

**A RESPONSE TO MARVIN ROSENTHAL'S  
INTERPRETATION OF I THESSALONIANS 3:13**

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**I THESSALONIANS 3:13**

"so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (NKJV).

**HIS CLAIM**

In the March/April 1997 issue of Zion's Fire, Marvin Rosenthal wrote a feature article entitled "The Church's Trojan Horse-The Pretribulation Rapture Theory." In that article, he commented on the meaning of "saints" in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. He confidently asserted:

"Saints" in this verse is an unfortunate and inappropriate translation. "Saints" in this verse does not refer to believers, The Greek word *hagios* should be translated "holy ones" and is a reference to angelic beings. These angelic beings will accompany Christ at His coming (parousia) (cf. Mt. 25:31; 2 Th. 1:7-8; Rev. 19:14). In no sense, then, can 1 Thessalonians 3:13 be used to support the teaching that the Lord comes for the Church at the beginning of the seventieth week and then with the church at its end, as some contend (p.5).

In the July/August 1997 issue of Zion's Fire, he repeated this interpretation in an article entitled "He is Coming with all His Saints" (p.5).

**HIS PROOFS**

**1. The meaning of the word "saint"**

He pointed out that **hagios** can be translated as "holy ones." He admitted that every true believer is a saint. He wrote: "It is conspicuously clear that the New Testament repeatedly uses the Greek word **hagios** ("saint") as a designation for all true believers (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 16:1; Eph. 1:1)"(p.6).

**2. The meaning of the word "saint" in the Old Testament.**

He pointed out that the Hebrew word for "holy" (*kadosh*) is used of God, of believers, and "sometimes used of angelic beings" (p.7). He quoted both Ryrie and Walvoord in support of an angelic meaning (p.7)

He then demonstrated that the Septuagint used the word "angels" in passages where the Hebrew text had "holy ones". He referred to Zechariah 14:5 where the Septuagint used "angels" in place of the Hebrew "saints." (p.7). He then concluded: "The expression "and all the saints" {Zech. 14:5} appears to be a parallel of Paul's statement to the Thessalonians, "with all his saints" (1 Th. 3:13). (p.7).

He also asserted that the Dead Sea Scrolls used the phrase "holy ones" as a designation of angels (p.7).

He then concluded: "In the light of these facts, it would be most natural for the New Testament writers to speak of angels as "holy ones" (hagios). (p.7)

### **3. An analogy with the word "Elect"**

He pointed out that the verbal adjective "elect" is used of angels (1 Tim. 5:21), of Christ, and of believers. He concluded: "In exactly the same way, the Greek word hagios, translated "holyones" or "saints," is used to refer to angels or the redeemed. Only the context can tell which is in view" (p.8).

### **4. The context of the word "saint" in 1 Thessalonians 3:13**

He reasoned: "Since he {Paul} is praying that believers on the earth will have their hearts established at the Lord's coming, he is clearly distinguishing between believers on earth and the "saints" (holy ones) who will come with the Lord from Heaven. It is impossible for the Church to be in two places at the same time. They can't have their hearts "established" (the idea is firm and unmoved) until Christ comes and at the same time accompany Him at His coming" (p.8).

He then pointed out that the "archangel" is mentioned at the return of Christ (1 Thess. 4:16) and that "mighty angels:" accompany Christ at His return (2 Thess. 1:7). He then affirmed that the Gospels identify angels with the return of Christ (Matt. 13:41; Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26).

He concluded: "First Thessalonians 3:13 cannot be used as a proof text by those who teach that Jesus is going to rapture the Church and then return with the Church (with all His saints) seven years later. The text is clearly speaking of angelic beings" (p.8).

### **MY RESPONSE**

1. The adjective "holy" is used with the noun "angels" three times in the New Testament (Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). Once it is used with the singular noun "angel" (Acts 10:22).
2. Paul used the word "angel" (both singular and plural) fourteen times in his epistles. He referred to angels (Rom8:30; 1Cor4:9;6:3,11:10; 13:1;Gal.3: 19;Col2: 18; 1Tim 3:16); to mighty angels (2 Thess.1: 7); to elect angels (1 Tim. 5:21); to an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14); to an angel of Satan (2 Cor. 12:7); to an angel from heaven (Gal.

1:8); and to an angel of God (Gal. 4:14). Paul, however, never used the word *hagios* (holy) with the noun angels.

3. Paul used the adjective *hagios* to identify the Scriptures (Rom. 1:2), the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), the Law (Rom. 7:12), the firstfruit (Rom. 11:16), the root (Rom. 11:16) a kiss (Rom. 16:16), the temple (1 Cor. 3:17), persons (1 Cor. 7:14), the apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5), brethren (1 Thess. 5:27), and the divine calling (2 Tim. 1:9).
4. Paul used the adjective *hagios* in its plural form as a substantive, as a noun, namely as "the saints" –a designation of a group (Rom. 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25, 26,31; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor. 1:2;6:1, 2; 14:33; 16:1,15; 2 Cor., 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:12; Eph. 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil. 1:1; 4:21 (singular), 22; Col. 1:2,4, 12, 26; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:10; 1 Tim. 5:10; Philem. 5,7..

In the Book of Acts, the adjective *hagios* also is used to designate the believers, the "saints" (Acts 9:13,32, 41;26:10)

In these usages, the word "saints" is used all alone. By itself it equates to believers. It appears with no other adjectives or nouns. It is a "class noun", understood by all as genuine Christians

5. In the other epistles, outside of the Pauline epistles, the term "saints" is used of believers (Heb. 6:10; 13:24; Jude vv. 3, 14). The first three passages (Heb. 6:10, 13:24; Jude v.3) refer unquestionably to Christians.

The fourth passage (Jude v. 14) is debatable as to its meaning: "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints." Are these "saints" or "holy ones" redeemed humans or angels? What was divinely revealed to Enoch? What was his understanding? Is it a reference to Old Testament believers only? If it is a reference to angels, then it is quoted out of the Old Testament equation of "holy ones" with angels, with no reference to the distinctive nature of church saints.

6. In the Book of Revelation, the term "saints" is used only of believers (5:8; 8:3,4; 11:18; 13:7,10; 14:12; 15:3; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9).
7. In the Gospels, the term "saints" is used only once. It is a reference to believers (Matt. 27:52).
8. Paul used the verb *hagiazō* (to sanctify or to set apart) of believers (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 7:14; Eph. 6:26; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Tim. 2:21). The Book of Acts records that Paul used the verb of believers (Acts 20:32; 26:18). Paul also used the verb for food (1 Tim. 4:15). He never used the verb for angels.
9. Paul used the noun *hagiasmos* ("sanctification") only of believers (Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Thess. 4:3,4,7; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 2:15).

## **CONCLUSION**

The interpretation of Marvin Rosenthal that "saints" actually refer to angels cannot be demonstrated by a concordance and Biblical study of the word in the New Testament, especially in the Epistles of Paul. The phrase "saints" in First Thessalonians 3:13 can only refer to believers, to those believers who died before the Rapture and who will return with Christ. They are the ones "who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:13). They are the ones that "God will bring with {Christ}" (1 Thess. 4:13). They are the "dead in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:16). They are the "them" with whom the living believers will be caught up (1 Thess. 4:17).