I start from the assumption that the transition to agriculture, namely the production of most sources of sustenance of the country’s inhabitants by working the land, occurred at a relatively early stage of the formation of Israel as a nation. I am aware of recent modern theories in sociological research of the Bible that by means of societal models based on prehistoric and ethnographic evidence argue that the so-called “Pastoral Nomadism” was a result of agriculture and domestication of animals; and that from the start Israel was formed out of social elements of settled peasants, not out of nomadic tribes. Even though some correct principles are present in these theories they still are inadequate to undermine the Bible’s fundamental assumption concerning the creation of Israel, namely that the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan was preceded by various stages of nomadism, and that our earliest forefathers engaged primarily in pasturing flocks. This still does not go so far as to state that the entire biblical account, both the Patriarchs’ wanderings in Canaan and the Exodus from Egypt, is historical. But there can be no doubt that the early traditions concerning the beginnings of Israel grew up in the setting of a lifestyle and living patterns of nomadic families that got their sustenance mainly from grazing sheep and that lived on the margins of an agricultural milieu close to its settlement centres: if in Canaan, it appears in the stories of the Patriarchs; if in Goshen, in the stories of the migration into Egypt and the Exodus from Egypt. Memories

* This is an abbreviated English version of a lecture I delivered at the 14th Conference of the Israel Historical Society entitled “Reciprocal Relations between Religion and Economy in Israel and in the Nations” in July 1990 in Jerusalem.
of an age of wandering in the wilderness and the romance of sheep herders are not merely the fruit of a creative imagination of prophets and poets in the Bible but are imprinted in the very heart of the faith and the rituals of Israel. They are elicited in the accounts of divine revelations to the Patriarchs, in the particular circumstances of these revelations, and in the places where altars were erected to God; and in ritual traditions that reflect a semi-nomadic sheep-herding background. Suffice it to mention that the revelations to the Patriarchs, which were accompanied by the erection of an altar to God, occurred at major crossroads of their nomadic wanderings with their flocks in the areas of Canaan, and not in the urban centres themselves: this is evident in the narratives of Abraham, who pitched his tent “with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east” (Gen 12,8); or in the story of Jacob, who camped “before the city” of Shechem and set up an altar there to “the Lord, the God of Israel” (Gen 33,18–20). The revelation to Moses at the Burning Bush took place when he led the flock in the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God (Ex 3,1). The first festival mentioned in the relation of the history of Israel in the Bible, called “the feast to the Lord” (Ex 10,9), is associated with the request of the people of Israel to Pharaoh to go on a three-day journey in the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord their God (Ex 3,18; also 5,1; 10,9), and as we shall see below, it reflects a background of a festival of nomadic shepherds.²

On the basis of this initial assumption I shall try to illustrate, through analysis and comparison of religious commandments and rites that appear in various literary strata of the Bible, how the transition to agriculture influenced Israelite religion and ritual in such matters as festivals, place of ritual, sacrifices and offerings, and the like. The main concern is the distinction between the settled-farming stratum based on “field and vineyard” (Ex 22,4) and the use of farm animals, “ox and ass” (Deut 22,10), and the nomadic pasturing stratum based on sheep-breeding—although not yet on farms raising cattle for market. The separation of the two strata is difficult, as by the stage of biblical historiography these elements had become combined in Israelite religion and cult; moreover, already at an early

² M. Haran, *Periods and Institutions in the Bible* (Tel Aviv, 1973), pp. 88–91 (Hebrew), doubts the historicity of the tradition of this festival, and argues that “the story is caught out here by anachronistic assumptions based on living conditions in the land” (p. 89).