

Sourcing Food: Plants, Animals, and the Jews Who Tend Them: Produce Farming

Drisha Winter Zman 5781

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Part I: The Agricultural Calendar

The Gezer Calendar (ca. 900 BCE, trans. Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 38):

Two months of ingathering olives/
Two months of sowing cereals/
Two months of late sowing (legumes and vegetables)/
A month of hoeing weeds/
A month of harvesting barley/
A month of harvesting wheat and measuring grain/
Two months of grape harvesting/
A month of ingathering summer fruit.

Talmud Bavli Bava Metzia 106b









It was taught: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel in the name of Rabbi Meir, and also Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya, would say: the second half of Tishrei, all of Marcheshvan, and the first half of Kislev are the days of planting. The second half of Kislev, all of Tevet, and the first half of Shevat are the winter. The second half of Shevat, Adar, and half of Nisan are the period of cold. Half of Nisan, Iyar, and half of Sivan are harvest. Half of Sivan, Tammuz, and half of Av are summer. Half of Av, Elul, and half of Tishrei are the hot season. Rabbi Yehuda counts from the beginning of Tishrei; Rabbi Shimon counts from Marcheshvan.

רשב"ג משום ר"מ אומר וכן היה רבי
שמעון בן מנסיא אומר כדבריו חצי תשרי
מרחשון וחצי כסליו זרע חצי כסליו טבת
וחצי שבט חורף חצי שבט אדר וחצי ניסן
קור חצי ניסן אייר וחצי סיון קציר חצי סיון
תמוז וחצי אב קיץ חצי אב אלול וחצי תשרי
חום רבי יהודה מונה מתשרי ר"ש מונה
ממרחשון

Deuteronomy 8:7-9

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food free of poverty, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper.

כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ
נַחְלֵי מַיִם עֵינֹת וּתְהֻמֹּת יִצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה
וּבְהָרִ: אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וּשְׁעָרָה וְגֶפֶן וּתְאֵנָה
וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ-זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדָבָשׁ: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא
בְּמִסְכָּנֹת תֹּאכַל-בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא-תִחַסֵּר כֹּל
בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבִנֶיהָ בְרִזָּל וּמֵהָרָרִיהָ
תִּחְצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת:

DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
TEVET	SHEVAT	ADAR	NISAN	IYYAR	SIVAN	TAMMUZ	AV	ELUL	TISHREI	MAR-HESHVAN	KISLEV	
LATE SOWING & SOIL PREP		PLANTS GROWING, WEEDING & SOIL PREP	BARLEY HARVEST	WHEAT HARVEST	GRAPE HARVEST		FRUIT HARVEST	OLIVE HARVEST		SOWING WINTER GRAINS		
												

Part II: Vegetables

Talmud Yerushalmi, Kiddushin 4:12

Rav said: It is forbidden to live in a city in which there is no physician, no bathhouse, and no court... Rabbi Yossi ben Bun said: It is also forbidden to live in a town with no vegetable garden. Rav said: In the world to come, each person will have to give account for everything good they saw and did not eat. Rabbi Elazar took account of this teaching and set aside funds to purchase every species at least once a year.

ר' חזקיה רבי כהן בשם רב אסור לדור בעיר שאין בה לא רופא ולא מרחץ ולא ב"ד מכין וחובשין. אמר ר' יוסי בי ר' בון אף אסור לדור בעיר שאין בה גינוניתא של ירק. רבי חזקיה ר' כהן בשם רב עתיד אדם ליתן דין וחשבון על כל שראת עינו ולא אכל. ר' לעזר חשש להדא שמועתא ומצמיח ליה פריטין ואכיל בהון מכל מילה חדא בשתא:

Numbers 11:5

We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.

זָכַרְנוּ אֶת־הַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר־נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם חֲנָם
אֶת הַקִּשְׁאִים וְאֶת הָאֲבֹטְחִים וְאֶת־הַחֲצִיר
וְאֶת־הַבָּצְלִים וְאֶת־הַשּׁוּמִים:

I Kings 21:1-3

The following events occurred sometime afterward: Naboth the Jezreelite owned a vineyard in Jezreel, next to the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it as a vegetable garden, since it is right next to my palace. I will give you a better vineyard in exchange; or, if you prefer, I will pay you its value in money." But Naboth replied, "God forbid that I should give up what I have inherited from my fathers to you!"

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּרַם הָיָה
לְנָבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִי אֲשֶׁר בְּיִזְרְעֵאל אֶצֶל הַיְכָל
אֲחָאָב מֶלֶךְ שְׁמֶרוֹן: וַיְדַבֵּר אֲחָאָב אֶל־נָבוֹת
אֵלַימָר | תִּנְהַלְתֵּנִי אֶת־כַּרְמְךָ וַיְהִי־לִי
לְגַן־יֵרֶק כִּי הוּא קָרוֹב אֶצֶל בֵּיתִי וְאֶתְנַה
לְךָ תַחֲתָיו כָּרַם טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ אִם טוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ
אֶתְנַה־לְךָ כֶּסֶף מְחִיר זֶה: וַיֹּאמֶר נָבוֹת
אֶל־אֲחָאָב חָלִילָה לִּי מֵה' מִתַּתִּי אֶת־נַחֲלַת
אֲבֹתַי לְךָ:

Part III: Water

Deuteronomy 11:10-17

For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There the grain you sowed had **to be watered by your own labors** [lit. “by your foot”], **like a vegetable garden**; but the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, **soaks up its water from the rains of heaven. It is a land which the Lord your God looks after; God’s eye is always upon it from the year’s beginning to the year’s end.** If you heed the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, to love the Lord your God and to serve God with all your hearts and souls, I will grant rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late, and you shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your livestock and you shall eat and be satisfied. Take care that your hearts not be turned away to serve other gods and bow to them. For God’s anger will flare up against you, and God will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that God is assigning to you.

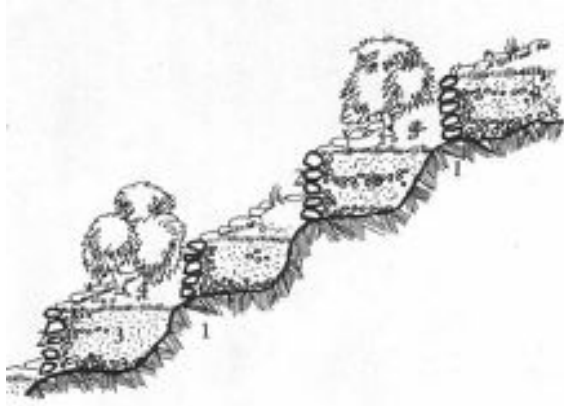
כִּי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲתָה בֹא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ
לֹא כְאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הִוא אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאתֶם מִשָּׁם
אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ וְהִשְׁקִיתָ בְּרַגְלֶךָ כְּגַן
הַיָּרֵק: וְהָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲתָם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֶרֶץ הָרִים וּבְקִיעֹת לַמָּטָר הַשָּׁמַיִם
תִּשְׁתֶּה־מֵמַיִם: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ
אֹתָהּ תַּמִּיד עֵינָיו ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּהַ מְרִשִׁית
הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה: וְה' ה' אִם־שָׁמַעַ
תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם
הַיּוֹם לֹא־הִבֵּה אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעַבְדּוֹ
בְּכָל־לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם: וְנָתַתִּי
מָטָר־אַרְצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמְלִקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפַּת
דְּגַנְךָ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וַיִּצְהַרְךָ: וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשַׂדְּךָ
לְבַהֲמֹתֶךָ וְאֶכְלֹת וּשְׁבַעְתָּ: הַשְּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן
יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסָרְתֶם מֵעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים
אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם: וְחָרָה אַפִּי־ה'
בְּכֶם וְעִצַּר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר
וְהִאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְאֲבַדְתֶּם
מֵהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר ה' נָתַן
לָכֶם:

Rashi on Deuteronomy 11:10

<p>Watered by your own labors: The land of Egypt required one to bring water from the Nile by foot to irrigate it—you had to rise from your sleep and to toil...But this land soaks up its water from the rains of heaven—you may sleep soundly on your beds, and the Holy Blessed One waters both low and high districts, both what is exposed and what is not exposed alike.</p> <p>Like a vegetable garden, which does not receive enough from rain alone, and one has to water it with foot and shoulder.</p>	<p>והשקית ברגלך. ארץ מצרים היתה צריכה להביא מים מנילוס, ברגלך, ולהשקותה – צריך אתה לנדוד משנתך ולעמול... אבל זו למטר השמים תשתה מים – אתה ישן על מטתך והקב"ה משקה נמוך וגבוה גלוי ושאינו גלוי כפחות.</p> <p>כגן הירק. שאין די לו בגשמים ומשקין אותו ברגל ובכתף.</p>
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Rashbam on Deuteronomy 11:10

<p>The land of Israel that you are going to inherit is not like the land of Egypt...It is superior in quality to the land of Egypt for the people who observe God's laws, and inferior to all other lands for people who do not observe God's laws. The land that you are inheriting is not like the land of Egypt, which does not lack for water whether its people are good or bad; due to the toil of irrigation they have food. But for the land of Israel, it [water] is dependent on whether you observe the mitzvot.</p>	<p>כי הארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה לא כארץ מצרים... צריכים אתם לשמור מצות ה' אלהיכם, כי הארץ הזאת טובה מארץ מצרים לשומרי מצותיו, ורעה מכל הארצות ללא שומרים. כי הארץ אשר אתה בא שמה איננה כארץ מצרים, שאין צריכין למטר ובין טובים ובין חטאים, בטורח השקאת שדותיהם יש להם לחם, אבל ארץ ישראל, אם אתם שומרים מצות.</p>
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Part IV: Conclusion

Song of Songs 4:1-2

<p>Ah, you are fair, my darling, Ah, you are fair! Your eyes are like doves behind your veil; your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes climbing up from the washing pool; all of them bear twins, and not one loses her young.</p>	<p>הַנֶּחֱרֵץ יָפָה רַעֲיֹתַי הַנֶּחֱרֵץ יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים מִבְּעַד לְצִמְתְּךָ שְׁעָרֶךָ כְּעֵדֶר הָעֵזִים שֶׁגָּלְשׁוּ מִהַר גִּלְעָד: שִׁנֶּיךָ כְּעֵדֶר הַקְּצוּבוֹת שֶׁעָלוּ מִן-הַרְחֻצָּה שְׂכֵלָם מִתְאַיְמוֹת וְשִׂכְלָה אֵין בָּהֶם:</p>
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Gabriel Davidson, *Our Jewish Farmers*, 1943, p6

Biblical and post-biblical Jews were primarily and preponderantly farmers. It took nearly two millennia of history to make the drastic change from rural to urban dwellers, from farmers to city folk, from a people working the land and fashioning the simple tools of an agricultural society to a dispersed people overwhelmingly petty tradesmen, professional workers and a footless proletariat. It took wars to devastate Palestine and bring about by forced migrations a scattering of the tribes all over the known world. It took religious proscription to set these people apart for centuries; to make possession of the land impractical and later illegal for them; to deny their participation in the guilds, that is in the emerging manufacturing of commodities. It took two thousand years of denial, persecution, legal restriction and religious hostility to convert a people of farmers into a people of middlemen.