



(Painting of our parish's Grotto of St. Michael, the Archangel courtesy of Kevin Finn, our maintenance staff member)

Saint Michael, the Archangel is an archangel and the warrior of God in all 3 of the current-day monolithic (belief in one God) religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. St. Michael is not a human being or bound to a human figure or state. He is a celestial being, specifically an archangel, and is considered a powerful angel. The earliest surviving mentions of his name are in third- and second-century B.C. Jewish writings, often, but not always apocalyptic (end-of-times oriented), where he is the Chief of the Angels and Archangels, and he is the angelic guardian prince of Israel, who is responsible for the care of the people of Israel. Christianity conserved nearly all the Jewish traditions concerning him, and he is mentioned explicitly in the Book of Revelation 12:7–12, where he does battle with Satan, and in the Epistle of Jude, where the archangel and the devil dispute over the body of Moses.

מִיכָאֵל

The name Michael in Hebrew

According to Jewish rabbinic tradition, Michael acted as the advocate of Israel, and sometimes had to fight with the princes of the other nations (Daniel 10:13) and particularly with the angel Samael, Israel's accuser. In some Jewish mystical traditions and writings, Samael is depicted as a powerful angel, sometimes associated with evil or the "left hand of God," and is often presented as a rival or adversary of Archangel Michael. While Michael is revered as a protector and leader of the heavenly host\*, Samael is portrayed as a tempter, accuser, and even the angel of death. Their relationship is often depicted as a near-constant conflict, with Michael acting as a defender of humanity against Samael's influence.

[\* The term "heavenly host" in religious contexts generally refers to the multitude of angels who serve God. It signifies a vast army or assembly of celestial beings, often described as God's divine army or attendants.]

The understanding that Michael was the advocate of the Jews became so prevalent that despite rabbinical (rabbis) prohibition against Jews appealing in prayer to angels as intermediaries or intercessors between God and his people, he still held an impressive place in the Jewish liturgy.

The rabbis declared that Michael entered into his role of defender at the time of the Old Testament biblical patriarchs. Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob said he rescued Abraham from the furnace into which he had been thrown by Nimrod (Midrash\* Genesis Rabbah 38:11 xlv. 16). Some say he was the "one that had escaped" (Genesis 14:13), who told Abraham that Lot had been taken captive (Genesis 14:14) (Midrash Pirke R. El.), and who protected Sarah from defilement by Abimelech (Genesis 20:5-7).

[\* A Jewish midrash is a method of interpreting the Tanakh# (Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament)) that involves exploring its deeper meanings and filling in gaps in the text.

# The Tanakh is an acronym derived from the names of its three main sections: the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings). The Tanakh encompasses Jewish history, law, poetry, wisdom literature, and theology. ]

Michael prevented Isaac from sacrifice by his father by substituting a ram in his place (Genesis 22). He saved Jacob, while yet in his mother's womb, from death by Samael (Genesis 25:23). He later prevented Laban from harming Jacob (Genesis 31) (*Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer*, xxxvi).

The Jewish midrash *Exodus Rabbah* holds that Michael exercised his function of advocate of Israel at the time of the Exodus and destroyed Sennacherib's army (2 Kings 19:35 and Isaiah 37:3). This refers to the biblical account where an angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem.

He is mentioned again in the last chapters of the Book of Daniel, a Jewish apocalyptic writing composed in the second century B.C., in which a man clothed in linen (never identified, but matching a description given to the writer John in the Book of Revelation regarding the Alpha and Omega) tells Daniel that he and "Michael, your prince" are engaged in a battle with the "prince of Persia", after which, at the end-time, "Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise" (Daniel 10:5-14).

In the traditions of the Dead Sea Qumran Jewish Essene community, Michael defended or lead the people of God in the eschatological (i.e., end-time) battle. In other writings, he is responsible for the care of Israel (and he may be the "one like a son of man" mentioned in Daniel 7:13–14) and the commander of the heavenly armies; he is Israel's advocate contesting Satan's claim to the body of Moses (Jude 1:9); he intercedes between God and humanity; and he accompanies the souls of the righteous dead to Paradise.

[Psychopomps act as guides and facilitators, ensuring a safe passage for souls to their proper destination in the afterlife. Michael and the guardian angels work together to escort the souls of those who are saved to heaven immediately after they pass away.]



Hanukkah Menorah



Holy Archangel Candles

The seven archangels (or four, as early traditions differ, however, always including Michael) were associated with the branches of the menorah, the sacred seven-branched lampstand in the Jewish Temple, as the seven spirits before the throne of God. This is reflected in the Book of Revelation 4:5-8 (*“From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God”*).

Michael is mentioned explicitly in Revelation 12:7–12, where he does battle with Satan, so that he no longer has access to God as accuser (his formal role in the Old Testament). The fall of Satan at the coming of Jesus marks the separation of the New Testament from Judaism. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus tells Peter that Satan has asked God for permission to “sift” the disciples, the goal being to accuse them and seek to actively challenge and weaken their faith, but the accusation is opposed by Jesus.

Michael is also mentioned by name in the Epistle of Jude, which is an impassioned plea for the believers to engage in battle against the incursion of the error. In verses 9–10, the author denounces the heretics by contrasting them with Archangel Michael, who, in disputing with Satan over the body of Moses, *“did not presume to pronounce the verdict of 'slander' but said, 'The LORD rebuke you!' ”*

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Throughout Christian history, St. Michael, the Archangel statues have been popular depictions of the archangel, often portrayed as a warrior battling against evil, particularly Satan. These statues are common in Christian contexts, particularly in Catholic churches and homes, and are often used as objects of devotion and protection.

Key Aspects of St. Michael, the Archangel Statues:

- **Depiction:** The most common depiction shows St. Michael in armor, holding a sword or spear, and standing upon and over a defeated Satan (often in the form of a dragon, serpent, or a grotesque satanic figure); representing the triumph of good over evil associated with the humanity’s promised hope of salvation.
- **General Physical Appearance:** In that St. Michael is a fighting, warrior Archangel against Satan and his minions, he rightly takes on a more rough, battled and war-torn image – for our human imagination and reference—unlike, the more spotless, gentle, and rosy-cheeked baby cherub angels.

- **Materials:** They can be made from various materials, including fiberglass, concrete, resin, bronze, and even ivory.
- **Symbolism:** St. Michael is a powerful symbol of good triumphing over evil, and these statues are often seen as symbols of protection and strength against the Evil One.

Saint Michael may often be depicted carrying a set of two scales – as he weighs the souls of the blessed and the justly condemned in images related to the Last Judgment at the End of Time or the End of Day.

- **Uses:** They are commonly found in churches, chapels, and homes, serving as objects of devotion and reminders of St. Michael's role as a protector of humanity.
- **Patron Saint:** St. Michael is the patron saint of soldiers, police officers, and those in dangerous professions, and his statues are sometimes given as gifts to those in these professions.
- **Customization:** Some statues are hand-painted and feature intricate details, as is our statue for the parish's Grotto to St. Michael, the Archangel.

In Catholic teachings, Saint Michael has four main roles or duties given him by God. His first role is the leader of the Army of God and the leader of the celestial forces in triumphing over the powers of Satan and Hell. He is viewed as the angelic model for the virtues of the “spiritual warrior”, his conflict with evil taken as “the battle within”.

The second and third roles of Michael in Catholic teachings deal with death. In his *second role*, he is the angel of after-death, carrying the souls of Christians to Heaven. Catholic prayers often reference this role of Michael. In his *third role*, he weighs souls on his perfectly balanced scales, a common object he holds in many of the museum-style works of art (portraits, statues, etc.).

In his fourth role, Saint Michael, the special patron of the Chosen People in the Old Testament, is also Guardian of the Church in the New Testament. Saint Michael was revered by the military orders of knights during the Middle Ages. The names of villages around the Bay of Biscay reflect that history. Moreover, doubtless for the same motive, he was considered the patron saint of a number of cities and countries (such as Brussels, Belgium; Kyiv, Ukraine; etc.)

Catholic tradition includes such elements in the *Prayer to Saint Michael*, which specifically asks the Archangel to “defend” the faithful from evil and the Evil One. Additionally, the *Chaplet of Saint Michael* consists of nine salutations, one for each of the nine choirs of angels.

In the churches of the Catholic Eastern Orthodox, they accord St. Michael, the Archangel, the title *Archistrategos*, or “Supreme Commander of the Heavenly Hosts”. Much like the Latin Rite Catholics, Eastern Orthodox pray to their guardian angels and above all, to Michael and Gabriel.

In closing, even in Islam, Michael, known as *Mikail*, is one of the prominent angels, often mentioned alongside Gabriel in the Qur'an. While not explicitly called an "archangel", in the Quran, *Mikail* is recognized as a high-ranking angel responsible for sustenance and natural phenomena, like rain. He is not typically portrayed as a warrior angel, unlike in some Christian traditions, although there are some mentions of him aiding Muslims in battle. In Islam, the four archangels, also known as the four principal angels, are Jibra'il (Gabriel), Mikail (Michael), Israfil (Raphael), and Azrael (the Angel of Death).