

Is Jesus Michael the Archangel?

The Five Michael Texts, the Watchtower's Two Proof Verses, and Hebrews 1

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I. The Name Behind the Name

Ask a Jehovah's Witness who Jesus was before Bethlehem, and the answer is a name most Christians would never guess: Michael. In Watchtower teaching, the archangel Michael is the Son of God's prehuman identity—the first and greatest of Jehovah's creatures, who became the man Jesus, and who resumed the name Michael at his return to heaven. The identification is not a side detail. It is where the Watchtower's whole doctrine of Christ crystallizes: if Jesus is Michael, He is an angel—exalted, but created, and no part of a Godhead. This essay tests the identification against the only evidence there is: the five occurrences of Michael's name in Scripture, the two texts the doctrine is built on, and the one chapter of the New Testament written, on its face, to answer exactly this question.

II. The Watchtower's Case in Its Own Words

The *Insight on the Scriptures* entry on Michael states the conclusion plainly: “Scriptural evidence indicates that the name Michael applied to God’s Son before he left heaven to become Jesus Christ and also after his return.”¹ The argument begins with the word *archangel* itself: it is never found in the plural in Scripture, and only Michael is called “the archangel” (Jude 9). There is one chief of the angels, the reasoning runs, and Scripture connects that office to the risen Lord: at 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Jesus descends from heaven “with an archangel’s voice.” As *Insight* puts it, the verse describes the voice of the resurrected Jesus “as being that of an archangel, suggesting that he is, in fact, himself the archangel.”²

The identification is then confirmed, in Watchtower teaching, by what Michael does. Daniel calls Michael “the great prince who is standing in behalf of your people” and says he will “stand up” at the time of the end (Dan. 12:1)—language the Society reads as royal. In Revelation 12:7, Michael and his angels wage the war in heaven that casts Satan down after the Kingdom’s birth in 1914—and who leads heaven’s armies against Satan, the argument asks, if not the enthroned Christ, who is elsewhere shown leading them (Rev. 19:14–16)? Two figures cannot both command heaven’s armies; therefore Michael and the glorified Jesus are one person under two names. That is the case at its strongest. Now the texts.

III. All Five Michael Texts

Michael is named five times in all of Scripture: three times in Daniel, once in Jude, once in Revelation. Nothing else exists to build on.

Daniel introduces him as “Michael, one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13)—*one of* several. That single phrase already sits badly under the doctrine, for Scripture never calls the Son one of anything: He is “the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14), bearing “the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). Daniel’s Michael is a great prince with peers, “your prince” (Dan. 10:21), charged with the care of Israel (Dan. 12:1). Nothing in Daniel hints that this prince is the Messiah—and Daniel has a Messiah figure, introduced elsewhere and differently: “one like a son of man,” who comes with the clouds of heaven and receives from the Ancient of Days “dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan. 7:13–14). *Son of Man* is the very title Jesus took as His own, and the service of all nations is not the portfolio of one prince among several.³

IV. Jude’s Test Case

The fourth text supplies something better than an inference: a direct display of Michael’s rank. “When the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body

of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’” (Jude 9). Michael, at the height of his authority, in heaven’s own business, dares not rebuke Satan in his own name; he appeals to the Lord’s.

Now watch Jesus—not enthroned in glory but standing hungry in the wilderness, in the days of His humiliation: “Begone, Satan!” (Matt. 4:10), and Satan goes. He silences demons with a word, and bystanders marvel that “he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him” (Mark 1:25–27). If Jesus is Michael, then the same person who dared not judge the devil in heaven commanded him at will on earth—having, on the Watchtower’s own account, *emptied himself* of his heavenly power to do it. The texts do not describe one person in two estates. They describe two persons of different ranks: the servant who invokes the Lord, and the Lord he invokes. Jude himself supplies the contrast four verses earlier, calling Jesus “our only Master and Lord” (Jude 4).⁴

V. A Voice, a Shout, and a Trumpet

The doctrine’s chief proof-text proves less than it must. “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). The Lord descends *with* an archangel’s call—amid it, accompanied by it—exactly as He descends with a cry of command and with God’s trumpet. By the doctrine’s own logic the verse would equally make Him the cry, or the trumpet—or make God the trumpet, since it is “the trumpet *of God*.” The picture is the royal arrival Paul’s readers knew from every imperial visit: the king comes, and the herald’s voice and the trumpet announce him. A herald’s voice announcing the King is strange proof that the King is the herald.⁵

Revelation 12 adds nothing more. Michael commands “his angels” in one battle scene (Rev. 12:7), as captains of the host do throughout Scripture; the victory hymn that follows credits the conquest to “the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11)—the Lamb and Michael appearing in the same vision as they appear everywhere else, distinctly. And the Lamb’s position in this book is not a chief creature’s: He shares the throne of God (Rev. 22:1, 3), and “every creature in heaven and on earth” directs worship “to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev. 5:13). A creature, however chief, cannot stand on the receiving side of every creature’s worship.⁶

VI. The Chapter Written to Answer This

Hebrews 1 reads as though its author had heard the doctrine coming. The theme is announced at once: the Son, having made purification for sins, has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty, “having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs” (Heb. 1:4). Then the questions fall like hammer

blows. “For to what angel did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’?” (Heb. 1:5). Of the Son: “Let all God’s angels worship him” (Heb. 1:6). “But to what angel has he ever said, ‘Sit at my right hand...’?” (Heb. 1:13).

The chapter’s whole architecture is a line drawn between the Son and every angel whatsoever. The angels stand on the side of “ministering spirits sent forth to serve” (Heb. 1:14); the Son stands on the side of the God they worship—addressed by the Father as “God” (“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,” Heb. 1:8, quoting Psalm 45) and as the “Lord” who “didst found the earth in the beginning” (Heb. 1:10, quoting Psalm 102 of Yahweh). And the next chapter closes the last exit: “For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come” (Heb. 2:5). The rhetorical questions expect the answer *no angel, ever*. If Jesus were the archangel, Hebrews 1 would not merely be mistaken; it would be arguing against its own conclusion in every verse—asking “to what angel did God ever say ‘You are my Son’?” about a Son who is himself an angel.⁷

VII. Where the Identification Came From

If no verse states the identification—and none does—where did it come from? Not from the early Church: the Fathers know Michael as a great angel and Jesus as the Lord the angels worship, and they never confuse the two; the identification of Christ with an angel was precisely the kind of claim Hebrews 1 and Colossians 2:18 were deployed against. The Jesus–Michael equation entered the Watchtower’s bloodstream from nineteenth-century Adventist speculation—the milieu of William Miller and his heirs, from which Charles Taze Russell drew so much of his eschatology. It is a doctrine required rather than discovered: a created Christ must be filed somewhere in creation’s ranks, and chief angel is the highest shelf available. The identification does not emerge from the five Michael texts; it is imposed on them by a Christology that has nowhere else to put the Son.⁸

VIII. The Son Whom Angels Worship

Set the two portraits side by side. Scripture’s Michael: one chief prince among several, guardian of a nation, a warrior who wins one battle by the Lamb’s blood and who dares not rebuke the devil except in the Lord’s name. Scripture’s Son: the only-begotten, worshiped by all God’s angels at the Father’s command, seated at the right hand, addressed as God and as the Lord who founded the earth, holding the name above every name. These are not two descriptions of one person; they are the two sides of the line Hebrews 1 draws.

The Watchtower’s reading takes two prepositions—a “with” read as “as,” a singular noun read as an identification—against the direct statements of an entire chapter. No text says Jesus is Michael. Many texts say what Jesus is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The reader who was taught the angel-Christ is invited to do what this essay has done—read all five Michael texts, read Hebrews 1 aloud, and ask whether the questions it asks have any answer left. Who the Son is, at full length, is the subject of the companion essay on the Trinity.⁹

Endnotes

1. *Insight on the Scriptures* (1988), vol. 2, “Michael,” No. 1.
2. Ibid.; Jude 9 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. The same case is made in *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (2005), appendix, “Who Is Michael the Archangel?”
3. Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; 7:13–14; John 1:14; Phil. 2:9 (RSV). Scripture quotations, unless noted, are from the Revised Standard Version.
4. Jude 4, 9; Matt. 4:10; Mark 1:25–27 (RSV).
5. 1 Thess. 4:16 (RSV). On *parousia* as a royal arrival announced by herald and trumpet, see the companion essay *What Is the Parousia?*
6. Rev. 5:13; 12:7, 11; 22:1, 3 (RSV).
7. Heb. 1:4–14; 2:5 (RSV), quoting Pss. 2, 45, 102, and 110.
8. On the Adventist milieu and its Christology, the standard histories of the Millerite movement; Col. 2:18 (RSV) on the worship of angels.
9. John 1:1 (RSV); *The Trinity: A Guide for the Perplexed*, on this site.

For Further Reading

Against Heresies, Book III, by St. Irenaeus, c. A.D. 180—the earliest Christology knows no angel-Christ. Free online at <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103303.htm>.

Early Christian Doctrines, by J. N. D. Kelly—what the first centuries actually taught about the Son.

God Crucified—Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament, by Richard Bauckham—why the New Testament places Jesus on the Creator’s side of the line.

A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG), s.v. *archangelos*; the standard lexicon.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, esp. §§328–336 on the angels and §§464–469 on who Christ is.

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“And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’”

—Hebrews 1:6

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam
To the greater glory of God*

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A Note on Authority

This essay represents the author’s articulation of *the Catholic assessment of the Watchtower’s identification of Jesus with the archangel Michael*, drawing on Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Church Fathers, and the major theological tradition. It is offered as a personal defense, not as an official statement of the Church’s teaching. Where this defense is fortunate enough to align with the magisterial teaching of the Church, the credit belongs to the tradition that formed it. Where it falls short, the responsibility is the author’s alone.