

A Brief Discussion of Whether Jesus Is Michael the Archangel

There are certain subjects in Scripture where the statements are so definitive that a person can safely be dogmatic - i.e. that salvation is by grace through faith alone.

In other cases, there is evidence that varies in its clarity, upon which thinking Christians can take definitive positions based on their study of the evidence, but upon which they should allow others latitude to disagree based on their own understanding of the evidence. The subject of the identity of Michael the Archangel is one of those cases. In these instances, while persuasion is the right of every student of the Bible, a dogmatic position is more about our own pride than it is about the facts of the case.

Bible students who are persuaded that the Michael the Archangel statements in Scripture refer to Jesus do so based on the following evidence.

1. There are two clear and distinct types of references to angels in the Bible

“An” angel of the Lord

Luke 2:9 - An angel of the Lord finds the shepherds on the fields near Bethlehem and tells them about the birth of Jesus. Could not have been Jesus because He was the one lying in the manger in Bethlehem.

Acts 12:2-9 - An angel of the Lord opens the doors of the prison cell in Jerusalem and leads Peter out of jail.

Matthew 28:2 - An angel of the Lord comes from heaven to the tomb of Jesus, rolls back the stone, and sits on it.

Revelation 19:10; 22:9 - Twice John the Revelator tries to worship an angel of the Lord who had come with a message for him. In both cases the angel stops him saying, “Don’t do it! I am a fellow servant with you. Worship God!”

Acts 8:26 - An angel of the Lord tells Philip to "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

“The” angel of the Lord

Genesis 16:7-11 - The angel of the Lord finds Hagar near a spring in the desert and tells her about the birth of Ishmael. Hagar recognizes the angel as “The Lord” - (vs. 13)

Numbers 22:31 - The angel of the Lord stands in the road to stop Balaam and his donkey.

Judges 6:11 - The angel of the Lord comes and sits under the oak near the winepress where Gideon was hiding from the Midianites. Gideon, recognizing who He is addresses Him as “Lord.” (Elohim) - Judges 6:18,23

Judges 13:20-22 - When Manoah and his wife realize that they have seen the angel of the Lord, they say, “We have seen God!”

Genesis 32:30 - When Jacob wrestles with the angel (Genesis 32), he eventually realizes that he has been wrestling with God. (Note also Hosea 12:3)

Matthew 2:19-20 - An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him that Herod has died. (Can't be Jesus because He is in Egypt, growing up in His parent's home.

Zechariah 3:4 - Zechariah reports the angels words to Joshua, the high priest as saying, "I have taken away your sin." (Something only God has the prerogative to do.)

Exodus 3:2-15 - An angel appears to Moses in a burning bush (vs. 2). When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, he called to him from the bush and told him what He was about to do.

Genesis 22:11-18 - The angel of the Lord stops Abraham from killing Isaac. Then the angel calls from out from heaven and says, "By myself I have sworn says the Lord I will bless you because of your obedience"

2. Theophany

God regularly took the form of created beings in the history of the world in order to interact and communicate with humans. It is common enough in Scripture that a theological term was coined to describe it when it occurs. It is "Theophany" - from the Greek theophaneia [theo- (God) + -phaneia (to show oneself, appear)].

Some instances include:

- Adam (Genesis 3:8)
- Abraham (Genesis 17:1-4, 9-10, 15-16, 22; Genesis 18:1-33 where God appears with two angels, all in the form of humans)
- Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30)
- Moses (Exodus 3:2-6)
- Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15)
- Daniel (Daniel 3:22-25)

There are also other instances that are not quite so specific, but which strongly imply that God appeared to humans.

- Genesis 11:5 - "The Lord came down"
- Exodus 34:5 - "The Lord descended and stood with him there"
- Numbers 11:25 - "The Lord came down and talked with him and took some of the Spirit that was upon Him and put it upon the 70 elders"
- Numbers 12:5 - "The Lord came down and stood at the door of the tent"

So, it would not be unusual for him to take the form of a created being, to interact with them on a

level they could understand. Neither would it imply that God (whatever member the Trinity is being described) is a created being, just because He took the form of a created one.

It is also clear from the larger context of the Bible that many of these “Theophanies” were “Christophanies” - in other words, it was God (Theo) the Son (Christ) who was the one interacting with humanity.

3. Christ as Michael

This raises the intriguing question, if God, and specifically Jesus *took on human form* in order to interact with humans, did He ever do the same in the larger context of the whole universe. In other words, in order to interact with angels and other created beings, is there any evidence that God, and specifically Jesus, God the Son, take on the form of a created being in order to better interact with those created ones?

A. It appears that the different members of the Trinity, three distinct beings with identity and personality, although absolutely equal, have taken on different roles in the heavenly “corporation.”¹

The One we call “God the Father” appears to play the part of president of the corporation.²

The One we know as Jesus is always seen in the role of creating (John 1, Hebrews 1, Colossians 1) and in showing by example how to relate to God. (The One, or the Three). He is also the one in heaven responsible with the response to Satan when he rebelled against God.

The One known as “The Spirit” seems to always be the source of power. At the creation, it was the Spirit who moved upon the face of the waters as Jesus spoke, and things occurred. Creation happened. The Spirit also seems to be the source of the power for created beings, human and otherwise, to be able to live the life of the Kingdom of Light. It is the Spirit whose job throughout Scripture is described as drawing people to God and providing power for Christian living and witness.

¹ This is why it is so important to examine the context of any mention of God in the Bible to determine if God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit or God the Corporation is being spoken of in any particular passage.

² While any analogy inevitably falls short when describing something so beyond comprehension as God, the image of a corporation can help to illuminate the concept of God for us. God, we are told repeatedly in Scripture is one God. At the same time, three separate and distinct individuals are described as making up the One God. In the same way, a corporation is a single entity, viewed in the eyes of the law as an individual; yet in most states a corporation must be made up of at least three individuals - a president, a secretary and a treasury - each with separate and distinct roles within the corporation, the one.

In this context, what exactly do we know about Michael the Archangel.

The term Michael, when referring to an angelic being, appears 5 times in the Bible.

- Daniel 10:13 - “But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia.” (In this case, Michael apparently comes to the aid of an angel who is doing battle with an spirit/demonic power assigned to the kingdom of Persia)
- Daniel 10:20-21 - But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael , your prince. (The contention is against the demonic spirits assigned to the kingdoms of Persia and Greece)
- Daniel 12:1 - “At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued.
- Jude 8-9 - Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones. But 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."
- Revelation 12:7 - Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels.

The term “angel” is a common one in the Bible. It literally means “messenger.”

The term “Archangel” - archangelos in Greek, occurs twice in the Bible. It means top messenger or chief messenger, or chief of the messengers.

- Jude 9 - mentioned above.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 - For 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. And the dead in Christ will rise first . . .

In Daniel we find that Michael is one of the chief princes and that He is our prince. That might mean He is in line for the Throne. We also find Him working behind the scenes with Gabriel to ensure that God's will for nations actually occurs. Then we see Michael who is called the great prince, standing up, and when he does a time of trouble starts and God's people are delivered. In Jude we see Michael confronting Satan when Moses was resurrected. Finally in the book of Revelation we see a war in heaven. The opposing sides are described as Michael and his angels against the dragon which we know as Satan and his angels.

Michael in the Bible is the chief angel or the head of the angels, the archangel. Jewish tradition calls Him, “God’s angel.”

In two New Testament passages, Michael and Jesus are pictured as doing identical things at the end of the world - shouting and resurrecting the dead.

- In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we read - “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- When Jesus describes the same scenario in John 5:25-29, he says that “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

The comparison of two other passages (Joshua 5:13-15 and Revelation 19:10) gives us another insight into who this archangel, Michael, really is.

- Joshua 5:13-15 - And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.
- Revelation 19:10 - "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

In one case, the Captain of the Lord's host allows Joshua to worship Him. In the other, the angel says don't, I am your fellow servant. And we know that the Captain of the Lord's Host is the same one who in Revelation 12 let the armies of heaven in their war against Satan. - “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and

his angels . . . “ (Revelation 12:7-12)

And He is the same one who leads God’s victorious armies in the end of the world - (Revelation 19:11-20) Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

That victorious one, we know, is Jesus.

Jesus and Moses

He is also the one who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, when God is described as coming and standing with Moses (Exodus 34:5) - "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear'. "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us . . . “ (Acts 7:37-38)

Jesus as an angel and the Exodus

Early on, in the Exodus, God promised to send an Angel to go before them.

Exodus 23:20-21 - “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him.

"My name is in Him," to the Hebrews at the time meant, "He is my heir, my descendent, the one who will carry on my legacy" (Examples of this same use of language for heirs of Abraham and others are found in: Gen 48:16, Isa. 66:22, Deut. 25:6-7, 2Sam. 14:7). This idea of having God say: "My name is in Him", agrees with what is written in Hebrews about Jesus:

Hebrews 1:4-5. - having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"

Jesus as an angel and Samson

In Judges 13:15-23, the angel speaking to Manoah and his wife says that his name is “Wonderful.” This is the same one who in Isaiah 9:6 is the Messiah - “And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Non-Biblical evidence

There are those who contend that Seventh-day Adventists are the only ones who believe that Michael and Jesus are the same individuals. While there are many who disagree with our position, there are those who agree. For instance, Charles Spurgeon and the commentator Matthew Henry both take the same position.

In addition, Ellen White supports the idea that Michael and Jesus are the same individual.

Summary

As stated in the beginning, there are issues that are so cut and dried in Scripture that a person can take a position on them unequivocally. Then there are those issues where honest individuals of integrity and love for God can examine the evidence and come to different conclusions. This issue is one of those that are worth studying, but are not hills worth dying upon.

Nothing is sadder than Christians contending over issues that, ultimately, have very little to do with our salvation. At the same time, nothing is more exhilarating than wrestling with important issues with those of like heart and mind who are looking to discover the truth about God. So, in this little monograph I have tried to present the evidence that many find convincing for equating Jesus and Michael, without being so dogmatic that it ends all discussion.

I look forward to dialoging with those who read it as we continue to search together for a deeper understanding of the wonders of our God.