

THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

Michael from the Hebrew <Mikha'el>, meaning: <Who is as God>? His name is a battle cry; both shield and weapon in the struggle, and an eternal trophy of victory. The popularity of this name in the Old Testament appears from the fact that no less than ten persons bearing the name of Michael are mentioned in the sacred books, like: "Sthur the son of Michael." A similar name is found also in the Accadian language with a meaning identical to that of Michael; the Accadian equivalent is <Mannuki-ili.>



As the proper name of one of the great Archangels, the word Michael appears for the first time in the book of the prophet Daniel, where he is called: "Michael, one of the chief princes," and again: "At that time shall Michael rise up, the great prince, who standeth for the children of thy people."

The name "Archangel" is given only to Saint Michael, even though sacred tradition and the liturgy of the Church attribute the same title to Saint Gabriel and Saint Raphael: "When Michael, the archangel, disputing with the devil, contended about the body of Moses, he durst not bring against him the judgment of railing speech, but said: The Lord command thee." In spite of such an explicit testimony of the Scripture, a few writers have maintained that Saint Michael, because of his exalted position among the Angels, must belong to a much higher order, perhaps to that of the Seraphim, rather than to the order of Archangels. We do not believe that this opinion can be defended. The exalted position occupied by Saint Michael can be explained by the fact that, even though he belongs to a relatively low order by nature, his outstanding zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of his fellow Angels, at the time of Satan's rebellion, merited him such glory and power as to equal and even to excel through grace such celestial spirits that belong to a much higher Choir by nature. If we remember, ie Angels lived through a period of probation during which they could merit each according to his works. The great variety of merit explains, in addition to other natural elements, the great difference in their glory and in their power.

Father Joseph Husslein points out that the Church calls Saint Michael "Prince of the heavenly hosts"-<Princeps militiae caelestis>, adding further: "The fact that the three Angels I have just mentioned are spoken of as Archangels need not imply more than that they were entrusted with extraordinary missions. Michael is the only one to whom the Scriptures apply this title, but there is good reason for the opinion that he may be the very highest of all the angels." Saint Michael is indeed a prince of the heavenly hosts, but this is sufficiently explained by the power granted him by God and not necessarily by superiority of nature. We believe that a power of that sort would not be conferred upon Seraphim and Cherubim who are the living throne of God, but rather upon those who belong to the order of ministering spirits, namely Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, who "are sent to minister for them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation."

According to Gustav F. Oehler, "this name: Michael-Who is as God?-of the prince of the Angels does not imply merely a humble acknowledgment on the part of the Angel, but it is rather an actual assertion concerning the Angel himself. The name thus expresses the irresistibility of him to whom God gives the power to execute His behests."

Saint Michael has always been the warrior Angel, fighting first Satan and his demons from the beginning, then, in the course of time, all the enemies of God's own People. He is "the great prince, who standeth for the children of thy people." As of old, so today, Saint Michael is the great defender of the Church of Christ on earth.

The now famous problem, "The Angel of the Lord," <Malakh Yahweh>, that has engaged the attention of Scripture scholars for decades, may perhaps be solved by admitting that this mysterious Angel of the Lord (who in various books of the Old Testament is represented as acting in the name of God Himself, and is often received and honored as God would), is none other than the Archangel Saint Michael, God's own legate to His people. The words of the prophet Daniel seem to insinuate this: "None is my helper in all these things, but Michael your prince." "At that time shall Michael rise up, the great prince, who standeth for the children of thy people." A legate can speak and act in the name and by the authority of the supreme ruler who sent him and whom he represents. This seems to have been Saint Michael's position with the children of Israel; he was both the heavenly Prince representing the King of Heaven and the heavenly protector of God's own people against both human and diabolical enemies.

Saint Michael who had defended and protected God's children in the spirit world, was to extend the same protection to the human children of God here on earth. Surrounded and threatened as they were by hostile pagan nations, over which Satan had established his tyrannical rule, Saint Michael could not

remain indifferent to this new form of seduction and rebellion introduced by his archenemy among the children of men. As long as Satan persists in his attacks, the heavenly champion, the Prince of the heavenly hosts will continue to shatter his plans with the war cry of old: "Who is as God?" In the Old Testament, therefore, Saint Michael is the Angel par excellence, the Angel of the Lord, the national Guardian Angel of the Israelites.

At times, especially in the book of Exodus, this "Angel of the Lord" is called simply, the Lord; as for example in this passage, "And the Lord went before them to show the way by day in a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire, that he might be the guide of their journey at both times." He who is called "the Lord" in this passage, is mentioned again in the same capacity as the "Angel of God" in the following passage: "And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, leaving the forepart, stood behind, between the Egyptian camp and the camp of Israel, and it was a dark cloud, and enlightening the night." This very clever military maneuver clearly shows the strategy of the Prince of heavenly hosts.

As the national Guardian Angel of the Israelites, and God's special legate to His people, Saint Michael is introduced with words which reveal the great divine love and solicitude of the Lord, together with man's duties towards Guardian Angels in general: "Behold I will send my Angel who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared. Take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be contemned, for he will not forgive when thou hast sinned, and my name is in him. But if thou wilt hear his voice, and do all that I speak, I will be an enemy to thy enemies, and will afflict them that afflict thee."

The other opinion which holds that the expression the "Angel of the Lord" is not really an Angel, or Saint Michael, but the Word of God (the Logos) God Himself, is now regarded as a mere conjecture and a rather obsolete opinion.

Several apparitions of the Archangel Michael have been reported during the Christian centuries. One of the most outstanding of all such apparitions is the one which is commemorated in the universal Church on May 8. The Archangel Saint Michael appeared on Mount Gargano in Apulia, South Italy, in the days of Pope Gelasius (492- 496). A shrine was erected in the cave of the apparition and it became the goal of devout pilgrimages in subsequent centuries. Another feast in honor of Saint Michael the Archangel, on September 29, formerly known as <Michaelmas>, is the anniversary of the Dedication of the former basilica of Saint Michael and all the Angels on the Salarian Way in Rome. An apparition, similar to that of Mount Gargano, was honored in the great shrine called <Michaelion>, near Constantinople, according to the historian Sozomenus, who

wrote about the middle of the fifth century, a century of great devotion to the Holy Angels in general and to Saint Michael in particular.

In the liturgy of the Mass Saint Michael is regarded as the Angel who leads the souls of the faithful departed to heaven: "Deliver them from the lion's mouth, that hell engulf them not, that they fall not into darkness; but let Michael, the holy standard-bearer, bring them into the holy light."

Saint Michael is invoked in a particular manner in the prayers recited at the foot of the altar after Mass: "Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, etc." This particular prayer is a condensed form of the general exorcism against Satan and all the evil spirits, published by Pope Leo XIII.

As long as God's children are exposed to the attacks of Satan in this world, Saint Michael's battle cry: "Who is like God?" will continue to scare and shatter all the forces of evil, and his powerful intervention in the struggle in behalf of the children of God will never cease.



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