

Questions:

Who really wrote James? What is the purpose of the oil (5:14)? Is this ceremony something that the church should perform today? How does James's emphasis on works combine with that of Paul on faith? Was Luther correct when he said that James "has no evangelical manner about it"? Why, or why not?

Archaeology

One of the objections to identifying the author as Jesus' brother is that the Greek of the epistle is too good for someone who grew up in an obscure village in Galilee and off the major trade routes. Papyri and other documents have been found, however, which show that a knowledge of Greek would not have been uncommon for that day. Alexander the Great had conquered the Persian empire (c. 330-323 BC) and brought the Greek language with him. Aramaic remained the common language but it was gradually displaced by Greek as the trade language of the ancient world (cf. the displacement of French by English as the language of international diplomacy in the past two centuries).

Study Tips:

Read through James twice at one sitting. Use a different version the second time to avoid stagnation through over-familiarity. Read about James (both the person and the letter) in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. Look up all references to James in the New Testament (be sure to discern between the various men with the same name). What further insight into the letter does this background information give? Read James again, breaking it into topical units. First look for as much unity as possible (how large can the units be?), then for as much diversity as possible (how small can the units be?). Does there seem to be a flow of thought or pattern of argument that moves through the book?

What are the parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount? What are James's references to the Old Testament? List all the imperatives in James (there are at least 59). Are any no longer valid for today's church? What changes would result in the church if these were obeyed?

Keys:

Many of the topics discussed in James are mentioned both in 1:2-27 and in 5:5-20. James states the themes, discusses them, and re-emphasizes them at the end. Three verses in the first chapter seem to be the key to James's concerns. In 1:4 James