

**JAMES: PRACTICING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**  
**XIII. Ministering To Rescue Believers From Premature Death**  
**(James 5:19-20)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Though the Epistle of James offers little formal structure and is less concerned about theological concepts than other New Testament works, it is intensely practical, explaining how to be "doers" of God's Word, James 1:22.
- B. James 5:19-20 addresses the need to minister to rescue fellow believers from premature death due to God's discipline (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to James 5:19-20), so we view it for insight and application:

**II. Ministering To Rescue Believers From Premature Death, James 5:19-20.**

- A. To understand the instruction of James 5:19-20, we must rely on the preceding context (as follows):
  - 1. James 5:14-15 had admonished believers who had grown spiritually weary and had fallen from the way of righteous living to call for the elders of the church to come, minister and pray for their restoration.
  - 2. Indeed, James' readers were to understand that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective, much as the prayers of Old Testament Elijah were effective in his prophetic ministry, James 5:16-18.
  - 3. Thus, James 5:19-20 was written to encourage those who heeded the call of the spiritually weary believer who had fallen from the way of righteousness to go to him and minister to restore him, revealing that such a ministry saves a spiritually defeated brother from a premature physical death from divine discipline.
- B. Accordingly, James 5:19-20 explains the importance of ministering to spiritually downtrodden believers in an effort to restore them to spiritual health and victorious Christian living (as follows):
  - 1. Addressing his readers as fellow spiritual brothers in Christ, James wrote about anyone in their midst of saved people who might "wander away" (*planao*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 671) from God's truth, James 5:19a.
  - 2. Since every believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit until the Day of Redemption, the Rapture (Ephesians 4:30), the "wandering away" does not involve loss of one's salvation, what is impossible, but the choice by a believer to live by his sinful nature instead of the power of the Holy Spirit, living a life of sin and possibly also being deceived in errant theology in concert with such sin since the errant believer is "wandering," suggesting he may have been deceived.
  - 3. James asserted that if anyone in the church would "turn [the wayward believer] around, back" (*epistrepho*, Ibid., p. 301), and that by a ministry such as the elders coming to refresh and pray for the wayward believer who was asking for help, such a believer in this turning around ministry for the spiritually weak believe would save his "earthly life" (*psuche*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 790; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 901-902) from death and "cover" (*kalupto*, Ibid., p. 401-402) a multitude of sins, James 5:19b-20.
  - 4. The expression "cover a multitude of sins" used in James 5:20b and 1 Peter 4:8, with both epistles being addressed to Hebrew Christians (cf. James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1), recalls the Hebrew Old Testament verb *kipper* meaning "cover over, pacify, make propitiation" (B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 497-498) that was used for the phrase "Day of Atonement" or literally "Day of [the] Covering." On that day, the high priest would sprinkle the sacrificial animal's blood on the Mercy Seat to atone for Israel's sins, Lev. 16:1-34. The Mercy Seat sat on top of the ark of the covenant, and in the ark were placed three objects (Hebrews 9:4b) that recalled Israel's sins against God -- (a) Aaron's rod that budded after Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-17:13), (b) the tables of the Law Israel violated by committing idolatry in worshiping the gold calf at Mount Sinai (Ex. 32:1-35; 34:1-2 ) and (c) the pot of manna recalling how Israel failed to believe and obey God relative to His miraculous provision of food in the wilderness (Ex. 16:1-36). The sprinkling of the blood on the Mercy Seat figuratively "covered" these objects beneath it from God's view, objects that recalled Israel's sins against Him so that God could then relate to Israel in forgiveness and blessing.
  - 5. Applied to James 5:19-20, just as the high priest under the Law ministered to deliver Israel from God's wrath on the Day of Atonement, "covering" Israel's many sins, those in the Church who ministered to turn the wayward from his sinful way to the Lord would save his physical life from premature physical death by God's discipline and see the Lord forgive the sinner for a multitude of sins he had committed!

**Lesson:** *Believers who turn wayward fellow believers back from their sinful ways to the Lord will save them from premature physical death in divine discipline and lead to God's forgiveness of the wayward party's many sins!*

**Application:** *May we help fellow wayward believers repent of their sin to save their lives and gain forgiveness.*