

THE HIDDEN MANNA OF REVELATION 2:17

(1) *an omer of manna was kept in a jar as a memorial for all generations of Jews to see:* Then Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations (לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם ‘for your generations’), that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.” 33 And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar (כִּנְיֹתָא) and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations (לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם ‘for your generations’).” 34 As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept (Exod 16:32–34). כִּנְיֹתָא “jar, or like receptacle” (BDB) is a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament. It was not a common clay storage jar but a special gold jar (Heb 9:4). The stated intent of storing this manna is not to hide but to show it to all future generations of Jews. It was to be a memorial of God’s providential care and to strengthen the faith of all future generations of God’s people. That is to say, he has, can, and will provide their daily needs no matter how hopeless the situation. It was an historical and doctrinal reminder. Question. How can this jar be placed “before the LORD” (in the ark of the covenant) and still be seen by all the people? Note: this is the only manna that could be stored without spoiling: “and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul” (Exod 16:20). It was supernaturally preserved! Note also that an omer was a day’s portion for one person: “you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent” (Exod 16:16). An omer is about two quarts.

(2) *this manna was stored inside the ark of the covenant in a golden jar:* “And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna (ἐν τῇ στάμνος χρυσοῦ ἔχουσα τὸ μάννα), and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant” (Heb 9:3–4). στάμνος is “a jar regularly used for wine, but in the NT it refers to the jar in which manna was kept permanently — ‘jar’” (Louw & Nida). “earthen jar or bottle for racking off wine . . . generally, jar, . . . used to keep money in . . . as a ballot-box . . . as a measure . . . -οῦρος, ὁ, *keeper of oil-jars* in the palaestra, Hsch” (LSJ). It’s usually a clay jar used for storing food, not a clay cooking pot. The author of Hebrews, however, tells us it was not a common clay storage jar but a special jar made of gold (Heb 9:4). This verse reveals precisely where the jar of manna was stored: inside the ark of the covenant. Apparently the phrase “place it before the LORD” (Exod 16:33) means inside the ark (Heb 9:4). The time sequence is important here, since the ark had not yet been built when the command to store the manna was given. So, if it was gathered *immediately* and put in a jar, it must have been stored elsewhere for a while—perhaps in a tent. Or it may have been gathered anytime after the ark was completed, since manna fell continuously up to the Conquest (Exod 16:35; Josh 5:12). The question then becomes, Why store it inside the ark if it’s to be seen by all generations: “that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness” (16:32)? It would be hidden from everyone inside the ark—even from the high priest! Perhaps it was stored inside the ark just during the wilderness wanderings; there was little reason to see the jar since the people saw and ate manna every day. “That they may see the bread” clearly implies this jar of manna was *not* supposed to be hidden. Now we may inquire further, How is the manna to be seen if it’s sealed in a metal jar? At some point the jar must have been taken out of the ark and displayed publicly for all future generations to see. When was it taken out? And where was it displayed? We don’t know.

(3) *the jar of manna was not in the ark of the covenant when it was moved to Solomon’s Temple:* “There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 8:9). Where was it? We can only guess. It was either lost or hidden before the dedication of Solomon’s Temple, or, more likely, it was displayed publicly for everyone to see in keeping with God’s original intent. According to Jewish legend, Jeremiah showed his generation the jar of manna to encourage them to study the Law and to strengthen their faith: “To serve future generations as a tangible proof of the infinite power of God, the Lord bade Moses lay an earthen vessel full of manna before the Holy Ark, and this command was carried out by Aaron in the second year of the wanderings through the desert. When, many centuries later, the prophet Jeremiah exhorted his contemporaries to study the Torah, and they answered his exhortations, saying, ‘How shall we then maintain ourselves?’ the prophet brought forth the vessel with manna, and spoke to them, saying: ‘O generation, see ye the word of the Lord; see what it was that served your fathers as food when they applied themselves to the study of the Torah. You, too, will God support in the same way, if you will but devote yourselves to the study of the Torah’” (Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, III, § 111). So the Jews believed the jar of manna could still be seen in Jeremiah’s day. Jeremiah was a contemporary of Josiah. He was called by God in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign (628 B.C., Jer 1:2), helped with Josiah’s reforms, and wrote a lamentation when this godly king died (609 B.C., 2 Chron. 35:25). The legend, if not historical (note “earthen vessel”), is a good illustration of God’s purpose in storing the manna.

(4) *overcomers will receive some of the hidden manna from Jesus:* “To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna (δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου) . . .” (Rev 2:17b). The questions we must answer are: Who hid the jar of manna? When was it hidden? Where was it hidden? Why was it hidden? Is it called “hidden manna” because it was placed in the ark and hidden from everyone for a while? Or was it hidden somewhere before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.? Is it and perhaps the ark of the covenant still hidden? Or was it destroyed along with the ark by the Babylonians? A Jewish legend says it was hidden by King Josiah about 25 years before the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and that it will be recovered by Elijah in the Kingdom: “When the imminent destruction of the Temple was announced to King Josiah, he concealed the Holy Ark, and with it also the vessel with manna, as well as the jug filled with sacred oil, which was used by Moses for anointing the sacred implements, and other sacred objects. In the Messianic time the prophet Elijah will restore all these concealed objects” (Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, III, § 112). Another Jewish legend says the jar of manna that mysteriously disappeared will be revealed by the Messiah: “But the Messiah will do the following seven wonders: He will bring Moses and the generation of the desert to life; Korah and his band he will raise from out of the earth; he will revive the Ephraimitic Messiah, who was slain; he will show the three holy vessels of the Temple, the Ark, the flask of manna, and the cruse of sacred oil, all three of which disappeared mysteriously; he will wave the sceptre given him by God; he will grind the mountains of the Holy Land into powder like straw, and he will reveal the secret of redemption. Then the Jews will believe that Elijah is the Elijah promised to them, and the Messiah introduced by him is the true Messiah” (Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, IV, §114). “It was a constant tradition of the Jews that the ark, the tables of stone, Aaron’s rod, the holy anointing oil, and the pot of manna were hidden by Josiah when Jerusalem was taken by the Chaldeans; and that these shall be restored in the days of the Messiah” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 69). Now, if “hidden manna” refers to this jar of manna, then it still exists, is still hidden, and Jesus knows where it is! Perhaps he will retrieve it along with the ark at the beginning of the millennial Kingdom. Then, if I may conjecture, he will give grains of manna to overcomers—rare, valuable, treasured keepsakes, rewards that bring honor to their owners, precious because they’re types of Christ (John 6:48–51), not to eat but worn perhaps as jewelry or displayed in the houses of overcomers as trophies, visible to all men forever. God’s purpose in providing manna was to teach his people “that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deut 4:3). It’s perfectly fitting, then, that these grains of manna from the wilderness be given to overcomers who learned what the exodus generation never understood, that “man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). This hidden manna is both a token and a testimony to their understanding, faith, application, and love for God’s Word. This, then, is the ultimate fulfillment of “Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness” (Exod 16:32). Preserved forever. Visible forever. If this is the destiny of the jar of manna, then it will probably not be found before the second coming of Christ. And the ark, if recovered, will not be present in the millennial Temple (Jer 3:16–17; Ezek 43:7).