

THE SEVEN ARCHANGELS



Based upon what we know from Scripture from Tobit 12:15; Revelation 1:4,20; 3:1; 8:2,6; and Isaiah 63:9, the Church has determined that there are Seven Archangels. The Archangels have played an important role in the Bible and in other Jewish and Christian literature for many centuries. Some of the archangels in the bible are very well known, while others have been forgotten to history.

As of Council of Rome in 745 under the reign of Pope Saint Zachary, the Catholic Church officially only acknowledges the names of three of the seven Archangels: St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael. Although the Church acknowledges that there are seven Archangels according to Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, because these three Archangels are the only angels named in Scripture, they are currently the only three who are officially recognized by name in Catholic doctrine. The names of the other four Archangels appear in Jewish and Christian sources outside of the canon of Sacred Scripture (an example is the Book of Enoch chapter 20) and their names are: Uriel, Raguel, Zerachiel, and Remiel.

SAINT MICHAEL

Michael in Sacred Scripture – Daniel 10:13, 10:21, and 12:1; Jude 9 and Revelation 12:7. Michael also appears in many apocryphal Jewish and Christian sources.

Michael's name means, "Who is like God?" and he is the ultimate embodiment of the pious general and the Patron of soldiers, police officers, and firefighters. Various traditions say that he was the first of the angels who were created, which may explain why he is often revered as the eldest brother of his brethren. Traditionally, Michael has been referred to as the Prince/Guardian Angel of the people of Israel and he is now revered as the Guardian Angel of the Church. He is also the famous angel who led the forces of Heaven in casting out Lucifer/Satan when he rebelled against God:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (REVELATION 12:7-9)

There have been debates over the centuries about the exact rank of Michael over the angels. Some early Christian traditions, and some later ones as well, including The Prayer to Saint Michael by Pope Leo XIII, refer to Michael as the Prince of the Heavenly Hosts (i.e. the leader of all of the angels in Heaven). Saint Basil the Great made this argument during the 4th Century in his homily *De Angelis* and others, such as Saint Bonaventure (13th Century), argue that Michael was of the order of the Seraphim. However, Michael is the only angel in Sacred Scripture explicitly addressed as Archangel (Jude 9) and thus if the Nine Choir Tradition is accurate he could not be among the order of the Seraphim at the top of the hierarchy, because the order of the Archangels is at the second to the lowest of the hierarchy. There seems to be a major problem here but there are two possible ways to rectify this.

The first possibility is that our current understanding of the Nine Choirs might be a little bit wrong. As noted in the previous section, Saint Thomas Aquinas, who advocated the Nine Choir Tradition, stated in *THE SUMMA THEOLOGIAE* Part 1, Question 108, Article 3 that our knowledge about the angels is imperfect and that the full understanding about their hierarchy and their individual duties remains hidden from us. Thus, it is possible that the Nine Choir Tradition might be accurate overall minus the possibility that the Archangels could outrank the Seraphim and might lead the entire Angelic Host. Since we also established in the last section that it is right to refer to all Nine Choirs as angels and not just the office of the last choir, it could be fitting that the Arch-angels could be a rank that designates superiority over not just the last choir, but the other seven choirs as well. This would also logically explain why there are only seven Archangels while there are an innumerable amount of angelic beings within the other eight choirs. It is important to remember that this is only speculation though.

The second possibility is that the Nine Choir Tradition is accurate and that the Archangels are the eight choir in rank. If this is so, then it could be that since we know from Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition that Michael was the one who led the Angelic Host in the war against Lucifer and his fallen angels when they rebelled against God, it is possible to conclude that Michael was of a much lower rank than Lucifer, but because of his zeal for God in defending God's honor and authority, all the Angelic Host that remained loyal to God flocked under Michael's zealous defense of the Lord and, as a reward for Michael's love and valor, God elevated Michael to be the Prince/Leader of the entire Angelic Host under His Authority. If this were true, then this would also indicate that Lucifer's pride was even more greatly crushed since he was defeated by an angel of such lower rank than him. It is important to remember that this too is only speculation though.

Whatever the explanation might be, it is quite clear that Michael has always been revered as being the greatest of all of the angels according to Christian and pre-Christian Jewish sources. Thus, no matter what the exact scenario might have been, Michael is indeed the Prince of the Heavenly Hosts, which is not just an honorific title but one with real authority in the angelic hierarchy.

Michael also plays a role in human history in interactions with the Saints.

SAINT MICHAEL AND THE PLAGUE OF ROME – During the 590s, there was a great plague in the city of Rome that took many lives. Pope St. Gregory the Great led a procession of prayer through the city streets pleading with God to end the plague. When they reached the tomb of Emperor Hadrian, Pope Gregory saw a vision in which Michael stood atop of the tomb sheathing his sword, which was taken as a sign that what the Pope and those who joined him in prayer had done was pleasing to God. The plague came to an end shortly afterwards.

SAINT JOAN OF ARC – St. Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–1431) was a very young woman who led the French forces in numerous military battles against the English during the Hundred Years War, which was actually a series of wars between these two nations that lasted from 1337 to 1453. She was seen to be a gift from God used by Him to encourage the French that He favored them in the war. She received numerous visions from many Saints, among whom was Saint Michael.

OUR LADY OF FATIMA – In 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three children in Fatima Portugal: Lúcia Santos and her cousins Jacinta and Francisco Marto. Michael appeared to them as well and brought them Holy Communion, giving the Sacred Host to Lucia and the Precious Blood to Jacinta and Francisco.

POPE LEO XIII – Pope Leo XIII, who reigned during the later half of the 19th Century, had a vision of Satan and composed the Prayer to St. Michael as a result.

The Pope's experience involving the devil is said to have happened in the following way: While consulting with a number of Cardinals in the private Vatican chapel on October 13, 1884, he happened to pass before the altar, where he stopped suddenly and seemed to lose all awareness of his surroundings. His slender face grew pale, his eyes stared in horror, and he stood motionless for several minutes until those around him thought he was going to die. His physician rushed to his side, but in a moment or two the Pope recovered and almost painfully exclaimed, "Oh! What terrifying words I have heard." It is said that after the Pope recovered, he retired to his office, where he composed the famous prayer to the Archangel Michael:

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

After a time, Pope Leo XIII confided what he had heard: According to the report of his vision, the devil, in a guttural voice, had boasted to God that he could destroy the Church if he were given more time and more power. He then asked God for 75 years, then 100 years. His request was granted by God, with an understanding that there would be a penalty when he failed. The Pope was so worried about this experience that the prayer he composed was ordered by him to be said after all low Masses around the world. The prayer was recited as ordered, and was preceded by three Hail Marys. The recitation of these prayers after Mass was discontinued in most parishes after Vatican II when the traditional Latin Mass was replaced in 1970. However, on October 3, 1984—100 years minus 10 days after Pope Leo XII heard the devil ask for 100 years with which to attack the Church—Pope John Paul II issued an "indult by whereby priests and faithful... may be able to celebrate Mass by using the Roman Missal according to the 1962 edition." Thanks to this indult, the St. Michael prayer is still recited after Mass whenever the traditional Latin Mass is offered.

(Joan Carroll Cruz, Angels & Devils, Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1999, pages 289-290)

SAINT GABRIEL

Gabriel's name has many meanings: "Strength of God," "Hero of God," and "God has shown Himself Mightily". These variations can be summed up in one definition, "God is My Strength". Gabriel is God's holy messenger and traditionally he has been revered as the Archangel of Wisdom, of Revelation, of Prophecy, and of Visions

Gabriel has an important role Sacred Scripture: Gabriel appeared to the Prophet Daniel to explain a vision from God (Daniel 8); he appeared to the

priest Zacharias to announce that he would have a son, John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus (Luke 1); and he appeared to the Virgin Mary in the Annunciation (Luke 1). Tradition indicates that Gabriel was also the angel who appeared to St. Joseph in his dreams (Matthew 1 and 2) and that he was the Guardian Angel of Jesus and the Holy Family. In addition, some sources say that right before the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed body and soul into Heaven, Jesus sent Gabriel to His Mother to inform her what was to happen just as He sent Gabriel to her at the Annunciation (*St. Maximus the Confessor – THE LIFE OF THE VIRGIN, Ch. 8, Paragraph 103*). Gabriel also appears in many apocryphal Jewish and Christian sources.

SAINT RAPHAEL

Raphael in Sacred Scripture – Raphael played a pivotal role in the Book of Tobit (a book removed from the Biblical canon in Protestantism) as he helped Tobias the son of Tobit on his journey.

Raphael also appears in many apocryphal Jewish and Christian sources, such as the Book of Enoch.

Raphael's name means, "Healing Power of God". Traditionally, due to the meaning of his name, he is revered as the Archangel of Healing. Due to this, he might be alluded to in John 5:2-4 (which are passages not included in all Bibles):

Now there is at Jerusalem a pond, called Probatice, which in Hebrew is named Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick, of blind, of lame, of withered; waiting for the moving of the water. And an angel of the Lord descended at certain times into the pond; and the water was moved. And he that went down first into the pond after the motion of the water, was made whole, of whatsoever infirmity he lay under. (Douay-Rheims)

URIEL

Uriel's name means, "Fire of God." Traditionally he has been revered as the Archangel of Repentance and of the Damned and some apocryphal sources claim that he is God's regent over Sheol/Hades (i.e. Hell).

Although Uriel cannot be found in Scripture, his name has frequently been a part of tradition and he has an important role in many apocryphal texts, such as the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Peter, and 2 Baruch. Although these texts are now considered apocryphal, various Jewish scholars and Christian theologians during the early centuries of the Church did believe that these texts had some credibility and Uriel was indeed venerated as an Archangel by the Church until the Council of Rome in 745. At that Council, Uriel and the names of many other angels and Archangels were removed from the official list (i.e. canon) of angels to be venerated to deter the growing trend of angel worship that was

leading down the road to heresy. The list of angels that are worth venerating became confined down to only the three aforementioned Archangels.

Nevertheless, Uriel continued to remain a part of Christian tradition and Uriel has always been revered as an Archangel along with Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael and the Catholic Dutch playwright Joost Van Den Vondel (*LUCIFER*, published in 1654) and the Protestant English poet John Milton (*PARADISE LOST*, published in 1667) both incorporated all four of these Archangels in the telling of their versions of this story about the fall of Lucifer. And contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church continue to venerate Uriel as an Archangel to this day. However, I have found that due to historical and cultural traditions, many Catholics still do pray to Uriel and you find his statues and prayer cards in various Catholic bookstores.

THE OTHER THREE ARCHANGELS

These angels rarely appear in Christian literature in the West, but they do have an important role for Christians in the East, with variations to their names and how their names are spelled. These three Archangels appear as the Seven Archangels along with Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel in chapter 20 of the Book of Enoch, which was a Jewish apocryphal work before the time of Christ that was considered inspired Scripture by some of the Early Church for a time.

RAGUEL (as known as Sealtiel) – His name means, “Friend of God”. Traditionally he has been revered as the Archangel of Justice and Fairness. This Archangel can only be found in apocryphal sources.

ZERACHIEL (also known as Saraqael, Barachiel, or Sariel) – His name means, “God’s Command”. Traditionally he has been revered as the Archangel of God’s Judgment. This Archangel can only be found in apocryphal sources.

REMIEL (also known as Jerahmeel, Jehudiel, or Jeremiel) – His name has various meanings: “Thunder of God”, “Mercy of God”, and “Compassion of God”.

Traditionally he has been revered as the Archangel of Hope and Faith. This Archangel can only be found in apocryphal sources.

THE SEVEN ARCHANGELS AND THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

There is a theological and devotional tradition that the Seven Archangels are also patrons of the Seven Sacraments of the Church.

This is not necessarily doctrine, but it is a tradition worth mentioning.

According to one tradition: Michael is the Patron of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Gabriel is the Patron of the Sacrament of Baptism, Raphael is the Patron of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Uriel is the Patron of the Sacrament of Confirmation, Raguel is the Patron of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, Zerachiel is the Patron of the Sacrament of Matrimony and Remiel Patron of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

These traditions vary. Sometimes Gabriel is associated with the Sacrament of Matrimony due to the tradition that he was the Guardian Angel of the Holy Family; however, sometimes Gabriel is also associated with the Sacrament of Confirmation since he was present at the Annunciation when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, which caused the Incarnation of Christ to occur. Sometimes Raphael is associated with the Sacrament of Matrimony due to his influence of the marriage in the story of Tobit; however, sometimes Raphael is also associated with the Sacrament of Reconciliation or with the Anointing of the Sick due to his name meaning healing power of God.

This concept is not doctrine, but it is worth reflecting upon. The Sacraments do not come from the Archangels, for the Sacraments only come from Christ, but the Archangels can inspire us to reflect upon the Sacraments with greater reverence.

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHANGELS IN OUR LIVES

All of us have Guardian Angels. According to Paragraph 336 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.

There is a Scriptural basis for this as well:

Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. (Psalm 91:9-12)

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven... See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven THEIR ANGELS always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:1-4, 10)

Our Guardian Angels love us and do everything within God's Will to protect us from harm. Sometimes though we reject God's protection, and by consequence theirs, when we reject God and we have to deal with the consequences of our sins when we do not repent. Our Guardian Angels, along with the Archangels and the other Angels, also intercede for us in prayer (Tobit 12:12, Revelation 5:8 and 8:3).

Through intercession, even the Seven Archangels can come to our aid and we are encouraged to ask for their intercession and guidance. Prayer to the Angels and the Saints must never be confused with worshiping of them. This is a mistake that Protestant Christians often make because prayer for them is only a form of worship in their minds. For Catholics and Orthodox Christians, prayer to the Angels and the Saints is only in asking for their intercession to God (as we ask any other believer here to also pray for us), for their protection by means of the Grace of God working through them, and for guidance as we strive to emulate their examples. **WORSHIP OF THE ANGELS AND THE SAINTS IS FORBIDDEN BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH!** Those who accuse us of worshipping the Angels and the Saints do not understand this and accuse us of idolatry and being polytheistic (the belief in many deities) rather than monotheistic (the belief in only one God).

We need to be very careful of this because there are superstitious Catholics who do fall into this trap that Protestants accuse us of. Nevertheless, we should develop personal devotions to the Angels and Saints, especially the Archangels. We should ask for their intercession and for their aid in times of trial and of jubilee. We should also strive to emulate their example and service to God.

Due to the length of explaining why the Angels are loyal to God and how we ought to emulate their example, this subject will be explored in another essay.