

Jesus and the sign of the 'hidden manna'

by Gary Michuta • April 15, 2016



After the exodus from Egypt, God fed his people with a mysterious food called manna. Its name comes from the Hebrew word *man*, which means “what?” In other words, this mysterious food is essentially called “What is it?” When the people asked this question to Moses, he simply replied, “This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat” (Exodus 16:15).

Manna looked like thin flakes that formed on the ground, much like frost (Exodus 16:14-15), and it tasted like honey or fresh oil (Exodus 16:31, Numbers 11:8). The Israelites were allowed to gather manna each day to eat, one portion per person, but no matter how much or how little they gathered, each had enough to eat (Exodus 16:18). Extra manna could not be kept for the next day, except on Friday. Because the Israelites could not work on the Sabbath, they were allowed to gather twice as much manna on Friday so they could eat it on the Sabbath.

We are familiar with the story of the manna because of its connection with the Eucharist. After the multiplication of the loaves, the people asked Jesus, “...What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (John 6:30-31). Jesus replies that he is the living bread that comes down from heaven (John 6:35) that is he is the true manna.

Jesus also speaks of manna in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 2:17, Jesus says, “To the victor I shall give some of the hidden manna...” What’s curious is his description, “hidden manna.” *Hidden* manna? The manna wasn’t hidden. The Israelites gathered it and ate it in their homes. The manna was very public. What does Jesus mean by the “hidden manna?”

Most people are not aware that there was manna that was hidden from the public. God told Moses to take some of the manna and put it into an urn and place it before Him in the Tabernacle (Exodus 16:32-34). This portion of hidden manna was to be saved for future generations. Therefore, Moses placed it inside the Ark of the Covenant along with the Ten Commandments and Aaron's rod (Hebrews 9:4). Exodus does not tell us when the future generations will receive this hidden manna. There was an expectation, however, that when the messiah came he would provide future generations with manna.

A non-biblical Jewish writing called Second Baruch says this about the messiah:

“And it shall come to pass when all is accomplished that was to come to pass in those parts, that the Messiah shall then begin to be revealed. ... And it shall come to pass at that self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time. And it shall come to pass after these things, when the time of the advent of the Messiah is fulfilled, that He shall return in glory” (2 Baruch 29:2, 8, 30:1).

The Jews who asked Jesus for a sign like Moses and the manna in John 6 probably had this idea in mind. I'm sure they didn't expect his response: “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die” (John 6:48-50).

Jesus does bring down from heaven the “treasury of manna” put away for future generations in the Eucharist, where he is still hidden under the appearances of bread and wine. Ultimately, the Eucharist is a foretaste of the messianic banquet at the end of time (Revelation 19:9). Only then will the manna not be hidden and we “will see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Until then, we feed on the hidden manna that Christ gives us in the Eucharist.