

# How Much Does God Control History?

How much does God control the events in history?

- At one end is the idea that God totally controls every event, every action in the universe, down to the box of Raisin Bran Crunch you had for breakfast.
- At the other end is the idea that, while God is sovereign over all things, He chooses to stand back and let the universe run on its own. God only steps in what we plead for His intervention.

The truth is somewhere in the middle.



I am reticent to say that God causes *all* things to happen. I can't say God willed Hurricane Francis to cause \$10 billion in damage and kill 49 people. I can't say God caused a

gunman to kill 12 people in Thousand Oaks, California.

We face a tension in this issue we can't fully resolve on. But there are two truths in this tension I can stand on with full confidence and faith:

1. **God allows tragic events to happen.** We live in a fallen world of our own making. Even so, we don't fully understand why God prevents some things from happening yet allows others to proceed and bring grief to our lives.

My father died from cancer twenty-one years ago. When he was first diagnosed with cancer, he said something that, surprisingly, brought me comfort. He said, "This is not a surprise to God." He never questioned God. He never bargained with God. He simply trusted. He prayed for healing, but he knew that—regardless of the way God answered—God would answer. What my father would go through for the next year was no surprise to God, and as my father trusted Christ through it all, God brought good into his life and the lives of others.

2. **God's sovereign plan will not be thwarted.** God orchestrates some events for His divine purposes. At these times, nothing can stand in the way of what God wills. The tension comes in discerning those things God allows and those things God orchestrates.

God's sovereign plan includes our salvation. His plan from the very beginning was to rescue us from our sinful state and bring us back to Him. God's plan for our salvation for not tied to God looking down on the earth, searching and hoping for the right opportunity. The birth and life of Jesus was not just some serendipitous

occurrence; as if everything just fell into place by happenstance. No, God was determined to bring about our salvation, and He orchestrated events to see that everything fell into place.

*"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Gal. 4:4-5).*

Throughout the Old Testament, God "dropped hints" of what He was planning: prophecies. He spoke through multiple people over hundreds of years, pointing to what the Messiah would do "when the time had fully come."

Here's just a tiny list of those prophecies:

- Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7)
- Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21-23)
- Born as a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16)
- Born of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; Luke 3:23, 33; Hebrews 7:14)
- Born of the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Matthew 1:1)
- Taken to Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:14-15)
- Performed miracles (Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 9:35)
- Cleansed the Temple (Malachi 3:1; Matthew 21:12-13)
- Entered Jerusalem as a king on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:4-9)
- Died a humiliating death (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53)
- Betrayal by a friend (Psalm 41:9; Luke 22:3-4; John 13:18) for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:14-15)
- Crucified with thieves (Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38)
- His side was pierced (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34)
- Buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60)
- Rose from the dead (Psalm 16:10; Mark 16:6; Acts 2:31)



We are approaching the Christmas season. As we ponder the gift of salvation and the arrival of Jesus Christ as a baby, hold on to this essential truth:

**The birth of Jesus was no surprise to God. He was behind it all the way!**

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