

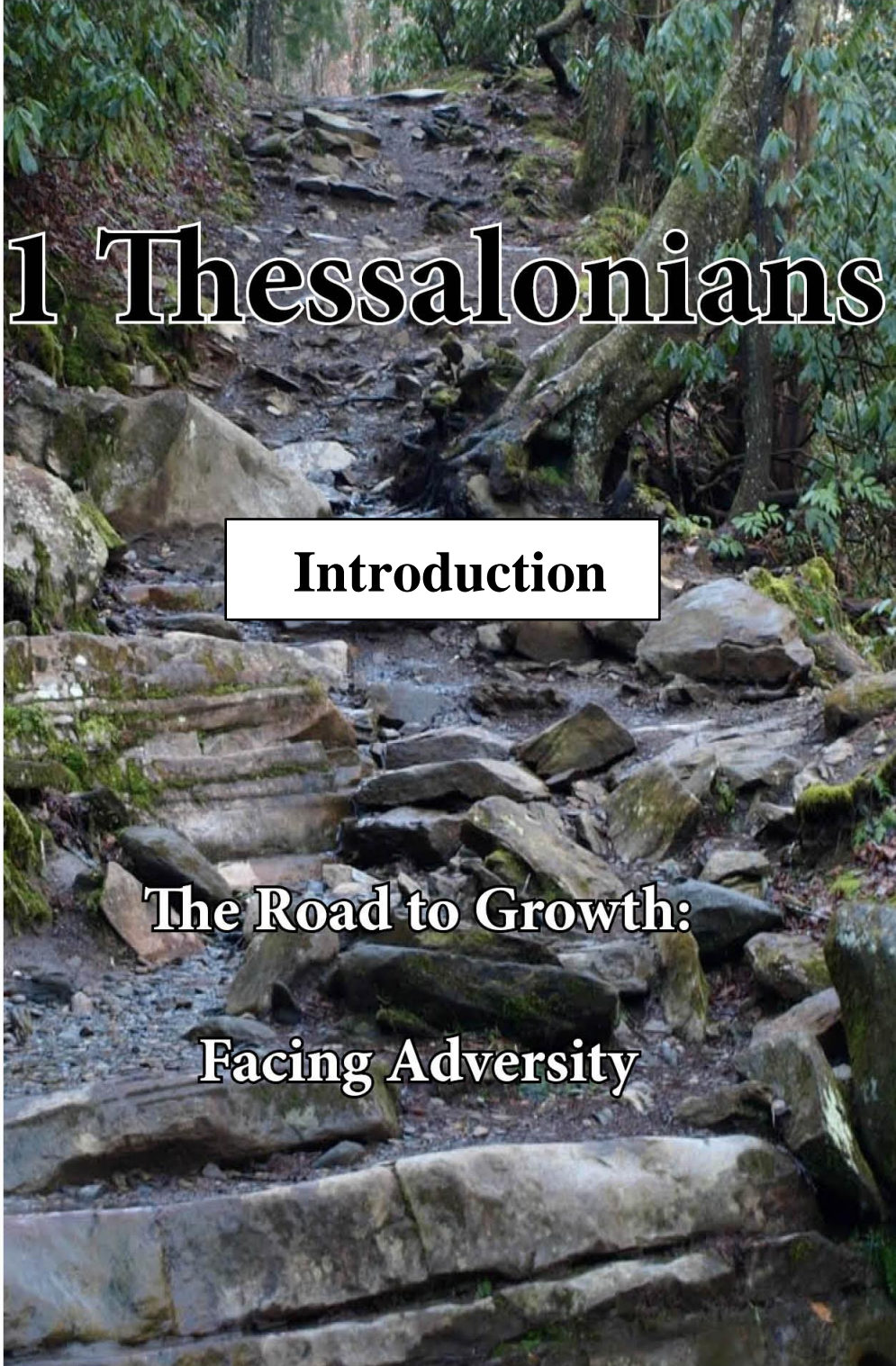
Journeys With God

1 Thessalonians

Introduction

The Road to Growth:

Facing Adversity



Introduction



The City of Thessalonica

The city of Thessalonica (today it is called Salonica or Thessaloniki) is located on the coast of Macedonia (northern Greece). The city was originally built beside a large natural harbor (called the Thermaic Gulf) on the Aegean Sea. At the time it was given the name of Therma, because of the many hot springs nearby. In 315 B.C. it was renamed Thessalonica after the half-sister of Alexander the Great.

When Rome conquered Macedonia in 168 B.C., the city was made capital of the province of Macedonia. At the same time it was given the status of a “free city,” allowing it to be ruled by its own citizens, instead of the Roman Empire. By the first century A.D. it had a population of about 200,000 people. With its large, well-protected harbor, and the fact that it was a key city on the Via Egnatia (the main east-west highway of the Roman Empire), Thessalonica became a center for political and economic activity. It also became a trade-port for goods from all over the Roman Empire. As a result, it became known as “the mother of all Macedonia.”

The city was inhabited by a combination of Greeks, Romans, and Jews. The people of Thessalonica worshipped many gods, but a particular favorite was Jupiter, the father of Hercules, the alleged founder of Therma’s ancient royal family. Thessalonica had a celebrated amphitheater, where gladiatorial contests were put on for the amusement of the citizens, and a circus for public games.

Who Wrote This Letter?

Twice in the letter the author identifies himself as the Apostle Paul (**1Thessalonians 1:1** and **1Thessalonians 2:18**). Paul’s authorship was completely unquestioned until the twentieth century, but these critics have failed to make a significant case against the overwhelming internal and historical evidence. Not only does the writer claim to be Paul, but the details of the letter correspond completely with the details of Paul’s ministry as described in Acts chapters sixteen through eighteen. In addition, the early church fathers all ascribed Paul as the author and he is identified as such in Marcion’s canon in A.D. 140.

From Where Was This Letter Written?

Once again, based on internal evidence and other New Testament writings, we know with a high degree of certainty that this letter was written while Paul was in Corinth. After Paul left Thessalonica, he spent a brief time in Berea (**Acts 17:10-14**), and a short time in Athens (**Acts 17:15-34**). He then moved on to Corinth, where Silvanus and Timothy joined him. It was during this period, with Timothy and Silvanus at his side, that Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians (**1Thessalonians 3:6**).

When Was This Letter Written?

Based on the eighteenth chapter of the book of Acts, we know that Paul had been in Corinth for about a year and a half when the Jews accused him before the proconsul Gallio (**Acts 18:1-11**). Archeologists have uncovered an inscription in the temple of Apollos at Delphi (near Corinth) indicating that Gallio served as proconsul in Achaia between A.D. 51 and 52. Thus, it is most likely that Paul wrote this letter sometime in A.D. 50 or 51. Based on this information, it appears that this was the earliest of Paul's writings to be included in the Bible. Chronologically, it was one of the earliest writings of the entire New Testament, with only James' letter having been written previously.

Historical Background

When Paul initially arrived in Thessalonica he went to the Jewish synagogue, witnessing to them for three Sabbaths that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, for whom all Jewish believers had been waiting. As a result of Paul's persuasive testimony, some of the Jews converted to Christianity along with a large number of Greeks who had previously become believers in the Jewish religion, as well as quite a few of the leading women of the city. This mass conversion caused some of the devout Jews to become angry and they accused the Christians of supporting another king beside Caesar.

As a result of the uproar that was caused, Paul and Silvanus were secretly escorted out of town by night and they headed to Berea, some ten miles or so to the south. Once again Paul headed to the local synagogue and testified that Jesus is the Christ. And, just like in Thessalonica, many of the Jews, Greeks, and prominent women believed. But when the Jews of Thessalonica heard that Paul was gaining converts in Berea, they stirred up trouble in Berea, so Paul headed to Athens while Silvanus and Timothy remained in Berea.

After Paul arrived in Athens, he sent word to Silvanus and Timothy that they should join him there, which they apparently did a short time later. Then Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica to encourage and comfort the church there and Silvanus was sent to Philippi, while Paul travelled to Corinth, about forty-five miles west of Athens. It was after Timothy and Silvanus rejoined Paul in Corinth that he wrote 1 Thessalonians in response to Timothy's good report of the church.

Why Was This Letter Written?

Upon hearing about the church in Thessalonica from Timothy, Paul decided to write to them. It appears that there were a number of objectives that Paul had in writing this letter, which include:

- To encourage the church (1Thessalonians 1:2-10).
- To answer to allegations that had been made about Paul by those who opposed his ministry in Thessalonica (1Thessalonians 2:1-12).

- To comfort the church which had apparently suffered persecution from the Jewish believers of the city (1Thessalonians 2:13-16). In doing so, Paul also expressed his joy in the strength of their faith and their love for the Apostle (1Thessalonians 2:17-3:13).
- To remind the new believers of the importance of maintaining moral purity (1Thessalonians 4:1-8).
- To admonish those in the church who were not working, to pitch-in and work hard as a witness to those outside the church (1Thessalonians 4:9-12).
- To more clearly explain some misunderstanding within the church concerning the Rapture and the coming Day of The Lord (1Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)
- To instruct the church in the importance of submitting to the leadership of the church and to work toward unity and peace within the body by supporting each other (1Thessalonians 5:12-15).
- To briefly recite some of the basics of Christian living (1Thessalonians 5:16-22).