

Is 'Heaven is for Real' for real?  
An Orthodox Reflection on Near-Death Experiences: Week Four

*What are fallen angels like?*

“Lucifer” means “bringer of dawn,” or “morning star”

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” - Luke 10:18

“He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” - John 8:44

“Satan” means “the opposer,” or “the accuser”

The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)...in the original Greek, “deliver us from evil” is actually “deliver us from *the evil one*.”

Antichrist means instead of Christ NOT the opposite of Christ

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*The Nature of Divine Judgment...  
Morality vs. Ontology / Behavior vs. Being*

Some references to “Judgment” in Scripture:

John 3:17	1 Timothy 2:3-4	2 Peter 3:9	John 3:19-20
John 12:46-50	Luke 12:49	2 Peter 3:10-14	2 Peter 3:7
Hebrews 12:29	Hebrews 10:31	2 Thess. 1:6-10	Rev. 20:9-10
Rev. 22:1-5	John 17:3		

God demands our purity...	OR	God <u>is</u> purity
God asks us to behave...	OR	God <u>is</u> Love
God can’t stand darkness...	OR	God <u>is</u> Light
God expects everyone to be good...	OR	God <u>is</u> Goodness
God says we must be humble...	OR	God <u>is</u> Humility
God “justifies” us in His eyes...	OR	God <u>is</u> Holiness
God requests us to be self-sacrificial	OR	God <u>is</u> Self-emptying

*“The fire of hell is the love of God...” - St. Isaac the Syrian*

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*A Brief Summary of the Experience of Taxiotis*

Taxiotis was a soldier from Carthage. He spent his entire life in grievous sins, but finally repented, left the military service and lived a God-pleasing life.

While he was with his wife on his estate near the city, he committed adultery with the wife of his farm worker. Afterwards, he was bitten by a snake and died immediately.

Taxiotis was dead for six hours after which he arose. Then, on the fourth day, he spoke and related how and what kind of level of judgment he had passed through until he came to the level of judgment for adultery. There, he fell into the dark abode of demons from which he was led out by an angel who attested on his behalf and was sent back in the flesh to repent for his latest sin.

He repented for forty days, going from church to church, beating his head against the doors and thresholds, always crying and telling of the terrible sufferings which sinners undergo in the other world. He implored men not to sin but to repent for those sins already committed.

On the fortieth day, with rejoicing, Taxiotis took up habitation into the Kingdom of the Merciful God.

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### *St. Athanasius of the Kiev Caves (+1176)*

After this holy monk died, there was a delay of two days before his funeral took place. When the Abbot and brethren met in the presence of his body, God miraculously recalled him to life in order to exhort the monk to obedience, to fidelity to the tradition of the holy Fathers, to repentance, to tears, and to the highest virtue of all - unceasing prayer.

Upon the return of his soul to his body, they gathered around him and asked him: "How did you return to life? What did you see? What did you hear?" He would say nothing about it, being totally in horror at that which he had seen in the other world, and would only say: "Save yourselves!" When they pressured him to tell a little more of what he had seen in the other world after death, he replied: "Even if I should tell you, you would not believe me or listen to me." When they urged him yet further, however, he said among other things: "Repent every moment and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Most-pure Mother."

After that, St. Athanasius spent twelve years as an anchorite in a cave without speaking a word. He only broke his silence shortly before his death. His countenance was radiant with the uncreated light as he once more exhorted the assembled brethren to repentance. Then he fell asleep in peace.

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### *Hieroschemamonk Melchisedek*

Before Father Melchisedek had taken the great monastic schema, he had served in the monastery like all the other priests, and was known as Father Michael. He was a very skilled and hardworking carpenter in the churches as well as in the cells of our monastic brotherhood. Indeed, to this very day we have kept icon frames, lecterns, chairs, tables, chests of drawers, and all kinds of other furniture made personally by his hands. He used to work and work with incredible devotion, to the unalloyed joy of the abbots of the monastery, from the first crack of dawn till very late at night.

At one point he was blessed with a commission for a particularly large and important work of carpentry for our holy monastery. He worked several months straight, virtually never emerging from his workshop. And when he wasn't working, he felt himself to be slacking off. He worked so hard that when he finally finished the job, he was feeling ill, so ill that, according to eyewitness accounts, he fell down right then and there and - died.

Several monks rushed in upon hearing the alarmed shouts of these eyewitnesses. One of the monks who rushed in was Father John....Father Michael appeared to be showing no signs of life at all. All those who'd gathered around him bent their heads in sorrow over his corpse. But suddenly, Father John pronounced: "No, he is not dead. He will keep on living!"

And he began to pray. And suddenly the immobile carpenter of our monastery opened his eyes again and revived. However, everyone noticed that he appeared to be shaken to the very depths of his soul. Once he had come to a little bit, Father Michael began tell to us to summon the abbot

to him. Once the abbot arrived, the ailing monk with tears in his eyes begged him for permission to be allowed to take the vows to enter in the great monastic schema.

...What we did know in the monastery, however, was that, in those few minutes when Father Melchisedek was dead, he had a certain revelation after which he came back to life a completely different person....Therefore I and all my friends naturally wanted to learn about this mystery from Father Melchisedek himself. And so...when I finally gathered up the courage to first ask a question of the schema-monk, that was exactly what I asked him: what did he see over there in that land from which no traveler returns?

Upon hearing this question, Father Melchisedek stood silently for a long time by the Royal Gates of the altar, with his head cast down....But finally, in a voice that was very weak from hardly ever speaking, Father Melchisedek began to reply.

He said that he had suddenly seen himself standing in the midst of a giant green field. Then he had walked on through this field, continuing straight but not knowing where he was going, until his path was blocked by a gigantic moat. There, amidst thick mud and clumps of earth, he saw a multitude of icon frames, church lecterns, and metal overlays for icons. There he also saw crooked tables, broken chairs, and strange wardrobes. As he looked at them, he recognized his own carpentry work. He stood looking at his own work both recognizing it and yet utterly surprised by it - and suddenly he had the feeling that somebody was standing over his shoulder . . . He lifted up his eyes and saw that it was the Mother of God. She gazed with melancholy at all his work of many years. And then she spoke: "You're a monk . . . And all we wanted from you was just one thing, the main thing: repentance and prayer. Instead of that, you gave us this woodwork . . ."

The vision disappeared. The dead man opened his eyes and was once again back at the monastery.

After this event, Father Melchisedek was a completely changed man. The main focus of his life became exactly what the Holy Mother of God had mentioned to him - repentance and prayer. The fruits of his now exclusively spiritual labors were not delayed, revealing themselves in his deepest humility, his weeping over his past sins, his sincere love for all, and his complete and utter withdrawal from all affairs of this world, his absence from all human interference in his ascetic labors. Thereafter those fruits were also revealed in the effectiveness of his powerful prayers on behalf of others, and by his ability to foresee the future, something that was noticed by many of us.

...There was a period during my life in the monastery when I was inundated with an avalanche of undeserved and cruel (or so they seemed to me) trials. Sorely beset, I vowed to seek advice from the very strictest monk in the entire community, Father Melchisedek.

In answer to my knock on his door...Father Melchisedek emerged fully dressed in his monk's mantle and stole. I found him in a moment when he was performing his strict prayer rule.

I told him about my misfortunes and seemingly insoluble problems. Father Melchisedek listened to me silently, standing as ever with his head drooping down in melancholy. When I was finished, he lifted up his eyes to me and suddenly burst into tears, and wept most bitterly:

"My brother!" he cried out in inexpressible pain. "Why are you asking me for advice? I myself am perishing!"

This elder, this great, holy ascetic spiritual warrior who was standing in front of me and weeping with unrestrained grief, now was feeling himself to be in truth the worst and most sinful man on earth! With each moment he did so, I saw with ever-increasing clarity and joy that all the

ridiculous little problems of mine put together, indeed all of those matters that I had thought so insurmountable, were in fact not worth the least little thing!

Furthermore, at that very moment I suddenly felt that all of these insignificant problems had suddenly and completely vanished and had been lifted from my soul. I already had no need to ask any advice from this elder. He had already done everything he could for me. I bowed to him full of gratitude and left.

Everything on our earth - both the simple and complicated questions, both the little human problems and the challenges of finding the great path to God, all the secrets of the past, the present, and the future ages - all can be resolved only by such mysterious, ineffably beautiful and omnipotent humility. And even if we cannot understand its truth and meaning, and even if it seems for now that we are not ready for this mysterious and all-powerful humility, nonetheless, that humility by itself will reveal itself to us through those incredible persons who are capable of possessing it.

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### *Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos*

"So, then, the criterion is the fruits which are produced. If after a vision peace and calm prevail in the heart, it is an indication that it came from God, but if it creates commotion, it is a sign that it comes from the devil. The same thing happens with regard to the passion of pride. When a person becomes proud after such an experience, it is an indication that he is possessed by an evil energy, while the person inspired by the grace of God is humbled and usually says nothing. Therefore an experience is evaluated according to the person's subsequent life."

"According to the witness of holy men it is characteristically said that a person has a variety of experiences not only after his soul leaves his body, but also as the time approaches for his soul to depart. Since the person is living at the border point, all these states are justified. That is to say, he may see visions of holy men, divine light, and so forth, but also visions of demons who are trying to make him more frightened and seize him."

"The fear in the face of the mystery of death lies in the fact that a new life is beginning for the person. And of course this is also connected with the eternal state of his soul and body. According to St. Theognistos, the hour of death is a new birth, when the person, particularly a just person, comes out from some dark, second maternal womb and is entering the immaterial and radiant realm. Therefore he advises the person to be joyful, since he is being carried through death towards the fulfillment of his hopes. But along with that, he advises him to be watchful 'because of the ungodly demons that surround us,' which try up to the last moment to injure us. Thus the person should be joyful because he is being led to the enjoyment of eternal blessings, but should also be sober and watchful because of the uncertainty of what is to come, since he is so subject to change."

### *Reverend Billy Graham*

"At the point of death the spirit departs from the body and moves through the atmosphere. But the Scripture teaches us that the devil lurks there. He is 'the prince of the powers of the air' (Eph. 2:2). If the eyes of our understanding were opened, one would probably see the air filled with demons, the enemies of Christ. If Satan could hinder the angel of Daniel for three weeks on his mission to earth, we can imagine the opposition a Christian may encounter at death....The moment of death is Satan's final opportunity to attack the true believer; but God has sent His angels to guard us at this time."