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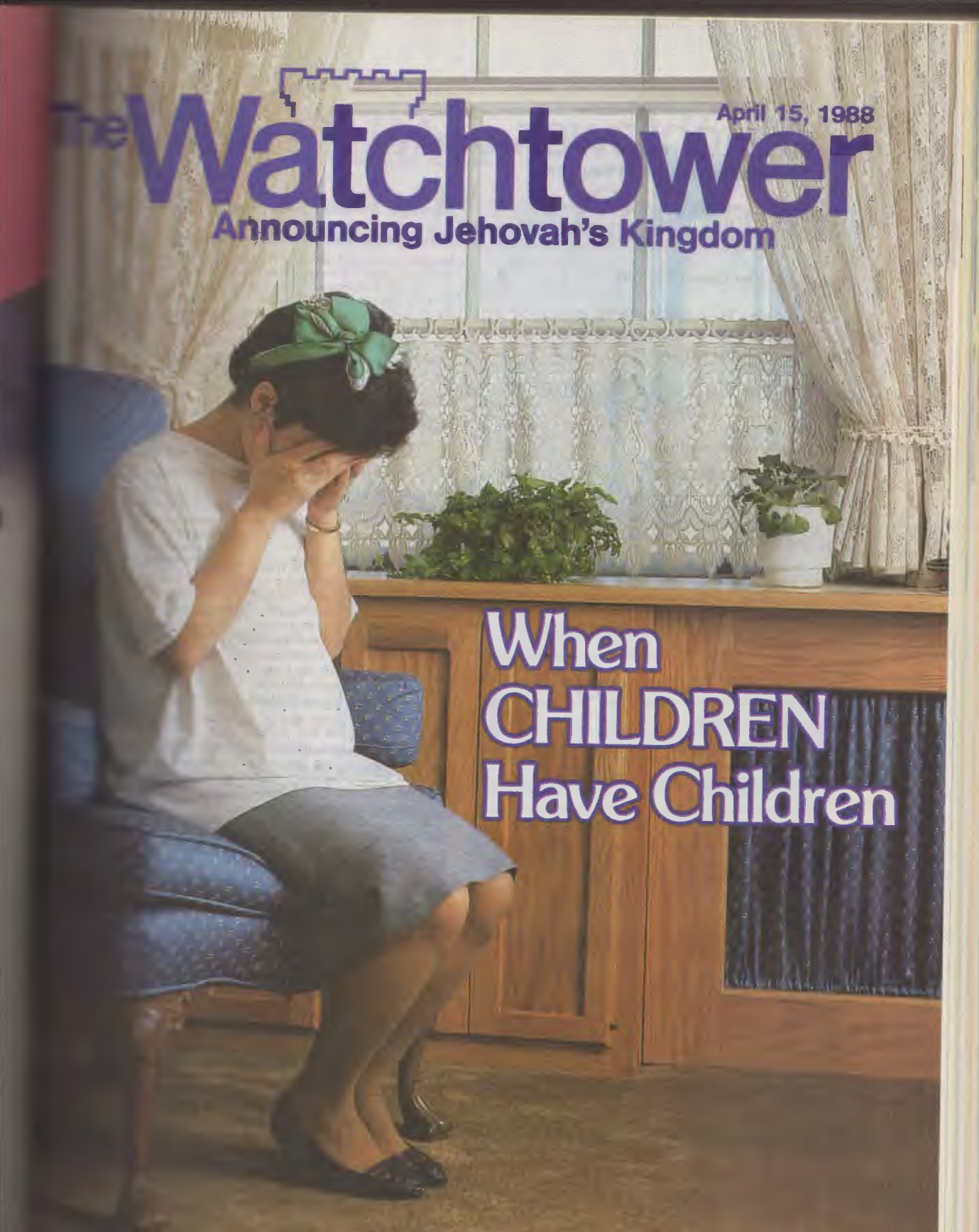
Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom



When CHILDREN Have Children

Discipline That Can Yield Peaceable Fruit

"No discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but grievous; yet afterward to those who have been trained by it it yields peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness."—HEBREWS 12:11.

THINK back to your childhood days. Can you recall your parents disciplining you? Most of us can. The apostle Paul used that as an illustration when commenting on discipline from God, as we read at Hebrews 12:9-11.

2 God's fatherly discipline, which can affect our spiritual lives, can take many forms. One is his arrangement to exclude from the Christian congregation a person who no longer wants to live by God's standards, or who refuses to do so. A person who is thus strongly chastised or disciplined may repent and turn around. In the process, the congregation of loyal ones are also disciplined in that they learn the importance of conforming to God's high standards.—1 Timothy 1:20.

3 'But,' someone may ask, 'is it not harsh to expel and then refuse to talk with the expelled person?' Such a view surfaced in a recent court case involving a woman who was raised by parents who were Jehovah's Witnesses. Her parents had been disfellowshipped. She was not, but she voluntarily disassociated herself by writing a letter withdrawing from the congregation. Accordingly, the congregation was simply informed that she was no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses. She moved away, but years later she returned and found that local Witnesses would not converse with her. So she took the matter to court. What was the outcome, and how might this affect you? In order to understand the matter properly, let us see what the Bible says about the related subject of disfellowshipping.

1, 2. (a) According to Hebrews 12:9-11, what does God lovingly provide? (b) What is one example of discipline, and what can result from this?
3. How do some react to the idea of disfellowshipping?

Why This Firm Stand?

4 Most true Christians loyally support God and his righteous laws. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-7; Hebrews 6:10) Occasionally, though, a person deviates from the path of truth. For example, despite help from Christian elders, he may unrepentantly violate God's laws. Or he may reject the faith by teaching false doctrine or by disassociating himself from the congregation. Then what should be done? Such things occurred even while the apostles were alive; hence, let us see what they wrote about this.

5 When a man in Corinth was unrepentantly immoral, Paul told the congregation: "Quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a forni-

4. What occasionally occurs with some in the congregation? (Galatians 6:1; Jude 23)
5, 6. (a) We have what wise counsel as to dealing with those who commit serious sins and are unrepentant? (Matthew 18:17) (b) What questions do we face?

"Cutting ourselves off completely from all association with [my disfellowshipped sister] Margaret tested our loyalty to Jehovah's arrangement. It gave our family opportunity to show that we really believe that Jehovah's way is best."
—Lynette.

cator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man." (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) The same was to occur with apostates, such as Hymenaeus: "As for a man that promotes a sect, reject him after a first and a second admonition; knowing that such a man has been turned out of the way and is sinning." (Titus 3:10, 11; 1 Timothy 1:19, 20) Such shunning would be appropriate, too, for anyone who rejects the congregation: "They went out from us, but they were not of our sort; for if they had been of our sort, they would have remained with us. But they went out that it might be shown up that not all are of our sort." —1 John 2:18, 19.

6 Hopefully, such a one will repent so that he can be accepted back. (Acts 3:19) But meanwhile, may Christians have limited fellowship with him, or is strict avoidance necessary? If so, why?

Cut Off Thoroughly?

7 Christians do not hold themselves aloof from people. We have normal contacts with neighbors, workmates, schoolmates, and others, and witness to them even if some are 'fornicators, greedy persons, extortioners, or idolaters.' Paul wrote that we cannot avoid them completely, 'otherwise we would have to get out of the world.' He directed that it was to be different, though, with "a brother" who lived like that: *"Quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that [has returned to such ways], not even eating with such a man."*—1 Corinthians 5:9-11; Mark 2:13-17.

8 In the apostle John's writings, we find similar counsel that emphasizes how thoroughly Christians are to avoid such ones: "Everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, *never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him.* For he that says a greeting [Greek, *khai'ro*] to him is a sharer in his wicked works."* —2 John 9-11.

9 Why is such a firm stand appropriate even today? Well, reflect on the severe cutting off mandated in God's Law to Israel. In various serious matters, willful violators were executed. (Leviticus 20:10; Numbers 15:30, 31) When that happened, others, even relatives, could no longer speak with the dead lawbreaker. (Leviticus 19:1-4; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 17:1-7) Though loyal Israelites back then were normal humans with emotions like ours, they knew that God is just and loving and that his Law protected their moral and spiritual cleanness. So they could accept that his arrangement to cut off wrongdoers was fundamentally a good and right thing.—Job 34:10-12.

10 We can be just as sure that God's arrangement that Christians refuse to fellowship with someone who has been expelled for unrepentant sin is a wise protection for us. "Clear away the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, according as you are free from ferment." (1 Corinthians 5:7) By also avoiding persons who have deliberately disassociated themselves, Christians are protected from possible critical,

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7. How would our conduct differ as to two classes of sinners?

8. What advice did the apostle John provide on shunning?

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* John here used *khai'ro*, which was a greeting like "good day" or "hello." (Acts 15:23; Matthew 28:9) He did not use *a·spa'zo·mai* (as in verse 13), which means "to enfold in the arms, thus to greet, to welcome" and may have implied a very warm greeting, even with an embrace. (Luke 10:4; 11:43; Acts 20:1, 37; 1 Thessalonians 5:26) So the direction at 2 John 11 could well mean not to say even "hello" to such ones.—See *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1985, page 31.

9, 10. (a) What happened to unrepentant lawbreakers in Israel, and why? (b) How should we feel about the arrangement today for dealing with persons expelled for unrepentant sin? (2 Peter 2:20-22)

unappreciative, or even apostate views. —Hebrews 12:15, 16.

What About Relatives?

11 God certainly realizes that carrying out his righteous laws about cutting off wrongdoers often involves and affects relatives. As mentioned above, when an Israelite wrongdoer was executed, no more family association was possible. In fact, if a son was a drunkard and a glutton, his parents were to bring him before the judges, and if he was unrepentant, the parents were to share in the just executing of him, 'to clear away what is bad from the midst of Israel.' (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) You can appreciate that this would not have been easy for them. Imagine, too, how the wrongdoer's brothers, sisters, or grandparents felt. Yet, their putting loyalty to their righteous God before family affection could be lifesaving for them.

12 Recall the case of Korah, a leader in rebellion against God's leadership through Moses. In his perfect justice, Jehovah saw that Korah had to die. But all loyal ones were advised: "Turn aside, please, from before the tents of these wicked men and do not touch anything that belongs to them, that you may not be swept away in all their sin." Relatives who would not accept God's warning died with the rebels. But some of Korah's relatives wisely chose to be loyal to Jehovah, which saved their lives and led to future blessings.—Numbers 16:16-33; 26: 9-11; 2 Chronicles 20:19.

13 Cutting off from the Christian congregation does not involve immediate death, so family ties continue. Thus, a man who is disfellowshipped or who disassociates himself may still live at home with his Christian wife and faithful children. Respect for God's judgments and the congregation's action will move the wife and children to recognize that by his course, he altered the spiritual bond that existed between them. Yet, since his being disfellowshipped does not end their blood ties or marriage relationship, normal family affections and dealings can continue.

14 The situation is different if the disfellowshipped or disassociated one is a relative living outside the immediate family circle and home. It might be possible to have almost no contact at all with the relative. Even if there were some family matters requiring contact, this certainly would be kept to a minimum, in line with the divine principle: "Quit mixing in company with *anyone* called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person [or guilty of another gross sin], . . . not even eating with such a man."—1 Corinthians 5:11.

15 Understandably, this may be difficult because of emotions and family ties, such as grandparents' love for their grandchildren. Yet, this is a test of loyalty to God, as stated by the sister quoted on page 26. Anyone who is feeling the sadness and pain that the disfellowshipped relative has thus caused may find comfort and be encouraged by the example set by some of Korah's relatives. —Psalm 84:10-12.*

The Court Decision

16 You may want to know the outcome of

11, 12. (a) What was the effect on Israelite relatives when a wrongdoer was cut off? (b) Illustrate the benefits of obedience.
13. How will loyal Christians respond if an immediate family member is disfellowshipped or he disassociates himself?

* For a discussion of a relative's being disfellowshipped, see *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, pages 26-31.

14. What divine advice should influence our contact with a disfellowshipped or disassociated relative outside our immediate family circle?
15. How can relatives control the influence of emotions in such instances? (Psalm 15:1-5; Mark 10:29, 30)
16-18. What decision was reached in the court case mentioned earlier, and what added opinion did the court offer?

the court case involving a woman who was upset because former acquaintances would not converse with her after she chose to reject the faith, disassociating herself from the congregation.

17 Before the case went to trial, a federal district court summarily granted judgment against her. That judgment was based on the concept that courts do not get involved in church disciplinary matters. She then appealed. The unanimous judgment of the federal court of appeals* was based on broader grounds of First Amendment (of the U.S. Constitution) rights: "Because the practice of shunning is a part of the faith of the Jehovah's Witness, we find that the 'free exercise' provision of the United States Constitution . . . precludes [her] from prevailing. The defendants have a constitutionally protected privilege to engage in the practice of shunning. Accordingly, we affirm" the earlier judgment of the district court.

18 The court opinion continued: "Shunning is a practice engaged in by Jehovah's Witnesses pursuant to their interpretation of canonical text, and we are not free to reinterpret that text . . . The defendants are entitled to the free exercise of their religious beliefs . . . Courts generally do not scrutinize closely the relationship among members (or former members) of a church. Churches are afforded great latitude when they impose discipline on members or former members. We agree with [former U.S. Supreme Court] Justice Jackson's view that 'religious activities which concern only members of the faith are and ought to be free—as nearly absolutely free as anything can be.' . . . The members of the Church [she] decided to abandon have concluded that they no longer want to associate with her. We hold that they are free to make that choice."

* 819 F.2d 875 (9th Cir. 1987).

19 The court of appeals acknowledged that even if the woman felt distress because former acquaintances chose not to converse with her, "permitting her to recover for intangible or emotional injuries would unconstitutionally restrict the Jehovah's Witnesses free exercise of religion . . . The constitutional guarantee of the free exercise of religion requires that society tolerate the type of harms suffered by [her] as a price well worth paying to safeguard the right of religious difference that all citizens enjoy." This decision has, in a sense, received even more weight since it was handed down. How so? The woman later petitioned the highest court in the land to hear the case and possibly overturn the decision against her. But in November 1987, the United States Supreme Court refused to do so.

20 Hence, this important case determined that a disfellowshipped or disassociated person cannot recover damages from Jehovah's Witnesses in a court of law for being shunned.* Since the congregation was responding to the perfect directions that all of us can read in God's Word and applying it, the person is feeling a loss brought on by his or her own actions.

Discipline—Many Benefit

21 Some outsiders, upon hearing about disfellowshipping, are inclined to sympathize with a wrongdoer who can no longer converse with members of the Christian congregation. But is not such sympathy misplaced? Consider the potential benefit that the wrongdoer and others may receive.

* Though various individuals have brought suit, no court has rendered a judgment against Jehovah's Witnesses over their Bible-based practice of shunning.

19, 20. Why is a person who is cut off from the congregation not in position to recover monetary damages in court?
21. Why is balance needed in viewing disfellowshipping?

[22] For example, on page 26 we noted Lynette's comment about her choice 'to cut herself off completely from all association' with her disfellowshipped sister Margaret. She and her Christian relatives 'believed that Jehovah's way is best.' And it is!

[23] Lynette's sister later told her: 'If you had viewed the disfellowshipping lightly, I know that I would not have taken steps toward reinstatement as soon as I did. Being totally cut off from loved ones and from close contact with the congregation created a strong desire to repent. I realized just how wrong my course was and how serious it was to turn my back on Jehovah.'

[24] In another case, Laurie's parents were disfellowshipped. Yet she says: 'My association with them never stopped but increased. As time went on, I became more and more inactive. I got to the point of not even attending meetings.' Then she read material in *The Watchtower* of September 1 and 15, 1981, that stressed the counsel of 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 and 2 John 9-11. "It was as if a light bulb were turned on in me," she writes. 'I knew I would have to make some changes. I now better understand the meaning of Matthew 10:34-36. My decision was not an easy one for my family to swallow, for my son, five, is the only boy, and they love him dearly.' It is hoped that losing such association will touch the parents' hearts, as it did Margaret's. Still, the discipline involved helped Laurie: 'I am back out in the field ministry. My marriage and family are stronger because of my change, and so am I.'

[25] Or consider the feelings of one who was disfellowshipped and later reinstated. Sandi wrote: 'I would like to thank you for the very helpful and instructive articles [mentioned above] on reproof and disfellowshipping. I am happy that Jehovah loves his people enough to see that his organization

22, 23. Illustrate the importance and value of obeying God in our view of disfellowshipped persons.
24. How did one sister's response to disfellowshipping affect her and others?
25. What view did a reinstated person have of God's discipline?

Points to Remember

- □ In what ways can disfellowshipping be a form of discipline?
- □ Why does a Christian's conduct toward disfellowshipped persons differ from his conduct toward sinners in the world?
- □ What Scriptural direction should be borne in mind even if a relative is disfellowshipped?
- □ An appeals court reached what conclusion in a case brought by a disassociated person?
- □ What can we learn from some personal expressions about disfellowshipping?

Excommunication—What Effect?

English historian Edward Gibbon wrote about the propriety and effect of disfellowshipping nearer the time of the apostles:

"It is the undoubted right of every society to exclude from its communion and benefits such among its members as reject or violate those regulations which have been established by general consent. . . . The consequences of excommunication were of a temporal [earthly] as well as a spiritual nature. The Christian against whom it was pronounced was deprived of any part in the oblations of the faithful. The ties both of religious and of private friendship were dissolved."

is kept clean. What may seem harsh to outsiders is both necessary and really a loving thing to do. I am grateful that our heavenly Father is a loving and forgiving God.'

[26] So our God who requires that an unrepentant wrongdoer be expelled from the congregation also lovingly shows that a sinner can be reinstated in the congregation if he repents and turns around. (A disassociated person can similarly request to become part of the congregation again.) Thereafter he can be comforted by Christians who will confirm their love for him. (2 Corinthians 2: 5-11; 7:8-13) Truly, it is just as Paul wrote: "No discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but grievous; yet afterward to those who have been trained by it it yields peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness."—Hebrews 12:11.

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26. What righteous fruit can result from accepting discipline? (Psalm 94:10, 12)

Do You Remember?

Have you enjoyed reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower?* Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

□ **What is the theme of modern-day Biblical evangelism?**

The core of the true evangelizer's message today is the good news of God's Kingdom in the hands of his appointed Ruler, Jesus Christ. It includes all the truths Jesus spoke and that his disciples recorded. (Matthew 24:14; 28: 19, 20)—1/1, page 4.

□ **Why is it necessary to continue preaching the good news in territories where there is little or no result?**

Jehovah, through Christ Jesus, has commanded that 'the good news be preached in all the inhabited earth.' (Matthew 24:14) When people refuse to listen, this gives us an opportunity to show the depth of our love and devotion to Jehovah by persistently doing what is right. Also, our love moves us to warn our neighbors as to what the future holds for mankind. (1 John 5:3; 2 Timothy 4:2)—1/1, page 26.

□ **What benefits does the full-time ministry bring to many Kingdom publishers?**

It helps them to cultivate more fully the fruitage of the spirit, to express more love for people, to become more efficient in the ministry, and to trust Jehovah to a greater extent. Hence, they enjoy a closer relationship with Jehovah.—1/15, page 26.

□ **To what direction and purpose of God did all Bible writers point in spite of their differences in presentation?**

They all showed what Jehovah God will do to make mankind happy and also what humans individually must do in order to receive God's approval.—2/1, page 7.

□ **What are some of the rewards and benefits from being honest?**

A climate of trust and confidence is developed, leading to healthy attitudes and relationships. Honesty also contributes to a clean conscience, and it gives peace of mind, so that one can face others without fear of embarrassment. (Hebrews 9:14; 1 Timothy 1:19) —2/15, page 7.

□ **Whose prayers does the almighty God hear and answer?**

Jehovah hears prayers offered to him through the right channel, Jesus Christ; in the right manner; and with the right attitude of mind and heart. God answers such prayers according to his divine will and at his chosen time. —3/15, page 7.

□ **What important event occurred in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes' rulership (455 B.C.E.)?**

Permission was granted Nehemiah to go back and rebuild Jerusalem and its walls. This command was the start of the "seventy weeks" of years of Daniel's prophecy, pointing forward to Jesus' appearance as "Messiah the Leader" on time in the year 29 C.E. (Daniel 9:24, 25; Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1-9)—3/15, pages 28, 29.

□ **How are family problems best handled?**

In love, for the Bible counsels, "Let all your affairs take place with love." Also, "Love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Corinthians 16:14; 1 Peter 4:8) This should be a deep-seated love that is willing to overlook the imperfections of other members of the family that might otherwise irritate and grate on one's nerves.—4/1, pages 6, 7.