

## Milk and Honey

The phrase, “milk and honey” is first used to describe Canaan in Exodus 3:8.

*“So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from the land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.”* Exodus 3:8

This phrase is never used in the New Testament but occurs in Exodus 3:17; 13:5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 13:27; 14:8; 16:13, 14; Deuteronomy 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; Joshua 5:6; 11:5; Jeremiah 32:22; Ezekiel 20:6, 15. A slightly revised phrase is also used: “*milk and cream*” (Job 20:17) and “*curds and honey*” (in a prophecy concerning Jesus, Isaiah 7:15, 22).

In every Old Testament reference, it describes the bounty and lushness of the land of Canaan that God gave to Israel through His promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21). This phrase represents something pleasant, sentient and desirable, as it is so used in describing a product of the physical love between a husband and wife (Song of Solomon 4:11; 5:1).

Offering a guest milk, as opposed to water, was a step above mere hospitality (cf. Judges 4:19). Milk, along with butter (Genesis 18:8; Proverbs 30:33), was a common courtesy as an expression of welcome by a host. This milky, white fluid (Genesis 49:12; Lamentation 4:7; sometimes called “*cream*,” Judges 5:25; 20:17; Job 29:6) could be sourced from camels (Genesis 31:15), goats (Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 14:21; Proverbs 27:27) or cows (1 Samuel 6:7, 10; also curds – possibly cheese, Job 10:10 – being the product of milk, Deuteronomy 32:14; Isaiah 7:22). It was sometimes drunk with wine (Song of Solomon 5:1). This is not to be confused with a mother’s milk for her child (Isaiah 28:9), which is intended solely for a human, pre-adolescent’s consumption (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12, 13; 1 Peter 2:2).

Honey was greatly appreciated for its sweetness (Judges 14:18; Psalm 19:10; 119:103; Proverbs 24:13; Ezekiel 3:3; Revelation 10:9, 10), which gave food a more palatable taste (*i.e.*, manna, Exodus 16:31; pastry, Ezekiel 16:19; and, evidently, made locusts palatable, Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6) and was able to revive the weary (cf. 1 Samuel 14:29). It was often stored in a jar (1 Kings 14:3) but was not always authorized to use, as when the Israelites offered their grain sacrifices (Leviticus 2:11). When it was used, it was to be used moderately (Proverbs 25:16, 27).

Combining these two highly desirable food sources fitly described the land of Canaan from the Jewish perspective, at least what it once was. After the Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Romans, the property within the parameters of what was once the “Promised Land” has no relationship whatsoever to the land as it exists today.