

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.
- **Move around the room:** Set up stations around the room to represent the different cities. As you talk about the different messages to each church, walk to the station that represents that church.

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 them rich. He would make them 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
ADVENTURE!**

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

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. As kids arrive, ask them to share about a time they were given instructions to follow.

SAY • Who normally gives you instructions? Whose instructions do you have to obey? Why is it a good idea to follow instructions? Today we're going to hear a story about some instructions that Jesus gave to seven churches.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Hot or Cold?" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the "Hot or Cold?" activity page. Instruct kids to draw circles around things that are more useful in hot weather and boxes around things that are more useful in cold weather.

SAY • Some items are useful when it's hot or cold, but what about if the temperature is just medium? Today we'll hear about a church that Jesus said was lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. What do you think Jesus meant? We will learn more soon.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Real repentance

Prepare a set of index cards with various emotions (happy, angry, sad, sincere, and so forth). Call up volunteers one at a time to choose a card and say “I’m sorry” using the emotion on the card. Invite the rest of the kids to guess what emotion it is.

SAY • Have you ever heard someone say he was sorry, but you knew that he didn’t really mean it? Have you ever apologized because your mom or dad made you, but you didn’t really feel sorry? Sometimes we do that with God. Do you think God knows the difference? Of course He does! Jesus calls us to true repentance which means turning away from sin toward Jesus.



- index cards
- marker

OPTION 2: Following instructions

Form two teams. One kid from each team will be a runner. The rest of the team will line up at the other end of the room. You will whisper a command to the runners who must take the message to the first person in their teams’ line. That person will obey the command and move to the back of the line. The runner will then return for the next command. The first team to cycle through each player wins.

Suggested commands: do a jumping jack, spin around, hop on one foot, and so forth.

SAY • Was it hard or easy to follow all these instructions? Sometimes instructions are more difficult to follow. We’ll hear about some instructions that Jesus gave to seven churches during our story today.

- paper (optional)
- pencils (optional)

Tip: Let runners use paper and pencil to write the commands to help them remember.

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)

• leader attire

• binoculars

[Leader enters wearing pilot gear and carrying binoculars.]

LEADER • Hello, boys and girls! My name is *[your name]*, and I just returned for another trip in my super cool hot air balloon. It's so amazing how much you can see way up there. When I'm up high, places that are far away can be seen at the same time. I could see my city, and three or four others around it. If I flew up into space, I could see all the cities in the country, especially if it were nighttime and the city lights were shining. But no matter what, I could not see every city in the world at once. Only God can do that.

That actually reminds me of our Bible story for today. Jesus knows what is happening in churches all over the world, whether they are honoring Him or not. Today's story is about seven special letters to seven churches. Jesus had messages for them based on their struggles and strengths.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Before we set off on our story, who remembers our big picture question? *What will happen when Jesus returns?* Does anyone remember the answer? [Allow responses.] That's right! *Jesus will destroy all evil and make all things new.* This promise gives us great hope for eternity because one day Jesus will wipe away all the bad things. Listen to our story and think about how Jesus' promise to return shines through the letters to the seven churches.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Last week we learned that John had an incredible experience while living in exile on Patmos. **Jesus appeared to John in a vision to tell about the end of time.** Jesus encouraged John that one day He will return and make all things new. Today's story also comes from the Book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible. Our story today is called "God's Warning to Seven Churches."

- 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 • The messages in each of the seven letters are different, but they all have something in common. Most of the letters contained an encouragement for what the church was doing well or a rebuke for something it was doing wrong, but each contained a

- Bibles
- "God's Warning to Seven Churches" video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

promise for the people who would listen to and obey the message of the letter.

I want to talk specifically about Jesus' words to the church in Laodicea. Jesus said that the church was not hot or cold, but lukewarm and useless. Hot water can be used to clean and to cook. Cold water is refreshing to drink and could be used before refrigerators to help keep food cool and fresh. Lukewarm water can't do any of those things. Jesus warned the church that their passion for God was neither driving them to live righteously, nor was it refreshing those who needed to see God's love. Their lukewarm feelings toward God made them useless!

These seven letters show us God's grace because they prove that God cares about His church. The churches who obeyed the message of the letters were able to be a light to many people for the gospel. When they lived as God instructed them, God was able to use them to bring the gospel to lost people.

Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith. These letters weren't just for the seven churches mentioned. These messages are for us today as well! Jesus wants us to love Him more than anything else. He doesn't want us to be afraid because He has power over evil. He wants us to repent of our sin and turn back to Him. He wants us to boldly proclaim the gospel to unbelievers. Jesus wants us to remember that He gives us abundant life!

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. Through the church, Jesus helps believers work together to do God's plan.

It's important for us to remember that if we believe in Jesus, we are part of the church. That means that these warnings apply to us too. Jesus died on the cross to provide us with the way to live forever, but our new life doesn't have to wait until Jesus comes back! We begin our new life with God right away. We read our Bibles and trust the Holy Spirit to guide us. We share the gospel with others so they can have new life with God too.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Revelation 21:5. Divide the room in half and guide one half of the room to say the first half of the verse and the other half of the room to answer with the second portion. Do this several times, and then switch.

LEADER • Our key passage is a beautiful promise that gives us hope. Even when life is hard or scary, we can trust that one day Jesus will return. He will make everything right again!

Lead boys and girls in singing "Everything New."

- Key Passage Poster
- "Everything New" song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever been given a warning when you were breaking the rules? How did that feel? Think about that as you watch this clip.

Show the "Unit 36, Session 2" discussion starter video. Discuss with the kids why Aiden corrected Maria. How do you think Maria felt when Aiden corrected her? Talk about how warnings can sometimes be hard to hear, but they are

- "Unit 36, Session 2" discussion starter video

for our benefit, to protect us from falling into sin.

LEADER • When you make a bad choice, it can feel scary or embarrassing to have someone correct you, but in the end, that is much better than the results you will face if you do not get or ignore the warning. Jesus warned the churches because He wanted them to fully experience their new lives with God. When we choose sin, it doesn't take away our salvation, but it does prevent us from experiencing all the joy we could have by living for God's glory.

Sing (4 minutes)

• "I Stand Amazed" song

LEADER • I love being reminded of Jesus' promise to return. It gives me hope, and it makes me want to sing! One day, we will all be amazed by Jesus as we stand in His presence.

Sing together "I Stand Amazed."

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • God, thank You for allowing us to hear Your Word today. The Scriptures are living and active, and everything that we read in the Bible comes from You. We believe that what Your Word says is true, and we pray that You would help us obey the message that we've heard today. We thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to rescue us from our sin, and we praise You for defeating sin and death! Give us hope for eternity as we wait for Jesus to return. 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

Display the key passage poster and read Revelation 21:5 aloud together a few times. Instruct all the kids to form a line and squat down. Starting at the front of the line, each child will pop up as they say a word in the key passage. Repeat a few times, mixing up the kids and challenging them to pop up and say the key passage faster.

SAY • Great job, everyone! Our key passage is a beautiful reminder of what will happen in the future. Jesus will return, He will rule as King of kings, and He will fix all that is broken in the world. Let's keep working on our key passage this week!

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

• Bibles, 1 per kid
• Main Point Poster
• tennis ball

Instruct the kids to sit in a circle on the floor. Ask review questions about the story, tossing a tennis ball a kid who raises her hand to answer. Only the person with the tennis ball may speak. Once she answers, she should toss the ball back to you to ask the next question. If a kid doesn't know the answer, he may pass the ball to another who does.

Suggested questions:

1. What was the message to the church in Ephesus?

*(“Turn back and love Me like you did at first,”
Rev. 2:4)*

2. What was the message to the church in Smyrna?
(“Do not be afraid of suffering because God will reward your faith,” Rev. 2:10))
3. What was the message to the church in Pergamum?
(Repent, stop believing false teachings and leading others to stumble; Rev. 6:14-16)
4. What was the message to the church in Thyatira? *(Do not listen to the false prophetess; believe the truth until Jesus comes; Rev. 2:20,25)*
5. What was the message to the church in Sardis? *(Wake up and remember the gospel, Rev. 3:2)*
6. What was the message to the church in Philadelphia?
(Be ready for Jesus’ return and continue obeying Him, Rev. 3:10-11)
7. What was the message to the church in Laodicea?
(They were lukewarm. Jesus told them to return to Him to be restored; Rev. 3:16-18)

SAY • Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith. This message is for us too! We can stand strong in our faith because Jesus gives us hope in His promise to one day return and make all things new. We don’t have to wait until Jesus returns for our life with Him to be full and wonderful.

Jesus gives us instructions and a mission so that we can experience full life right away. When the world distracts us and we choose sin, we might drift away from the joy we have from obeying God and living for His glory. Thankfully, we can always turn back to Him and experience joy again.

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

LOW PREP

- hula hoops, 7
- paper
- marker
- tape

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Seven churches

Place hula hoops on the ground and label each one with the name of one of the cities the seven churches were in. Form seven groups of kids, one for each church. Assign each group to a “church.” Invite them to act out the different issues talked about in the story, then one by one announce the warnings to them, and invite them to change their behavior to heed the warning.

SAY • Jesus told the seven churches to stand strong in the faith. This is a message for us today too! We can trust and obey God’s Word because it comes from God.

OPTION 2: Seven churches hopscotch

- paper
- marker
- tape
- beanbag

Write the name of each church’s city on a separate sheet of paper. Tape the papers on the floor in a hopscotch pattern. The kids will line up and take turns tossing a beanbag onto the board and hopping through the grid, skipping the church where the beanbag landed.

SAY • Jesus loves the church. The church is His means of spreading the gospel to unbelievers all over the world. It is God’s grace to us that He invites us into community with other believers. We can encourage one another just as Jesus does, to stand strong in our faith. Unlike our game, Jesus won’t “skip” anyone when He returns. Jesus will judge each person, and those who trust in Him will reign with Him forever.

Thankfully, we don’t have to wait until Jesus returns to experience full lives with Him. He wants us to love Him and glorify Him with our actions right away!

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring 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.