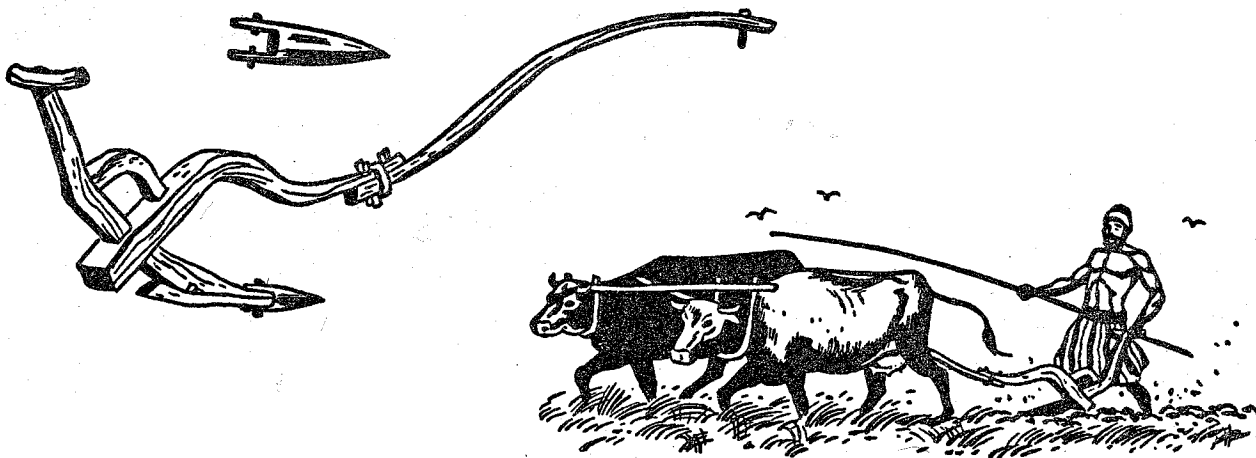
The farmer takes a pitchfork or a *shovel* (called a "fan" in the Bible) and uses it to throw the *grain* (valuable part) and *chaff* (worthless part) into the air. The chaff and straw are lighter and are blown away in the wind. The grain or kernels of wheat (or barley) are heavier and they fall to the ground. When the farmer is finished winnowing there is nothing left on the ground but a pile of good kernels. The bad goes and the good remains.

Someday God is going to separate men into two groups (Matt. 3:12):

1. The Wheat--good men (those God wants to keep for Himself)
2. The Chaff--worthless men (those that God must punish and judge)

To which group do you belong? Are you sure? How can you tell if you are a good tree or a bad tree (Matthew 3:10; 7:17-19)?

If the seed of God's Word is growing in the soft soil of your heart, then there will be a great harvest of good fruit (Matthew 13:23)!



Primitive Plowing



Threshing Grain

These illustrations are taken from *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* by Fred H. Wright (Moody Press, 1953), pages 171, 182.