



TOO MANY GOOD THINGS GONE BAD

By Wilfred Hahn



Oh, if we all could live in a world of “milk and honey.” Everyone will know what that phrase means—a land of no cares, of plenty and easy living. In this present era of ever increasing piles of wealth and a shrinking middle class, most would be content with just that.

However, just where did this phrase come from—“milk and honey”? Way, way back in the Old Testament. Today, several millennia later, it is a phrase still in common usage. Etymology (the study of the origin of words) and idioms can reveal fascinating connections with ancient societies.

The phrase “milk and honey” first appears in Exodus 3:8, where Lord Jehovah says to Moses: “So I have come down to rescue them [my people] from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.”

Jehovah had revealed to Abraham much earlier (and many times) that he would possess the land of Canaan and “All the land that you see” (Genesis 13:15). This land was promised by Jehovah to be given to Abraham and his descendants “forever” and for “everlasting” (Genesis 17:8).

However, the first time that the phrase “milk and honey” appears in the Bible, it was a revelation and reminder to Moses that this Promised Land was full

of great bounty. It could be supposed that since Abraham had lived in this land, that there was no need to promise him “milk and honey.” He would have known this to be the case. Moses, many years later, may have needed the incentive of “milk and honey”—a carrot on a stick, so to speak—to entice the Hebrews to leave Egypt and embark on the Exodus to this new Promised Land.

It is surely significant that the phrase “milk and honey” appears exactly 21 times (three times seven) in the Old Testament. It certainly is a promise that will be kept by God Himself (as it has yet to occur fully).

A Land of Excess

Throughout history, mankind has been busily boosting economic growth through various means and productivity gains. Growth of economic output (what we today popularly call Gross Domestic Product or GDP) has become a most important geopolitical measure of wealth and the key indicator of so-called “human progress.” It is the underlying essence of humanism. As such, today we live in an era where many countries suffer from excesses ... not shortages. Why?

It would be valid to state that industrialization and the profit motive imbedded in the pursuit of commerce and trade have created a world of surplus with respect to consumer goods and calories. There are many proofs. Most certainly with respect to “an excess of calories,” a worldwide epidemic of obesity is partial evidence.

There is too much supply and not enough demand. In fact, in many countries it is easier to buy something than to sell. Indeed, there are parts of the world where buying is more difficult than selling and where there are shortages of food. This need not be the case in our day. Greed, corruption, kleptocracy and human strife, whether by war or political competition, are the root causes in such cases.

Nevertheless, it would be valid to state that industrialization and the profit motive imbedded in the pursuit of commerce and trade have created a world of surplus with respect to consumer goods and calories. There are many proofs. Most certainly with respect to “an excess of calories,” a worldwide epidemic of obesity (as stated by the World Health Organization) is partial evidence (though in no way wishing to oversimplify this complex problem).

The “excess of food” reminds me of an old German fairy tale. As a child, I was exposed to the popular story called “Mecki in Schlaraffenland.” Years later, I located a version translated into English, which I read to my grandkids. As with most old fairy tales (Grimm’s, Wilhelm Busch ... etc.), they are considered somewhat too grisly for young kids in our day. In any case, Mecki lives in Schlaraffenland, which is a land of excesses. Milk and honey everywhere ... not to mention bacon, cakes and every savory food that one might want to eat.

In this tale, everything from back bacon to roast chickens fly into one’s mouth if carelessly left open. To be sure, it depicted a hyper-charged land of “milk and honey.”

However, an excess of anything is not ideal. Far from it. The side-effects can include loss of health, addiction, destruction of profitability ... etc. We hu-

mans indeed have a propensity for large appetites and ambitions, but only limited capacity to fulfill them. Balanced and modest satiation is enjoyable. But excesses—even of tasty and luxury items—lead to trouble.

Overwhelmed by Honey and Milk

Today, believe it or not, the milk and honey industries are suffering from excess supply. Both commodities are being produced in overwhelming volumes. Consider this quote about the milk industry: “If you ever felt like crying over spilled milk, now’s the time. Dairy farmers in the United States have dumped more than 43 million gallons of milk between January and August of 2016. This milk has been poured into fields, manure lagoons, and animal feed, or down the drain at processing plants. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, this amount of milk is enough to fill 66 Olympic-sized swimming pools and is the most wasted in [the] last 16 years.”¹

Apparently, there is so much surplus milk one could literally allow people to bathe in it. Actually, this was a practice of the ultra-wealthy centuries ago. A bath of warm milk promoted soft skin.

“The problem is that the United States is in the midst of a massive dairy glut,” so says the article. There is a similar condition in Europe, which also extends to huge stockpiles of cheese. Canadians, too, even though milk supplies are controlled, have far more capacity than demand.

Believe it or not, the world even suffers from too much honey. (Can there ever be too much of a





Most all of God's gifts to us, whether the gifts of the Spirit or material resources, are meant for sharing and blessing others through our giving.

good thing?) America is indeed overflowing with honey. In Canada, an influx of imported honey from China, Zambia, Vietnam (and other countries) is causing many beekeepers to close shop. The wholesale price of honey has halved in recent years.

The land of "milk and honey" that was in the eye of the ancient Hebrews is today nothing more than a quaint story in our time of excess. There is certainly no shortage of excesses and gluts in North America.

Hoarding versus Flows

As mentioned, excesses can also lead to problems. Consider stockpiling and hoarding. James comments on the endtime appearance of hoarding: "You have hoarded wealth in the last days" (James 5:3 NIV). The KJV uses the phrase "heaped." Hoarded wealth (which must mean a widening chasm between the "haves and have-nots") is here clearly cited as a condition of the last days. Stockpiling is repudiated throughout the Bible, where it involves denial of supply or greed. Here, we find a significant connection to the Old Testament's use of the phrase of "milk and honey."

But first, we must make an admission. Earlier, we had mentioned that the phrase "milk and honey" is found exactly 21 times in the Bible. Actually, this is wrong. To be exact, it is the phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey" (NIV) that appears 21 times. In every instance of "milk and honey" being mentioned, it is in the context of a "land" in which "milk and honey" is "flowing."

This is significant. Why? For a number of reasons. However, we want to focus on why the word "flowing" ("floweth" in the KJV) is always included. The word "flowing" implies something being used or active, or being distributed. It is not "stockpiling." The promised land of "flowing milk and honey" was not to be one of a storehouse of milk and honey. Honey and milk are not being stockpiled or hoarded, but are flowing. They were to be consumed and made available to all.

The Bible promotes flows. Consider that the Lord's Prayer specifically requests that the Lord "give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). We are not instructed to ask for a larder of bread that will last a month, but rather just for a day. Similarly, we note that the Israelites received manna daily and not in a form that could be stockpiled (with the exception of the second day portion for the Sabbath).

Thoughts to Ponder

Christians are to be "flow people" and not hoarders.

God's economy is mainly composed of flows, not overstuffed storehouses of idle money. Just as God is love in motion—love lived—so it should be with money. Of course, we need to save for our anticipated needs and to fund the activities of our businesses and livelihoods. However, there comes a point where the act of saving becomes hoarding. In this sense, for the saints, all saving must be done in a spirit of stewardship.

In contrast, the world promotes the spirit of hoarding; the pursuit of earthly wealth as a measure of success; a bulwark of security; to satisfy boasts. Most all of God's gifts to us, whether the gifts of the Spirit or material resources, are meant for sharing and blessing others through our giving. We ourselves can be the source of "flowing" milk and honey for those in need.

Be a flow-person, not a hoarder.

All Christians (though they may not be "Israelites") have the symbolic promise of a "land flowing with milk and honey." Someday, when we will arrive at the New Jerusalem, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:4-5). (MC)

ENDNOTE

- 1 <http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/43-million-gallons-milk-have-been-dumped-so-far-year.html>