



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

# The Church—Portent to Dark Cosmic Powers

Bible Reading: Ephesians 3:10; Deut. 32:7-9; Acts 17:26

[Watch LIVESTREAM here at 10am](#)

[Join our post-sermon discussion on Zoom at 11am](#)

[Join our citKids Connect discussion at 11am](#)

- “So that God’s...wisdom may now be made known *through the church* to the heavenly rulers & authorities” (Eph. 3:10)
- “...Any interpretation of Ephesians stands or falls with this verse.”—George Caird
- Ephesians 3:10 “is *one of the NT’s most powerful statements of the reason for the church’s existence*”— T. Wright

## SUMMARY:

The cosmic powers played a role in the nations’ dispersion after the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). God appointed ‘guardian angels’ over each people-group (Dt. 32:8). However, these ‘gods’ led the Gentile-nations astray into bondage, idolatry & immorality. Christ defeated them on the cross. Paul’s mission was to reverse the curse of Babel, proclaiming salvation to the Gentiles, producing multi-ethnic, multi-racial churches as portents—warning signs—to the evil spiritual forces. *This kind of church* displays God’s wisdom to the cosmos & fulfills God’s purpose. They are God’s ‘outposts,’ planted in ‘enemy territory,’ engaging in spiritual combat against the powers of darkness.

## Who are these Dark Cosmic Powers?

A. Where do we see evidence of Evil Spiritual Forces at work today?

B. The Fallen Angels (‘gods’) who oversee the Gentile Nations after Babel (Dt. 32:8; Acts 17:26)

- Moses said: “Remember the days of old...<sup>8</sup> When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples *according to the number of the sons of God*.<sup>9</sup> But the LORD’s portion is his

people, Jacob [i.e., Israel] his allotted heritage.’ (Deut. 32:7-9 ESV)

- “The point Dt. 32:8-9 is that sometime after God separated the people...at Babel...he then *assigned each of the 70 nations to the fallen sons of God* (...also 70 in number)” –Michael Heiser

C. These ‘gods’ led the Gentile nations into idolatry, immorality, conflict & chaos (Eph. 2:1-4)

D. The Cosmic ‘Princes’ seeking to frustrate God’s plan (Dan. 10:12-13, 20)

## Paul’s View of the Nations—formed by God, misled by gods (Acts 17:26)

- “Paul...[talks of God’s] determinative role...in establishing all national-territori[es]: ‘From one man he...made every nation...on the whole earth &...determined their appointed times & the boundaries...where they live.’ (Acts 17:26)” –Daniel Block

## Paul’s Goal—to Reverse the Curse of Babel (Rom. 11:25; 15:16; Eph. 2:11-13)

- “Paul...works...to *reclaim the nations*...Their scattering at...Babel [is] a...backdrop for Paul’s work.” –Jackson Richardson

## What is God’s Wisdom? Why ‘*through the church*’? The Church testifies the Reversal of Babel

A. What is God’s multi-faceted Wisdom?

B. Why ‘*through the church*’?

- “Paul tells the Church...to remain unified...to testify to the [cosmic] forces that God has now reversed his decree at Babel. Instead of...splintered people-groups, the church constitutes the restored people of God.” –Benjamin Gladd

C. Paul’s ministry provoked a reaction—“*Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus...*” (Eph. 3:1, cf. 3:13; 4:1)

- **Q:** Does our church, in the...life we lead, pose a challenge to the [cosmic] powers of evil which provokes reaction?

## The Church as a Portent & Sign

- What is a “Portent,” or “Sign”? Note: “Portent”—a sign or warning of a future event

- “The church is a sign to the evil spiritual powers...that...their dominion is coming to an end.” –Peter Williamson

A. The Church & the Cosmos—the Church has cosmic significance (Eph. 1:21-23; 3:10)

B. The Church is a Portent, a Sign (Eph. 3:10)

- “Paul sees *the church itself as the powerful sign...to the watching principalities & powers* that a new way of being human has been launched...that there is a new Lord.” –N. T. Wright

1. God’s wisdom is displayed, not via apostolic ministry or gospel-preaching *per se*, but via *the Church* (Eph. 3:10)

- “*The Church...[is] the medium...for the divine wisdom...[It’s] the mirror, God’s display window.*” –Richard Saucy
- The church *itself* is a sign: Eph. 3:10 “is *one of the NT’s most powerful statements of the reason for the church’s existence*: the rulers & authorities must be confronted with God’s wisdom...& this...happen[s]...*through what the church is*—the community in which men & women...of every race, color, social & cultural background come together [to] worship...the one true God.” –Tom Wright

## What kind of Church is a Sign of God’s Wisdom?

- What kind of Church? The multi-national, multi-ethnic Church is a Sign, a Portent, to the Dark Cosmic Powers

A. According to God’s eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11)

B. The Challenge—the Cosmic Powers are watching!

- “All the principalities & powers in the heavenly places are watching this week to see if we, the church, will live as if God is wise or as if he is foolish. Let’s show them by the way we live that God’s...plan is not failing!” —John Piper