

What does “a land flowing with milk and honey” mean?

The Promised Land is described in numerous places as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8,17, 13:5, 33:3, Lev. 20:24, Deut. 6:3, 11:9, 26:9, 15, 27:3, 31:20, Joshua 5:6, Jer. 11:5, 32:22, Ezek. 20:6,15). This is a metaphor that represents a fertile and abundant land. Let’s look at some key words in the phrase.

FLOWING comes from a Hebrew word that means “to gush forth abundantly” and is used at least 16 times in the Old Testament to describe the richness of the Promised Land. It would be a continual flow, not just a sporadic dripping.

MILK comes from the udders of goats or cows and can also mean cream, which is the richest portion of milk. This meant that the land contained plenty of pastureland, water, and grass for their flocks and herds to graze. It would not be a desert like the wilderness.

HONEY was their sweetener in that day and represented delightfulness. The land would produce many kinds of flowers, giving nectar to honey-producing bees. Honey was not only produced by bees but was also extracted from dates, figs, and grapes. Samson ate honey (Judges 14:8) and John the Baptist ate wild honey (Matt. 3:4).

The “land flowing with milk and honey” was meant to be a word-picture. **When the Israelites heard the phrase to describe the Promised Land that God would give them, they envisioned abundant pastureland, water, grass, flowers, bees, and palm trees.**

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