

Agricultural Origins of the Jewish Holidays

By Professor Gary Rendsburg

The three Jewish holidays of Pesah (Passover), Shavu'ot (Weeks), and Sukkot (Booths) commemorate major events in Israel's early history. Pesah recalls the exodus from Egypt; Shavu'ot celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai; and Sukkot evokes the wandering in the desert. While this information is correct, if we trace the historical origins of these festivals, we discover that all three began as agricultural observances.

Pesach is associated with the barley harvest, which occurs in the early spring; Shavu'ot is associated with the wheat harvest and the ripening of the first fruits, both of which occur in the early summer; and Sukkot is the great fall harvest festival, celebrated after all produce has been gathered from the fields (note that many cultures in the world have such a holiday; for example the Canadian and American Thanksgiving feasts). These three holidays, accordingly, were markers for the ancient Israelite farmers, with their strong ties to the land – and remember that the vast majority of the people in ancient Israel were engaged in the growing of crops and the production of food.

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Source: <http://jcarrot.org/the-agricultural-origins-of-the-jewish-holidays/>

① What is the connection between the Jewish holidays of Pesach, Shavu'ot and Sukkot and agriculture?

② Why do you think Jewish holidays are connected to harvest times?