

The Answer to Michael's Name

5 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"? 6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." 7 And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." 8 But to the Son *He* says: "Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your Kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." 10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:5-14)

People are fascinated by angels. People are fascinated by the idea of guardian angels, angels that intervene in human affairs, angels that protect. Books and movies about angels become best-sellers and box-office hits. Hollywood has capitalised on the angel fever. The hit TV series *Touched by an Angel*, was followed by movies like *Michael*, where Michael the archangel is pictured as a sinner living among us, and likewise *Lucifer*, where Lucifer lives among us as a naughty and harmless man, movies like *Legion* and the spinoff series *Dominion* take people's fascination with angels and commercialise it for entertainment.

In fact, some of the superhero stories are very similar to angel mythologies: beings of great power who protect humans, or fight off evil.

You can today purchase guides to help you hear from your angel, receive guidance and comfort from your angel, learn your angel's number, and buy any number of New Age paraphernalia depicting angels to keep as good luck.

Humans are always looking for go-betweens who stand between us and God, and angels are often what people turn to. If an angel is on your side, then it must be that God is on your side. In African Traditional Religion, the ancestors function much like angels. They are now spirits, who can mediate between you and God, and can bring either good fortune or bad fortune, protecting and blessing and prospering you, or cursing, harming, and impoverishing you.

This is not a new phenomenon. Paul had to warn the Colossian church against angel worship: 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels,

And a deep veneration of angels was also present in the Jewish religion of the first century. Although the Bible only reveals the names of two holy angels, Michael and Gabriel, rabbinic tradition had developed that into many more, claiming that there were other archangels named Uriel, Raphael. Rabbinic literature afterwards claimed all kinds of named angels. In fact, I counted at least 65 named angels, either coming from the scribal period before Christ, or the rabbinic period after him. Maimonides, the 12th century rabbi, went on to classify a hierarchy of 10 levels of angels.

With this high view of angels, you can understand why the writer to the Hebrews wanted to begin his case for Jesus being the true mediator between God and man by comparing Him to angels. The writer doesn't begin with the lowest comparison and work his way up, he begins at the very top, comparing what God says about angels to what He says about His Son. Of all beings, angels are the most likely beings that humans will turn to for mediation between them and God. But the writer wants us to know that God has spoken to us in these last days in final forms, by His Son, not by angels.

Now perhaps you are not about to try to contact your angel guide, or start praying to angels. But at some point you will meet someone who thinks that an angel can be a messiah, or that the Messiah is

an angel. You will come across teaching encouraging you to think of angels as mediators, or even sub-mediators, and you will meet people who will tell you that Jesus is an angel, or Michael's brother. As Christians who hold to the Gospel, we need to know the difference between Christ and the angels. We need to know that an angel cannot save you, and a Christ who is a creature cannot save you.

So what he does in this section is to assemble seven quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures, which as it were, give us God's statements regarding His Son, and God's statements regarding angels. We can summarise them as three contrasts between Jesus and the angels.

I. Jesus is the Son to be Worshipped

5 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"? (Heb. 1:5-6)

He opens with a rhetorical question. Which angel ever was called by God, "My Son"? Yes, angels are sometimes collectively called 'the sons of God' in the book of Job, and in Genesis. But that is meant in a creaturely sense, that the angels are the creation of God. In a similar way, Adam is called a son of God, and Paul says that all humans are in this sense, the offspring of God.

But that is not what the writer means here. He is asking, which angel did God ever address as "My Son"? The implied answer is, not one, ever. But conversely, God has used those very words with Jesus.

He quotes here from Psalm 2:7, where David speaks of his own coronation, but then prophetically speaks of his own descendant the Messiah. He then follows that up with something God said to David about Solomon, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:14, and 1 Chronicles 17:13. There God told David that He would as it were adopt Solomon, if Solomon obeyed Him.

The writer takes these two texts, and sees that they were prophetically spoken of Jesus.

Now this word "begotten" causes a lot of confusion and trouble. What is meant, when God says of Him, "this day I have begotten you"?

Begotten, when applied to the Son, does not mean beginning. It means "beginning" when applied to human fathers and human sons. But remember we do not take the human relationship and read it back into God. We take what we know of God and derive from it similarities and differences for us.

So what does it mean that the Son of God is begotten? In Scriptures such as John 3:16, *only begotten* is the Greek *monogenes*, which carries the idea of the unique, one and only Son. The Son who alone is of the Father. *This is away of defining the relationship, not the origin.* Theologians speak of the eternal generation of the Son. What that means is that in God, the Son has always been as a Son to the Father, and the Father has always been as a Father to the Son. It didn't begin at some point, because that would then be a creation. From eternity, where there is no beginning to the beginning, the Son has related to the Father as a Son, and the Father has related to the Son as a Father, and proceeding from their love and relationship has eternally been a third Person, the Spirit.

But this eternal Son entered human history as a man, and there were moments when the Father particularly, and publicly owned the Man Christ Jesus, as His Son. He made the unique Father-Son relationship publicly known. It could be said on any of those days, that the eternally begotten Son was being begotten in time-space before men. At the baptism of Jesus, a voice was heard saying This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17). At the Transfiguration, a voice was heard, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matt. 17:5)

And in fact, Paul, preaching in a synagogue in Antioch, applies Psalm 2 not to the birth of Christ,

but to His resurrection: 33 "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.' (Acts 13:33)
That's almost exactly what Paul wrote in Romans 1:4 4 *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (Rom. 1:4)

The Son's begottenness is not His creation or His beginning, it is His unique relationship to the Father as the Son. Far from saying He is less than God, begotten says the opposite. It says, "of whom else has God publicly said, "That is My Son." A proud father will announce to a crowd of spectators, "That's my boy!"

So the writer asks us, to which angel, at any time, did God say, "That's my Son."

What do you do with the Son? Here's his third Scripture quotation:

6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

You worship Him. Firstborn is a term parallel to Son. A Son carries the nature of the Father. The firstborn is eldest in the family, and so is the heir. He will receive the inheritance, He will assume the leadership of the family when the father passes on. Jesus is called the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15), the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18 and Rev 1:5) and the firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:29). Now with each of these terms, Son, begotten, and firstborn, we immediately think of origin, birth, and physical generation, but the Bible wants us to think in terms of rank, status, and nature.

So the writer quotes the Greek version of the Old Testament Deuteronomy 32:43. Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; (Deut. 32:43)LXX

Psa 97:7 Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, Who boast of idols. Worship Him, all you gods.

Now why this is important is because you recall the two occasions when the apostle John wanted to fall down and worship the angel who was giving Him the vision.

10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "*See that you do not do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev. 19:10)

8 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9 Then he said to me, "*See that you do not do that.* For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." (Rev. 22:8-9)

Now this is what angels say when an apostle tries to worship them. If Jesus is just one more spiritual creature, what business do the angels have worshipping Him?

The only explanation is if Jesus is the Son: the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person, God of God, begotten, not created. The Son is to be worshipped, the angels are to do the worshipping.

Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified;
no angels in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends their burning eye

at mysteries so bright

Now if that's what the angels should do with Him, what should we do? We worship Him. We don't try to get guidance and direction from angels, we get it from God – the Son of God. We don't pray to angels, and ask them for protection, we get that from God – the Son of God. We don't sing or praise angels. We don't become caught up in fables about angels and demons fighting, we don't give our ears to stories about supposed power encounters between demons, and the conversations people had with them. All of this is ironically giving honour and attention and admiration where it really belongs to Christ.

The Son alone is to be worshipped as the image of the Father.

But the writer has a second contrast for us.

II. Jesus is the King to Be Served

7 And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." 8 But to the Son *He says*: "Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your Kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (Heb. 1:7-9)

Notice something interesting in the style of writing. Of the three times the writer refers to the nature and work of angels, he speaks of how God makes them a certain way, or commands them to do something. It's almost impersonal.

But of the five Scriptures, four are given in the form of personal, direct address. "You are" "Your throne" "You, Lord" "Sit at My right hand". This is the way you speak to someone of high rank and dignity. And that's the second great contrast here. The first contrast was between a Son and worshippers, and the second contrast is between a King and servants.

First, verse 7. For his fourth Scripture, he quotes Psalm 104:4 Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.

This is carefully chosen language. The writer could have selected from loads of Scriptures about angels, but he chooses the one that calls them messengers and ministers.

Remember that angels are creatures of great rank. Some of them are actually called by the terms *thrones, authorities, principalities, powers*, chief princes, *rulers*. In fact, Scripture even reveals that some angels belong to a counsel, a divine assembly, responsible for some kind of rulership of the universe.

Psalm 82:1 God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods. (Ps. 82:1)

Then *Micaiah* said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. (1 Ki. 22:19)

And from Scriptures like these, people could easily think that angels are kings, and Jesus is one of those great angels. But here the writer deliberately chooses a Scripture in which the two terms for these mighty beings is *angels*, which literally means messengers, and *ministers*, which means public servants. Yes, they might be rulers, princes, authorities, in their own right, but before the Son, they serve. They are messengers. They are ministers.

Here's the contrast: 8 But to the Son *He says*: "Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your Kingdom.

The fifth Scripture he quotes is a Messianic psalm, Psalm 45. It pictures the King on his wedding day, but in its fullest form, it pictures Messiah's coronation and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Now what is amazing is that the author attributes these words to God the Father, and the object of these words as God the Son. Here, the Son is called God. There are only a few times in the New Testament when Jesus is directly called God, but this is one of them.

Joh 20:28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Rom 9:5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

1Ti 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

Tit 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

He is God on the throne. His throne is eternal, His throne is righteous with a scepter of righteousness to rule the kingdom.

You might be surprised to learn that the angels are sometimes called gods, plural. 7 Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, Who boast of idols. Worship Him, all *you* gods. (Ps. 97:7)

But which of the angels is called God, and is said to have a sceptre, and is said to have a kingdom? Which of them has an eternal throne? Angels have such high rank, but the writer deliberately makes them seem like servants next to this One.

Now the writer here in verses 8 and 9 does more than simply quote the Scripture which says Messiah has a throne. He goes on to quote something about the actions of Messiah that have earned Him this throne.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

This is something you will keep seeing in Hebrews. William MacDonald makes this helpful distinction for us: Jesus has both an inherent superiority and an acquired superiority. He is superior as God. But then in His Incarnation, and obedience and victory, He also has an acquired, earned superiority. Jesus was King as being fully God. But Jesus as Man chose to love righteousness and hate lawlessness, so He has now been coronated as the God-Man King. We see that in verse 13.

But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? (Heb. 1:13)

No angel is the Prince-Heir of all that belongs to God the Father. No angel has received the words of Psalm 110:1: Sit at My right, until I make Your enemies Your footstool? No angel had that inherently, and no angel took on flesh, suffered, obeyed, overcame temptation, died and rose again.

No, however great angels may be, they serve and minister to this person. Think about how the angels are seen in the Gospels.

Angels announced his birth to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds. We read after his temptation by Satan 11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. (Matt. 4:11).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to Peter, 53 "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? (Matt. 26:53)

While he prayed, 43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. (Lk. 22:43)

When He rose, angels rolled the stone away from the Tomb, not to let Him out, but to let the witnesses in. Angels appeared to the women. Angels appeared after the ascension. Angels will accompany His return, and be part of the judgement. Because Jesus is the King to be served.

If beings of such rank and power serve Christ, whom should we serve? Should we serve anyone else

that is claimed as a mediator? Should we present offerings to saints? Should we bring gifts to Mary? Should we slaughter animals to the amadlozi to get them on our side? All spirit beings: angelic and human, are not kings to be served. They themselves are servants. There is one God-Man on the throne.

Unique Son to be worshipped. Royal King to be served. The writer has a third category for us:

III. Jesus is the Eternal Creator to be Reverenced

10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail.

The writer now does something very unusual. His seventh quote is from a psalm that wasn't regarded as Messianic – Psalm 102. There the anonymous writer spoke of his own trials, and contrasted them with Yahweh's eternal rule and power. The writer of Hebrews now puts these words in the mouth of the Spirit of God, and ascribes them to Messiah.

Jesus is not only the unique Son, not only the royal King, but He is the eternal Creator. He laid the foundation of the Earth, and made the heavens. That's a way of saying, you created ex nihilo. You did not merely fashion what you found already made, you made all that exists out of nothing.

Now if there's one thing that we know is true of angels is that they are creations of God. The Bible doesn't specify when they were created. Some think they were created on day four, when the sun, moon and stars were made, since the angels are often related to the stars in Scripture. Some think they were created on day one, when God created light, or perhaps on day one when God made the heavens and the Earth. Job 38:7 describes the angels rejoicing when the Earth's foundation was laid, 4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding... 6 To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4,6 -7)

But we know they were created. And we mentioned last week Colossians 1:16, where Jesus is said to be the creator of angels.

16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. (Col. 1:16)

While creation will endure change, God the Son remains unchanging, undecaying, unaging, unending.

You might admire angels, but they each had a beginning. You might be in awe of their power and might, but each of them has an age. But the Son has no age, for there is no year to begin counting when He began. He is El Olam – God of eternity, the everlasting God.

By contrast, verse 14:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

The angels are spirit beings that serve. They are serving being sent. They are sent to serve believers, who will one day inherit all the future glories of salvation. As we are going to find out later in Hebrews, there is only one creature in the universe given a higher rank than the angels: and that's man. Man in his fallen and unredeemed state is lower in rank. But man in his glorified, united with Christ state will be higher in rank, and will judge angels. And right now, these beings are tasked to serve the Bride of Christ.

Worthy of respect, yes. Worthy of our glad gratitude, yes. But the fear of the Lord, the reverential awe, belongs to the Ancient of Days, and His Son.

*cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
which wert and art and evermore shalt be.*

And this brings us to perhaps the brilliant way that God has taught us this in names. In the Bible, only two of the unfallen angels are named. One is Gabriel, whose name means God is my strength. Michael is the other, and it seems that Michael is the chief angel. He is called the archangel in Jude 1:9, the great prince in Daniel 12:1 and in Revelation 12:7 we read, “ 7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, (Rev. 12:7)

It seems Michael, at this time, stands at the top of created beings. But what does Michael's name mean? Michael means, “Who is like God?” His name a rhetorical question: who among us, angels is like God? The answer: No one. Not one of us angels would God claim as His own unique Son. Not one of us angels would God invite to sit on His right hand, the place of glory and honour. Not one of us angels is El Olam – the everlasting God from eternity.

The name of the greatest angel is both a rhetorical question, and also a question with an answer. Who is like God? Jesus is. He is the Son. He is the King. He is the Creator.

*Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight
And all the twinkling starry host
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer
Than all the angels heaven can boast.*