

## GRAINS OF THANKSGIVING

### Wheat and Barley

As November comes in the United States, families and friends prepare for the Thanksgiving Day celebration. On that day, we remember especially how the Lord has provided for our physical needs (such as food) during the previous year. When we think of Thanksgiving, we often think of the “fruit of the earth” — the *harvest* — the *cornucopia* — the “amber waves of grain” that the gracious hand of God has provided.



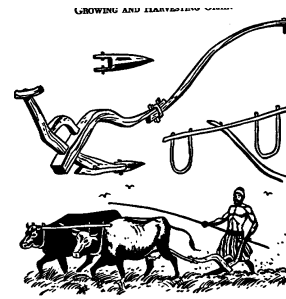
For the people of the Bible, the harvest time was very important. If the harvest was good, there would be plenty of food for the next year. If the harvest was poor (or non-existent) there would surely be hardship. The crops that were most frequently harvested (those which were the most important) were the principal cereal grains, wheat and barley. So important was grain that it was commonly an object of war and theft (Jdg 6:3). Simply put, nations needed bread.

Sometimes the word *corn* is found in our English translations of the Bible. The corn we generally think of is the kind grown in our summer gardens (Indian corn or maize), but this vegetable was unknown to the Biblical farmers. The word “corn” in the Bible is used as a generic way of referring to any (or all) of the *grains*.

#### GROWING AND HARVESTING GRAIN IN BIBLE TIMES

**Preparation** — A farmer would have to wait until September or October to begin planting wheat or barley. Before this time, the ground would be too hard to plough. In the fall, the rainy season would begin and start to soften the ground so it could be worked (Ps 65:10).

**Plowing** — Once the ground was soft, the plowing could begin. The plow was made of two wooden beams joined together. The front end hooked to a yoke placed on a pair of oxen. The upper part served as a handle. The lower



part held the iron plowshare that would actually dig into the ground. It took much effort to plow a field. It would take all a man's energy to keep the plowshare from skipping along the surface of the soil. Rocky hillsides that could not be plowed were prepared for planting with a pickax or mattock (Is 7:25).

**Sowing the Seed** — With the ground prepared, the farmer would carry a large sack into the field and broadcast the seed by hand. As soon as the seed was down, another worker would come immediately behind and plow again to work the seed into the soil.

**The Tares** — The great enemy of the grain farmer was the *tare*. In the Holy Land, tares are often called “wild wheat” because when growing they look just like wheat except the grains are black. Tares are poisonous to eat, causing dizziness, and must be carefully separated from the good grains. The tares would often grow “volunteer” among the desired crop.

**The Crop Matures** — Toward the end of December and into January and February come the hard winter rains. Then in March and April fall the “latter rains.” These spring rains are especially important to the grain crops. During this time the wheat or barley uses the water to mature for harvest. Barley would be harvested in April and May while wheat would typically come in May and June.

**The Harvest** — The ripe grain would be cut with sickles. Many sickles were made of flint, a cheap and useful material. The cut grain would be gathered into sheaves and transported to the threshing floor. During the harvest, travelers passing through were allowed to pick grain from any field and eat it as long as they didn't carry any with them (Dt 23:25). Also, the corners of the fields were left uncut for the poor to gather (Lev 23:22).

**The Threshing Floor** — In order to separate the edible portion of wheat or barley from the whole plant, it was taken to the threshing floor (generally a circular space with a smooth dirt floor thirty to fifty feet in diameter). There were different ways that the threshing could take place. 1) If a person had a small amount of wheat or barley, he could use a *flail*, a small wooden instrument, to beat the grain. 2) For greater quantities of grain, a *threshing instrument* could be used. Two wooden planks would be joined together about three feet wide and six feet long.

Underneath the planks would be driven in pieces of metal or sharp stones. The thresher would sit or stand on the instrument and oxen would pull it over the grain. 3) The oxen alone could be walked over the grain to thresh it. Usually a layer of straw would be placed on the threshing floor to protect what had already been separated.

**Winnowing** — Once the plant was threshed, it had to be *winnowed* to separate the grain from the chaff (outer husks) and straw. A winnowing *fan* was generally used. This was an instrument similar to a shovel. The mixture would be thrown up together against the wind. The heavier grain would fall straight to the ground while the chaff and straw was blown away.

**Sifting** — Although winnowing would take away many of the “impurities” there could still be small bits of straw and chaff in the grain. Women would shake a sieve containing the grain and blow away the chaff that appeared.

**Grinding and Storing** — After sifting, the wheat or barley would be stored or ground into meal for immediate use. Storehouses for grain were located either above or below ground and varied greatly in size.

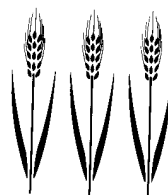
### GRAIN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Wheat, Barley, and several other grains are mentioned so frequently in the Scriptures that it would be impossible to list all the occurrences here. In the Bible, God often uses grain and its harvest to illustrate a spiritual concept. Match the Scriptures with the appropriate step in the growing or harvesting of grain. Consider each Scripture:

Proverbs 20:4	_____	
Luke 22:31-34	_____	
Luke 8:5-15	_____	
Matthew 13:24-30	_____	
Matthew 9:35-38	_____	
Matthew 3:11-12	_____	Revelation 14:14-15 _____
1 Timothy 5:17-18	_____	Joel 2:21-23 _____
Deuteronomy 28:8	_____	Matthew 24:38-42 _____
Ecclesiastes 12:1-4	_____	

preparation and plowing (A); winnowing (B)  
the crop matures (C); harvest (D); threshing (E)  
sowing (F); sifting (G); tares (H)  
storing (I); grinding (J)

### GRAIN IN THE BOOK OF RUTH



One of the most beautiful accounts of the harvesting of grain comes in the book of Ruth. For further study in this lesson, read the book of Ruth. Note how Ruth and Boaz meet each other at the threshing floor. *Read Matthew 1:1-16 to discover why the Lord caused the book of Ruth to be written!*

### GRAINS IN OFFERING AND THANKSGIVING

Harvest was a time of Thanksgiving among the Biblical people. God had given Moses instructions for three celebrations to be observed during the agricultural year:

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Weeks

The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was at the beginning of harvest. During this time, the priest waved a sheaf of new grain before the altar as an offering. Fifty days later at the Feast of Weeks, the offering began with two loaves made from new wheat. Last in the season was the Feast of Booths, celebrating both the grain harvest and the vintage.



### IN CONCLUSION

Let us take away two things from our study of grain in the Bible:

- 1) Remember and thank our God who supplies us with food to eat.
- 2) Remember how the Scriptures use grain and its harvest to illustrate spiritual truths.