

# *It Is Written*

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## *Is God In Control?*

By Doy Moyer

We often hear that “God is in control” when things in this world aren’t going well. With all the violence and evil, we wonder, how can God be in control? Are we saying that God makes bad people do bad things? Are we saying that God creates the violence and evil? It may seem counterproductive to say that God is in control while, at the same time, seeing the world fall apart around us. How can God be in control?

According to the dictionary, control means to “exercise restraint or direction,” to “hold in check,” or to have power over. I believe God is in control, even with all the evil in the world. He is sovereign and has all authority in heaven and earth (cf. Matthew 28:18). What I don’t believe is that God micromanages and coerces every decision, negates free will, pulls everyone’s strings like a puppet master, and makes all the bad things happen. That is not what is meant by affirming that God is in control. He doesn’t force everything, nor is He to be blamed for the evil.

What is the alternative? If God is not in control, then what is? Are we to accept that chaos or even the devil reigns and that God is taking a hands-off approach (i.e., a form of deism)? Are we to think that our exercise of free will has more power to control outcomes than God? We need to think about what we are accepting if we deny God’s control.

We affirm that God sits on His throne with all authority and maintains boundaries, even as He allows free will to operate and bear consequences. We are saying that God “does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” (Daniel 4:35). “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Psalms 115:3). When statements like these were made, people were evil then, too. Being in control is not forced coercion. Indeed, the fact that God allows people to make such choices and do bad things shows self-controlled patience and long-suffering on His part as He desires that none perish, but all come to repentance (II Peter 3:9). God is in control when He gives people up to the consequences of their sinful choices (Romans 1:24-32). Sometimes He does give people what they are asking for (negatively). Do not, for a moment, think that God is not in control just because we see terrible consequences from terrible behavior.

Consider the book of Job. Was God in control? The first two chapters show that He maintained control throughout, though He allowed bad things to happen to Job. It may be difficult to understand why, but our lack of understanding is not evidence that God is not in control. He set the limits of what Satan could do. The line was drawn by God, Satan acted freely within those boundaries, and the resolution at the end was of God’s making (a marked proof that Satan was wrong in his charges and pursuits).

When Daniel interpreted the “writing on the wall,” he referenced what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, stating that “the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will” (Daniel 5:21). When Jehoshaphat sought help from God, his prayer began, “O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you” (II Chronicles 20:6). This is what we mean when we say that God is in control.

During all of these times, evil and sin were in the world. Yet God maintained control and brought

about resolutions according to His will. He allows free will. He allows evil to bear its consequences. He also brings an end to these things, sets limits, and uses such events to serve greater purposes (e.g., using Babylon to bring judgment upon Judah; see Habakkuk).

God can corral events to bring about good, as well. This is one reason we pray, for what can prayer do if God is not in control? We think of God's providence and His use of what appear to be coincidences to bring people together and create positive outcomes (e.g., Esther, Joseph). The truth is that we just don't know or understand what is going on behind the scenes. This is why it is upon us to trust Him. We don't know what He knows, understand what He understands, or have the wisdom that He has.

God also controls the timing of the Day of Judgment, a day in which "He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). We can't afford to think God isn't in control. We just need to see that His control also allows us the freedom to make choices and provides us with the solution to sin by His grace through Jesus Christ.

## Jesus and Miracles

By Frank Himmel

In his first sermon, Peter introduced Jesus as "a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your presence, just as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). Let's begin a study of Jesus' miracles with three observations from this verse.

One, Jesus performed miracles. Too many in our day try to dismiss the accounts of Jesus' miracles as the exaggerations of over-zealous disciples. No, the New Testament is eyewitness testimony. "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16; cf. 1 John 1:1-3).

Jesus did many different kinds of miracles: various physical effects, such as walking on water; instant healing of numerous afflictions, including severed body parts; casting out demons; and in at least three instances He raised the dead. Unlike His disciples (e.g., Matthew 17:14-21), He never failed anything He attempted. Even His enemies acknowledged His miracles. The thousands gathered on Pentecost were well aware of Jesus' deeds—"just as you yourselves know."

Two, Jesus' miracles manifested divine power. The word miracle is used rather loosely in modern times, often to denote merely outstanding or unusual events; for example, a team making a "miraculous" comeback in a game. Such things are not miracles at all. Genuine miracles require supernatural involvement. In Jesus' activities, "God performed through Him."

Peter used three terms: miracles, wonders, and signs. Miracle emphasizes the cause, divine power. It is from the same word as dynamite. Wonder points to the effect on witnesses. Sign states the purpose. Miracles say something. They have implications beyond the event, which brings us to . . .

Three, Jesus' miracles proved who He was. He was "attested by God." That means accredited or proved. Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh (John 5:18; 10:30). His miracles verified it. Jesus' miracles are as critical to His identity as His teaching is.

When John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus was the Expected One, Jesus pointed to His miracles (Matthew 11:2-6). The Lord told audiences who stumbled over His words, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I am in the Father" (John 10:37-38). The written record of Jesus' miracles enables us to believe as surely as those who saw them firsthand (John 20:30-31).