



Esther 9:1-17 explains the political events that mark the salvation of the Jews in Persia, but context makes it clear that God alone is responsible for their deliverance. Their deliverance doesn't come from Esther's beauty, Mordecai's political skills, or Xerxes' graciousness, but from God's providential care. Likewise, however we might otherwise explain things, our victories over evil, sin, and adversity are God's gifts.

In the book of Exodus, when Moses cries out "Let my people go!" the famous contest is not so much between Moses and Pharaoh as between the Lord and the gods of Egypt. Heaven's power to rule prevails in the course of a war that is waged in heaven as well as on earth. The archangel Michael's victory in Daniel on behalf of God's people, the Jews, is a victory in a very real battle against the very real angel-princes of Persia and Greece—and by extension, the very real angel-princes of Rome, Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam, London and all the other succeeding powers of history, right down to Washington, Moscow and Beijing today.

. . . If sin is evil at the personal level, principalities and powers are evil at the cosmic level. They are not merely human projections or a way of describing the inner spirit of an institution. They are independent supernatural realities that transcend the natural plane of our human experience. Thus there are two kingdoms in the universe—the kingdom of God and light and the kingdom of Satan and darkness—as Jesus taught and demonstrated by his confrontations and healings.

Derek Prince, the Cambridge-educated philosopher, Bible teacher, and Battle of El Alamein veteran, came to his own settled conviction: "Human history is truly explained by the interplay between these forces." "Do You not know," Pilate said to Jesus, "that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" (Jn 19:10). Jesus' next words must have angered as well as stunned him, for they soared above any perceived cheek or stupidity to make an assertion that, if not true, was a sure symptom of delusion as well as an insult to mighty Rome. Addressing the representative of the mightiest power on the earth of his day, Jesus calmly replied, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (Jn 19:11).

This one sentence surely merits an hour of worship and reflection. At the very least it means that nothing short of an insistence that "principalities and powers" are independent supernatural realities, and that God rules over them all, can make sense of the biblical account of the nations and their power. For in the biblical account nations are powerful, independent realities that shape the people within them. Hence the old maxim, "That which chooses the chooser determines the choice." But nations, and not only individuals, too, have fallen. For Adam and Eve, disobedience led to exclusion. And for nations, as shown in the account of the Tower of Babel, disobedience led to confusion. So as the Bible's story unfolds, it is said that nations can become idols, and nations too will be judged. At the last day, even the great city, St. Augustine's City of Man, will be judged, "for in one hour she has been laid waste!" (Rev. 18:19). But that is not the whole story, and there is good news for nations too. Nations too may be redeemed, and at the great day at the end of time "all the nations will come and worship before You" (Rev. 15:4).

*Impossible People*

### Discussion Questions

What in the story of Esther indicates that the Jews' victory over their enemies is due to God's intervention rather than fortunate political advantages? What indications of God's intervention do you see in our nation, our church, and in your family and personal life?

If God achieves victory over sin and evil, what is our role in these battles? How can we contribute to the fight against the spiritual forces that hinder, oppress, and imprison us, family members, friends, and others?

How can we celebrate God's victories over sin and evil?