THE QUESTION

What does Exodus 16 say about the manna, and how did the early church read it?

Asked by a THF member on June 10, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 23 early Christian passages and 70 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-does-exodus-16-say-about-the-manna-and-how-did-the-early-church-read

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Exodus 16 tells how God fed Israel in the wilderness with manna, bread from heaven, and with quail. The people grumbled, and Moses said their grumbling was against the Lord. Each person gathered an equal measure. Early Christian writers read the manna as a sign pointing ahead to Christ, the true bread from heaven.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
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SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

God sent bread from heaven and quail

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Lactantius retells the wilderness story: when Israel was hungry, food came down from heaven, and the wind brought quail into the camp. He also notes that the people did not honor God in return for these gifts.

1 “Again, when they were hungry, a shower of food from heaven came down. Also, the wind brought quail into their camp, so that they were filled not only with heavenly bread, but also with more choice food.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 10 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 23, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Grumbling against Moses was grumbling against God

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Apostolic Constitutions quotes Exodus 16:8, where Moses tells the complaining people that their grumbling is really aimed at the Lord. The writer uses it to warn church members not to grumble against their bishop.

2 “And again, Moses says to those who rose up against him, "Your murmuring is not against us, but against the Lord our God."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 21, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Everyone gathered the same measure

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian points to the rule that each person gathered one omer of manna, no matter their age or sex. He sees this as a picture of how Christ's grace is given equally to all His people.

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3 “For there, without any distinction of sex or age, an omer was gathered equally by each person. From this it appeared that the mercy of Christ, and the heavenly grace that would later follow, was divided equally among all.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) *THF's updated English*

Source 16, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 7

The manna foreshadowed Christ

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian says the manna that came down in Exodus looked ahead to something greater: the heavenly bread and the food of Christ who was still to come.

4 “We see the sign of this equality celebrated in Exodus, when manna came down from heaven and, foreshadowing the things to come, showed the nourishment of the heavenly bread and the food of the coming Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) *THF's updated English*

Source 16, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 5 OF 7

Jesus called Himself the true bread from heaven

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In Tatian's harmony of the Gospels, the crowd brings up the manna their fathers ate. Jesus answers that Moses did not give the true bread; the Father gives it. Clement of Alexandria repeats these words and says the Word is Himself the bread of heaven.

5 “They said to him, "What sign have you done, that we may see and believe in you? What have you done? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 19 (c. 150–180 AD) *THF's updated English*

Source 2, page 5 Read it in the library ›

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6 “Further, the Word declares that He Himself is the bread of heaven.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 1.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 8, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Manna fed the body; Christ gives life

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Jesus contrasts the manna with Himself. Those who ate manna in the wilderness still died, but the bread that came down from heaven gives life that does not end.

7 “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that came down from heaven, so that a man may eat of it and not die.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 19 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 3, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

The manna stopped when Israel reached the land

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Irenaeus notes that Moses gave manna to the fathers, but under Joshua the manna ceased and the people ate wheat from the land. He treats that wheat as a symbol of the body of Christ.

8 “Furthermore, it was suitable that Moses should provide manna as food for the ancestors, but Joshua should provide wheat; as the first-fruits of life, a symbol of the body of Christ, as Scripture declares that the Lord's manna ceased when the people ate wheat from the land.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 5, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not give the full text of Exodus 16 verse by verse; they retell or quote parts of it.
- The Sabbath rules for gathering manna are not spelled out in the passages given here.

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- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 23 early Christian passages and 70 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–23, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 24–28, in Bible order), then 65 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *23 passages from 13 writers*

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 1*

1 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English; on point 1) "when you desired flesh, so vast a quantity of quails was given you, that they could not be told… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 2–4*

2 *Diatessaron* 19 **Quote 5, page 3** "his disciples. But there were other boats from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread after Jesus blessed it. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Diatessaron* 19 **Quote 7, page 4** "Jews then complained about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Diatessaron* 19 (1885 English; on point 6) "6:56 Whosoever eats my body and drinks my blood abides 51 in me, and I in him — John 6:57 as the living Father sent me, and I am… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 5–7*

5 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* **Quote 8, page 4** "should be a messenger to the people. Furthermore, it was suitable that Moses should provide manna as food for the ancestors, but Joshua should provide wheat; as the first-fruits… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 4) "God. He afflicted the disobedient so they would not disregard their Creator, and He fed them with manna so that they might receive sustenance for their souls, as Moses also… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Against Heresies: Book IV* out beforehand in them—[we] who would later serve God by the things of others. For the whole exodus of the people out of Egypt, which happened under divine guidance… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · source 8*

8 *Instructor* 1.6 **Quote 6, page 4** "the Word declares that He Himself is the bread of heaven. For He says, "Moses did not give you that bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 9–11*

9 *Against Marcion* 26 (on point 1) "when they asked for bread, He gave them manna from heaven… [continues online] **read ›**

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10 *Against Marcion* 12 “Again, in the law it says, "You shall not do any manner of work in it," Exodus 12:16, except what is to be done for any soul, that is… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *On Prayer* 6 shall be added," Matthew 6:33. Although we may rather understand, "Give us this day our daily bread," spiritually. For Christ is our Bread, because Christ is Life, and bread… [continues online] **read ›**

Early Liturgies, *c. 200–400 AD · source 12*

12 *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 (on point 5) “bread that came down from heaven and saved our souls from ruin… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 13*

13 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (on point 5) received the regions around Ptolemais and Sidon. Therefore he says, "His bread shall be rich, and he shall provide delicacies for princes." We understand this as a figure of our… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 14*

14 *Commentary on John* 6 (on point 6) “it is written in this same Gospel, “Your fathers ate bread in the wilderness, and are dead… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · source 15*

15 *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 14 (on point 5) in eternity, but made from mortal material? If Christ is only man, how does He say, I am the bread of eternal life which came down from heaven, John 6… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 16–18*

16 *Epistles* (1885 English) **Quotes 3, 4, page 3** “which equality we see the sacrament celebrated in Exodus, when the manna flowed down from heaven, and, prefiguring the things to come, showed forth the nourishment of the heavenly bread… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Treatises* (on point 5) As the prayer goes on, we ask and say, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This can be understood both spiritually and literally, because either understanding is full of… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Treatises* (on point 2) happens in the world. In this matter, the Jewish people always offended, because they kept murmuring against God, as the Lord God testifies in the book of Numbers, saying, “Let… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 19–21*

19 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) “afforded them a pillar of fire by night to give them light, and a pillar of a cloud by day to overshadow them from the heat… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 1) “gave them manna from heaven, and gave them quails… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 2, page 2** him. But do nothing secretly in a way that could bring reproach on the bishop, lest you stir up murmuring against him. For the murmuring will not be against him… [continues online] **read ›**

Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 22*

22 *Disputation with Manes* 1 (on point 1) “from the midst of the Pharisees, transferred them to an eternal salvation. There, Moses sought bread by prayer and received it from heaven, so that he might feed the people… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 23*

23 *Divine Institutes* 10 **Quote 1, page 2** “Again, when they were hungry, a shower of food from heaven came down. Also, the wind brought quail into their camp, so that they were filled not only with heavenly… [continues online] **read ›**

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THE BIBLE *5 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

24 **John 6:31** Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat." **read ›**

25 **John 6:32** Jesus therefore said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **read ›**

26 **John 6:33** For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." **read ›**

27 **John 6:51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever. And the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." **read ›**

28 **2 Corinthians 5:9** Therefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well pleasing to him. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *65 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Joshua 3:5 · 3:7 · 5:10

1 Samuel 21:3

Isaiah 1:14

Matthew 2:13 · 2:16 · 4:2 · 5:17 · 5:22 · 6:32 · 6:33 · 6:34 · 7:9 · 8:26 · 10:34 · 14:25 · 15:26 · 17:2 · 26:26

Mark 7:27 · 8:15

Luke 6:1 · 6:5 · 6:7 · 6:9 · 8:21 · 11:1 · 11:2 · 11:3 · 11:4 · 11:5 · 11:8 · 11:9 · 11:11 · 11:14 · 11:18 · 11:19 · 11:20 · 11:21 · 11:27 · 12:16 · 12:29 · 12:50 · 23:34

John 1:15 · 3:31 · 4:12 · 5:8 · 5:19 · 5:26 · 6:35 · 6:38 · 6:46 · 6:53 · 8:42

Acts 15:10

Romans 1:25

1 Corinthians 7:29

Galatians 4:19

Ephesians 2:2

1 Peter 3:20

1 John 4:12 · 5:8

Revelation 5:5

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What does Exodus 16 say about the manna, and how did the early church read it?” on June 10, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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