THE QUESTION

Why was a jar of manna kept in the Ark of the Covenant?

Asked by a THF member on June 10, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 24 early Christian passages and 72 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/why-was-a-jar-of-manna-kept-in-the-ark-of-the-covenant

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

These passages do not state one plain reason. They show the golden jar of manna standing with the ark in the Holy of Holies, and things placed in the ark kept as a lasting witness. The writers say manna fed Israel's souls and read it, and the ark, as signs pointing ahead to Christ.

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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POINT 1 OF 6

Manna was kept in the Holy of Holies

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

Origen lists the golden jar of manna among the holy furniture of the inner sanctuary, beside the ark, its cover and the cherubim. He calls the manna the bread of angels and says these things were made from gold taken out of Egypt.

1 “For out of the things with which the children of Israel spoiled the Egyptians, the furniture of the Holy of Holies was made: the ark with its cover, the cherubim, the mercy-seat, and the golden jar in which the manna, that bread of angels, was stored.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Letter to Gregory* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 17, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

Things placed in the ark served as witness

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

Hippolytus says Moses had the book of the law placed in the ark so it would remain as a testimony forever. He is speaking of the law, not the manna, but it shows the ark as a place for keeping a lasting witness of what God had given.

2 “Moses also commanded and charged them to place the book of the law back inside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, so that it might remain there as a testimony forever.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 16, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

Manna taught Israel to live by God's word

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

Irenaeus says God fed Israel with manna so they would receive food for their souls. Quoting Deuteronomy, he says the lesson was that people live not by bread alone but by every word from God.

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3 “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 says in Deuteronomy: “And fed you with manna, which your ancestors did not know, that you might know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God proceeding out of His mouth does man live.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 5, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Manna was heavenly food, like the Word

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

Clement calls the manna the heavenly food of angels that came down on the Hebrews. He then compares it to the Father raining down the Word, who became spiritual food for the good.

4 “In the same way, manna, the heavenly food of angels, came down from heaven upon the ancient Hebrews.”

later in the same passage

“Instead, when the kind and loving Father rained down the Word, He Himself became spiritual nourishment for the good.”

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 5 OF 6

The manna pointed ahead to Christ

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

Cyprian says the manna in Exodus foreshadowed the food of the coming Christ. In Tatian's Gospel harmony, Jesus says Moses did not give the true bread from heaven; the Father gives it.

5 “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) **Source 18, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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6 “Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which came down from heaven and gave life to the world."”

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

POINT 6 OF 6

The ark itself was a picture of Christ

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

Hippolytus says the ark of imperishable wood stood for the Savior, who had no corruption of sin. Irenaeus compares the ark's gold inside and out to Christ's pure body. So the ark that held the manna was itself read as a sign of Christ.

7 “And, moreover, the ark made of imperishable wood was the Savior Himself. For by this was meant the imperishable and incorruptible tabernacle of the Lord Himself, which produced no corruption of sin.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 14, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “Just as the ark of the covenant was gilded inside and outside with pure gold, so was the body of Christ pure and radiant; for it was adorned internally by the Word and protected externally by the Spirit, so that the splendor of both natures might be clearly revealed.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 7, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages gives God's stated reason for putting the manna in the ark.
- The passages do not describe how the manna was kept fresh in the jar.
- 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.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 24 early Christian passages and 72 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–24, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (source 25, in Bible order), then 71 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 *24 passages from 12 writers*

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 1–2*

1. *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English; on point 4) "whom He rained manna as nourishment, fit for the heavenly angels, in order that you might have no need to prepare your food… [continues online] **read ›**
2. *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English) "also God by the mouth of Moses commanded you to abstain from unclean and improper and violent animals: when, moreover, though you were eating manna in the desert, and were… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 3*

3. *Diatessaron* 19 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** "have you wrought? 25 John 6:31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 4–7*

4. *Against Heresies: Book II* (1885 English; on point 2) "above all, in the case of the Ark of the Covenant, on account of which the whole tabernacle of witness was formed… [continues online] **read ›**
5. *Against Heresies: Book IV* **Quote 3, page 3** "Why, then, did the Lord not establish the covenant for the ancestors? Because "the law was not made for righteous people." But the righteous ancestors had the meaning of the… [continues online] **read ›**
6. *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (on point 5) "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 ›**
7. *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** "as the ark [of the covenant] was gilded within and without with pure gold, so was also the body of Christ pure and resplendent… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 8–10*

8. *Instructor* 1.6 **Quote 4, page 3** "that is fitting and health-giving for the newly formed and newborn child. In the same way, manna, the heavenly food of angels, came down from heaven upon the ancient… [continues online] **read ›**
9. *Stromata* 2.11 (on point 2) "When the memorial of the heavenly and divine food was commanded to be consecrated in the golden pot, it was said, "The omer was the tenth of the three measures… [continues online] **read ›**
10. *Instructor* 2.1 (1885 English) "was the sufficient sustenance of the Israelites… [continues online] **read ›**

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Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 11–13*

11 *An Answer to the Jews* 3 (1885 English) “Israel— who had been known to God, and who had by Him been upraised in Egypt, and was transported through the Red Sea, and who in the desert, fed forty… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Against Marcion* 20 (1885 English; on point 3) “He, not for one day, but during forty years, not on the inferior aliment of bread and fish, but with the manna of heaven, supported the lives of not five… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Against Marcion* 26 (on point 4) “when they asked for bread, He gave them manna from heaven… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 14–16*

14 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 **Quote 7, page 4** moreover, the ark made of imperishable wood was the Savior Himself. For by this was meant the imperishable and incorruptible tabernacle of the Lord Himself, which produced no corruption of… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (on point 6) then, the Savior appeared and showed His own body to the world, born of the Virgin. She was the ark overlaid with pure gold, with the Word within and the… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Exegetical Fragments* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “also enjoined and charged them to place the book of the law again within the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, that it might remain there for a testimony… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 17*

17 *Letter to Gregory* 1 **Quote 1, page 2** “of the Holy of Holies was made: the ark with its cover, the cherubim, the mercy-seat, and the golden jar in which the manna, that bread of angels, was… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 18*

18 *Epistles* (1885 English) **Quote 5, 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 ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 19–20*

19 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 4) “gave them manna from heaven, and gave them quails… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 4) “them. You sweetened the bitter water with wood. You brought water out of the rock. You rained manna from heaven, and quails as food from the air. You gave them… [continues online] **read ›**

Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 21*

21 *Disputation with Manes* 1 (1885 English; on point 4) “Moses sought bread by prayer, and received it from heaven, in order that he might feed the people with it in the wilderness… [continues online] **read ›**

Methodius, *c. 270–311 AD · sources 22–23*

22 *Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna* 1 (on point 6) “might learn, O holy one, the mysteries connected with you? For when he was commanded to build the ark as a sign and likeness of this thing, he was not… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Oration Concerning Simeon and Anna* 1 (on point 6) at the voice of him that cried." By this is signified the veil of the temple drawn before the Ark of the Covenant, which was a type of you. This… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 24*

24 *Divine Institutes* 10 (1885 English; on point 4) “also, the wind brought quails into their camp, so that they were not only satisfied with heavenly bread, but also with more choice banquets… [continues online] **read ›**

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THE BIBLE *1 verse, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

25 **Hebrews 9:4** having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which was a golden pot holding the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *71 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.

Genesis 1:6 · 9:3

Exodus 16:36

2 Samuel 22:44

Psalms 18:43

Jeremiah 4:4

Daniel 9:26

Matthew 2:13 · 2:16 · 4:2 · 5:8 · 5:28 · 5:38 · 8:26 · 9:29 · 10:34 · 14:25 · 15:11 · 17:2 · 17:20

Mark 8:15

Luke 2:14 · 4:20 · 8:21 · 9:1 · 9:7 · 9:10 · 9:21 · 9:22 · 9:24 · 9:26 · 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 · 17:25 · 23:34

John 1:14 · 6:13 · 6:31 · 6:38 · 6:51 · 6:53 · 19:14

Acts 13:17 · 15:10

Romans 1:25 · 4:11 · 10:14

1 Corinthians 3:6 · 5:5 · 7:29 · 8:1 · 9:9

Galatians 4:19

Ephesians 2:2

Philippians 3:1

1 Timothy 6:16

Hebrews 8:8

1 Peter 2:10 · 3:20

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY