

God's Warning to Seven Churches

BIBLE PASSAGE: Revelation 2–3

MAIN POINT: Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith.

KEY PASSAGE: Revelation 21:5

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What will happen when Jesus returns? Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

The Book of Revelation opens with John's description of a vision. In the vision, Jesus gave John messages for seven local churches. Jesus told John to write these messages on a scroll and send them to the churches.

In most cases, Jesus commended the church for their good work, warned them about the areas in which they needed correction, and urged them to return to Him. Among other things, He warned the churches not to forget their love of the Lord. He encouraged them not to be afraid of being tested. He urged those who were surrounded by evil to not deny their faith. Each time, Jesus promised to reward those who remain faithful to Him.

The church is made up of people who have trusted in Jesus, who are committed to one another, and who meet together to worship Jesus and share the gospel. Jesus loves the church as His bride. (See Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9.) Jesus' message called the churches to turn away from their sin and remain faithful to Him. The Lord is slow to anger (Ex. 34:6-7) and patient, wanting everyone to repent (2 Pet. 3:9).

Jesus warned specific churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), but the problems they faced can still be found in churches today. Help kids understand some of the problems the early churches faced: They did not love like they should, they believed false teaching and did wrong things, and they were lukewarm—useless to the cause of Christ.

We can pray for our churches to be faithful, effective instruments in spreading the gospel. We should love the church because Jesus loves the church. Through the church, Jesus helps believers work together to do God's plan. Finally, Jesus warned believers to stay alert because He will come like a thief when no one is expecting Him. Believers—then and now—must always be ready!



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The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

God's Warning to Seven Churches

Revelation 2–3

- **Utilize art:** Show the Bible story picture and point to the map as you name the locations of the seven churches.
- **Display models:** Show models of the seven churches. Use figurines as simple as clay buildings or cardboard boxes.

The apostle **John** was on the island of Patmos (PAT muhs) when he **had a vision of Jesus**. **Jesus told John to write down a message for the seven churches** in Ephesus (EF uh suhs), Smyrna (SMUHR nuh), Pergamum (PUHR guh muhm), Thyatira (THIGH uh TIGH ruh), Sardis (SAHR diss), Philadelphia (FIL uh DEL fih uh), and Laodicea (lay AHD ih SEE uh). **So that is what John did.**

“To the church in Ephesus: You do not love well like you did when you first believed. Turn back and love like you used to.

“To the church in Smyrna: You are poor and are suffering, but really you are rich! You may face prison or death, but do not be afraid.

“To the church in Pergamum: You are faithful to Me, and you tell others about Me even when it is hard. But not everyone in the church is doing the right thing. Some people are living like those who do not believe. Turn away from your sin and turn back to Me!

“To the church in Thyatira: I know about your love, faithfulness, and service. You do not give up. But there is a wicked woman who teaches things that are not true, and some of you believe her. I will punish her and those who follow her teaching. Many of you do not follow her. Keep believing the truth until I come.

“To the church in Sardis: People think you are alive, but you are actually dead. You used to have a strong faith, but now you are weak. Wake up! Be ready for My return. Turn from your sin and remember the gospel.

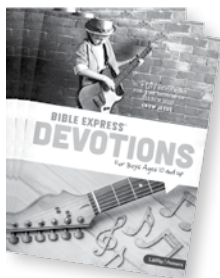
“To the church in Philadelphia: You are a small

church, but you listen to Me and obey My word. **I am coming soon. Be ready and keep believing.**

“To the church in Laodicea: You are lukewarm—not hot or cold, so you are not good for anything. I will spit you out of My mouth! You think you are rich, but you are actually poor, blind, and naked.” Jesus told them to come to Him, and He would make you rich. He would make you see and would put clothes on them.

Jesus said, “See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me.” Jesus will reward every faithful and obedient believer. John wrote, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Christ Connection: Jesus loves the church. His message to seven local churches called them to turn away from their sin and remain faithful to Him. We can learn from those churches. Through the church, Jesus helps believers work together to do God’s plan.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week’s devotionals to discover how God’s Word can help them grow in the gospel. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Introduce the STORY

SESSION TITLE: God's Warning to Seven Churches

BIBLE PASSAGE: Revelation 2–3

MAIN POINT: Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith.

KEY PASSAGE: Revelation 21:5

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What will happen when Jesus returns? Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.

Welcome time

- index cards
- pencils or markers

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to list seven places they have traveled. Then invite kids to share their lists.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- “Seek and Find” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete “Seek and Find” on the activity page. Kids should find each church’s match. There are seven pairs.

SAY • Great job. Today’s Bible story is about a message that John wrote to seven churches. The message was a warning from God that Jesus told to John in a vision. This message is found in the Bible in the Book of Revelation. Today, we’ll find out what John wrote.



LOW PREP

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: “Doctor Says”

Invite kids to play a game based on “Simon Says.” Teach kids the responses (given in parentheses) to the following commands. Then give commands at random. Begin some of the commands with, “Doctor says ...” Kids who do

not respond correctly or who respond when you don't say, "Doctor says ..." are out.

- Drink more water. (*Act out drinking from a cup.*)
- Get plenty of sleep. (*Stretch and yawn.*)
- Eat breakfast. (*Act out eating cereal.*)
- Exercise regularly. (*Jog in place.*)

SAY • Why do we listen to doctors' instructions about our health? (*Doctors know what is best for our health.*)
Today we are going to hear some instructions that Jesus gave to the church. Jesus loves the church, and He knows what is best for the church.

OPTION 2: Knock-knock jokes

Ask boys and girls if they like knock-knock jokes. Invite volunteers to share knock-knock jokes with the class. Then share some of these jokes. For each, begin with "Knock, knock." [*Kids respond, "Who's there?"*] Then say the first word. [*Kids respond, "(word) who?"*] Then say the phrase.

- Will / Will you let me in?
- Figs / Figs the doorbell; it's broken!
- Cows-go / No, cows go "moo!"
- Olive / Olive right next door.
- Who / Is there an owl in here?

SAY • That was fun. You'll hear in today's Bible story that Jesus said, "I stand at the door and knock." Jesus isn't about to tell a joke, though. Let's find out what He had to say.

• book of knock-knock jokes (optional)

Transition to teach the story

Teach the STORY

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• backpack
• utility work gloves
• Bible

[Leader enters carrying a backpack, a pair of utility work gloves, and a Bible.]

LEADER • Hey, everyone! I sure am glad to see you. I've been working on my hot air balloon in preparation to take off at the upcoming hot air balloon festival. I forgot how hard it is to do everything just right and get the balloon safely off the ground!

Safety is the most important thing when ballooning. One thing balloon pilots pay attention to is the weather. It is unsafe for balloons to launch when it is too windy or when there are unstable weather conditions. When meteorologists give weather warnings, you must pay attention!

[Hold up a Bible.] Speaking of warnings, do you think you would pay attention if Jesus gave you a warning? In a few minutes, we'll hear some warnings Jesus gave to seven churches.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • When you listen to today's Bible story, keep our big picture question and answer in mind: ***What will happen when Jesus returns? Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.*** Let's say that together. ***What will happen when Jesus returns? Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.***

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Last week, we talked about how the apostle John had been sent away to the island of Patmos for preaching the gospel. **Jesus appeared to John in a vision to tell about the end of time.**

Jesus told John to write down what he saw and the messages Jesus had for seven churches. We can find John's words in the Bible, in the Book of Revelation. Listen carefully to the Bible story to hear Jesus' messages.

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Revelation 2–3. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “God’s Warning to Seven Churches.”

LEADER • Jesus sure had a lot to say to these churches. Jesus told John to write these messages on a scroll and send them to the churches. Jesus knew what was going on in each church, and He told them what they were doing well and what they needed to repent of, or stop doing. **Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith.**

• Bibles
• “God’s Warning to
Seven Churches” video
• Big Picture Question
Poster
• Bible Story Picture
Poster

The things the believers were doing in those churches long ago are still things believers sometimes do in churches today. We can learn from Jesus' messages to the seven churches.

In His messages, Jesus told the church in Ephesus to love Him like they used to. The believers in the Ephesian church did not value and treasure Jesus like they had before. Jesus told the believers to turn back to Him and love Him like they first did.

He told the church in Pergamum that they were faithful to Him. The believers there told others about Jesus even when it was hard. But some people in the church did evil things, and Jesus warned them to turn back to Him.

Jesus told the believers in the church at Sardis to get ready for His return. On the outside, they looked alive and strong. But Jesus knew their faith was weak. He told them to remember the gospel and turn away from their sin.

Jesus was happy with the church in Philadelphia. The believers there listened to Jesus and obeyed Him. He encouraged them and told them to be ready for His return. He told them to keep believing in Him.

Jesus said that everyone should pay attention to the messages for the seven churches. Let's answer our big picture question: ***What will happen when Jesus returns? Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.***

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Christ connection

LEADER • Jesus loves the church. His message to seven local churches called them to turn away from their sin and

remain faithful to Him. We can learn from those churches. Through the church, Jesus helps believers work together to do God's plan.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Revelation 21:5.

- Key Passage Poster
- "Everything New" song

LEADER • Many of the believers in these seven churches had drifted away from what they had learned about Jesus. Even as believers we still sin because we live in a broken world, but we can have hope because of what our key passage says!

Guide the kids to repeat the key passage after you. Lead boys and girls in singing "Everything New."

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Think about the last time someone corrected you or gave you a warning. How can corrections and warnings be helpful? Think about that as you watch this video.

- "Unit 36, Session 2" discussion starter video

Show the "Unit 36, Session 2" discussion starter video.

Then lead kids to discuss the following questions:

- How did Aiden correct Mia?
- How did Jesus correct or warn the churches?
- How is correction helpful? How do you feel when someone corrects you?

LEADER • God calls us to turn away from sin, look to Jesus, and stay on mission.

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • John's words encourage us to use our ears to hear what Jesus said. Let's also use our voices to proclaim

- "I Stand Amazed" song

what we have heard and what we believe to be true about Jesus.
Sing together “I Stand Amazed.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Father God, thank You so much for Your Word.
We thank You that You love us and that You sent
Your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and then to rise
again on the third day, defeating death forever!
Thank You that we hear the truth of Your words
when we read Your Word. Lord, give us ears to hear
and understand Your truth. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Apply the STORY

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What will happen when Jesus returns? Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- scissors

Print a copy of the key passage poster on heavyweight paper. Cut it into seven pieces and hide them around the room. Challenge kids to find the seven pieces and put them together. Then lead them to read the key passage aloud. If time allows, hide the pieces and play again.

SAY • The words in our key passage are words that John heard Jesus say in his vision. ***What will happen when Jesus returns? Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.***

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- ball of yarn

Guide kids to stand in a circle. Give one player a ball of yarn. Tell her she may answer a review question or tell the group a fact she remembers from the Bible story. Then she should hold onto the end of the yarn and toss the ball of yarn to another player.

The second player will tell a fact or answer a question, pinch the line of yarn, and toss the ball of yarn to another player. As kids review the Bible story, they will form a yarn web. If a kid cannot think of a fact to share, encourage him to find Revelation 1–3 in a Bible. Assign him a verse to read

aloud: Revelation 1:3; 1:8; 1:10; 1:17; 2:4; 2:10; 2:29; 3:11.

Suggested review questions:

1. Who wrote the Book of Revelation? (*John, Rev. 1:1*)
2. Who was John writing to? (*to the seven churches in Asia, Rev. 1:4*)
3. What did John say Jesus will do for believers who are faithful? (*reward them; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17*)
4. Did the church in Ephesus love Jesus more or less than when they first loved Him? (*less, Rev. 2:4*)
5. What dangers did the church in Smyrna face? (*prison or death, Rev. 2:10*)
6. What did Jesus tell the church in Pergamum to do? (*repent, turn away from their sin and turn back to Him; Rev. 2:16*)
7. Was the church in Laodicea hot or cold? (*Neither, it was lukewarm; Rev. 3:15-16*)

SAY • Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith. Jesus loves the church. His message to seven local churches called them to turn away from their sin and remain faithful to Him. Jesus saves sinners and changes them to be like Him.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Let them hear

Invite kids to play a telephone game. Instruct the kids to sit in a circle. Give the first player a Bible and guide her to find Revelation 2–3. She should choose a phrase from Jesus' warnings to the seven churches and whisper the phrase to the kid sitting next to her.

Example phrases: *You have abandoned the love you had at first* (Rev. 2:4); *Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer* (Rev. 2:10); *I know your works—your love, faithfulness,*

LOW PREP

• Bibles

service, and endurance (Rev. 2:19); I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot (Rev. 3:15).

Tell the kids to whisper exactly what they hear to the person next to them until the message is passed completely around the circle. Call for the last player to tell the message he heard. Play again as time allows.

SAY • Sometimes when we get too far from the source of the truth, it is harder to get the full truth. That is why it is important to always go back to the Bible. **Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith.** Jesus told John to write down his vision—not just so those seven churches could hear God’s truth, but so we could also read it now!

OPTION 2: “Knock, knock” circle

• Bible

Instruct kids to sit around a table. If your group is large, kids may sit in a circle on the floor. Demonstrate how to softly knock on the table with your knuckles.

Encourage the kids to knock softly. Tap your foot to keep a consistent rhythm. Then instruct them to stop. Explain the game:

The first player will begin by tapping a simple four-beat rhythm, such as a slow knock–knock–knock–pause. The first player should repeat her rhythm without changing it. Then the player to her left will add his rhythm. For example: knock–pause–knock–pause. He should repeat his rhythm without any changes.

Invite kids to add their own rhythms one at a time. When everyone is knocking softly, allow kids to listen for a minute or two. Then point to the first player so she will stop knocking.

Continue around the circle until only the last player is

knocking. Then silence all the rhythms. Open your Bible to Revelation 3:20 and read the verse aloud.

SAY • Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith. He told the church at Laodicea that He stands at the door and knocks. The believers in the church had, in a way, pushed Jesus away. But He was waiting for them to open the door and let Him back in. Jesus said He would come in and eat with them, and they would be friends.

We can open our hearts to Jesus. When we trust in Him as Lord and Savior, He forgives our sins and gives us eternal life. This is the gospel—good news for sinners!

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, thanking God for His Word and for the church. Pray that God would help boys and girls stand strong in the faith.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "Seven Churches" on the activity page. Kids should find and circle the seven churches John wrote to in Revelation 2–3.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "Seven Churches" activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.