

Earthquakes & End Times

[Matthew 24:7](#)



I'm sure that all of you have heard about the huge [earthquake](#) that happen 9 days ago in Japan. It was the [fifth largest earthquake on record](#). It seems like there have been a lot of major earthquakes lately.

On January 12, 2010 a [7.0 earthquake hit Haiti](#), there were 33 aftershocks ranging in magnitude from 4.2 to 5.9. The Haitian government reported that an estimated 316,000 people had died, 300,000 had been injured and 1,000,000 made homeless. The government of Haiti also estimated that 250,000 residences and 30,000 commercial buildings had collapsed or were severely damaged. Most of those people are still homeless today.

On February 27, 2010 a massive [8.8 earthquake hit Chile](#). This catastrophic event affected over 2 million Chileans. It destroyed over 500,000 homes and left 497 people dead.



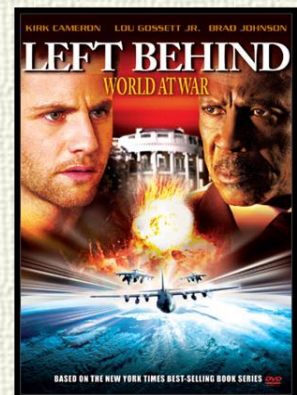
There have been 7 earthquakes of a magnitude 7.0 and greater so far in 2011. On January 1, there was a 7.0 in Argentina. On January 2, there was a 7.1 in Chile. January 13, there was a 7.0 in Loyalty Islands. January 18, there was a 7.2 in Southwestern Pakistan. On March 9, there was a 7.2 off the East coast of Japan. Then on March 11, there was a 9.0 off the East coast of Japan and about an hour later there was a 7.1 off the East coast of Japan.

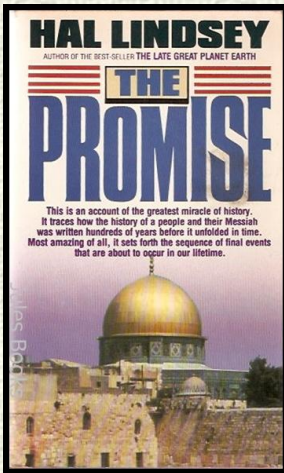
Is there any biblical significance to all these earthquakes? Are these quakes a sign of the end? Is our planet Earth shaking with greater *frequency* and *intensity* than ever before in human history? According to a number of Christian writers and teachers on Bible prophecy, Jesus predicted in the [Olivet Discourse](#) that a pronounced increase in the frequency and intensity of earthquakes would occur just prior to His return to the earth. So every time an earthquake happens the prophecy preachers start shouting, *“The end is near.”* Is there a spiritual significance to this earthquake?

People are always asking me, *“Does eschatology matter?”* And my immediate response is always, *“Does truth matter?”* If truth matters, then eschatology matters. And in times of a disaster like what has happened in Japan, the futurists start shouting, *“The end of the world is near,”* and getting people all fired up. If you have a biblical eschatology you just laugh at this end time nonsense. So yes, eschatology matters!

[Tim LaHaye](#), author of the *“Left Behind”* series, Says that the earthquake in Japan is a sign of end times. Let me just say here that the Bible does not speak of "the end of time." The expression "the end time" or the "time of the end" is found in Scripture, but nowhere in the Bible can we find the expression "the end of time." The expression "the end time" or the "time of the end" speaks of the end of an age, but the end of an age is not the end of time. **Scripture does not indicate that God has any plan to destroy this created world that we enjoy.**

In commenting on the Japanese earthquake Tim LaHaye says, *“The Bible tells us in Matthew 24 that one of the signs of the last days – one of the birth pangs to occur – is an increase in earthquake activity and intensity. We’re seeing that happen here. It’s not just earthquakes, but hurricanes and all kinds of natural disasters.”*





In *The Promise*, [Hal Lindsey](#) states, *“Jesus warned that earthquakes would increase in frequency and intensity as this old earth prepared for its final cataclysm”* (Page 198). He says that this piece of the prophetic "jigsaw puzzle" is supposed to be taking place in our day.

In his book, *Good-bye Planet Earth* (1976), Seventh Day Adventist author, Robert H. Pierson, has a subheading "A Shaking, Quaking Planet." Under it he states:

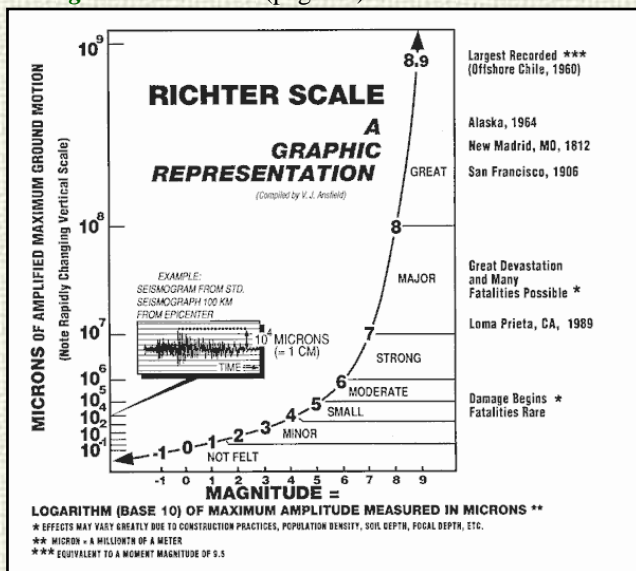
“With increasing frequency and intensity Mother Earth has been shaking and quaking. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives. Multiplied thousands more will perish in greater earth spasms ahead. Never since the days of Noah has the world been so badly battered. Again God is speaking to us — He is seeking to tell us that our time is short.”

The most remarkable and detailed claims in this regard, however, are those made by the Governing Body of [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) and their [Watch Tower Society](#). Maintaining that Christ's statement regarding *"great earthquakes"* ([Luke chapter 21:11](#)) has seen its true fulfillment only since 1914, the Watch Tower Society claims that we have experienced an enormous increase in such earthquakes since that year: The frequency of major earthquakes has increased about 20 times what it was on an average during the two thousand years before 1914. (*Survival into a New Earth* (1984), page 23.)

Before we examine what the Bible has to say on this issue, let me say that from a **scientific** standpoint, these claims of increased earthquake activity in our day are **false**. The earth has not been shaking and quaking with greater frequency.

The deployment of standardized and calibrated [seismographs](#) has been going on for just over a hundred years. It started with nine seismograph stations in 1898 that were capable of detecting, locating and measuring earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or larger anywhere in the globe. By 1931 there were 350 stations operating worldwide that were locating and measuring 6.5 earthquakes globally. By the 1950s the system of seismographs could locate all 6.0 events occurring globally. Today a network of more than 4,000 seismograph stations is locating and measuring more than 10,000 events with magnitude less than 5.0 each year. So we have definitely had an increase in the number of earthquakes we have been able to locate and measure each year.

[Charles F. Richter](#), former President of the Seismological Society of America and the originator of the "[Richter scale](#)," in an article published in the December 1969 issue of *Natural History* magazine said: *“One notices with some amusement that certain religious groups have picked this rather unfortunate time to insist that the number of earthquakes is increasing. In part they are misled by the increasing number of small earthquakes that are being catalogued and listed by newer, more sensitive stations throughout the world”* (page 44).



Dr. Richter's statement was aimed at demonstrating that the claimed increase in the earthquake activity during our century finds no support in the recorded seismological data during the period of instrumentally measured seismicity, which covers the period from 1896, or more particularly from 1903 onward.

Dr. Richter's statement was made back in 1969. Why then, does Hal Lindsey make these claims in his book, *The 1980's—Countdown to Armageddon?*:

“There have been many great earthquakes throughout history, but, according to surprisingly well-kept records, in the past they did not occur very frequently.

The 20th century, however, has experienced an unprecedented increase in the frequency of these calamities. In fact, the number of earthquakes per decade has roughly doubled in each of the 10-year periods since 1950 (page 29).

The 1970's experienced the largest increase in the number of quakes known to history. In fact, the dramatic increase in quakes in 1976 led many scientists to say we are entering a period of great seismic disturbances (page 30).

Hal Lindsey is trying to prove his claims that we are in the "last days" by using scientific data. The problem is that what he says is not what the data really says.

More recent statistics published by other seismologists, who have carefully and objectively examined the matter, not only confirm the accuracy of Dr. Richter's statement, but show that it continued to be true into the 1970's.

What do the seismologists themselves say as to the overall picture? Have they found any marked difference between the frequency of earthquakes since 1914 compared with earlier centuries? Seismologists, J. Milne and A. W. Lee, declared, "There is no indication that seismic activity has increased or diminished appreciably throughout historic times." And Professor Markus both agree: "For earlier centuries we do not have the same reliable statistics, but there are no indications at all of any increase in the activity in the course of time."

As the ancient records become more and more sparse and incomplete the farther back in time we go, it is only natural that we have more and better information from the latest centuries than from the earlier ones. There is, however, one exception-Japan. The Japanese have kept a running record of destructive earthquakes in that country (with its frequent seismic activity) reaching back to well before the birth of Christ. According to Milne's catalog, the number of destructive earthquakes in Japan recorded during the last ten centuries has shown no increase.

WHAT DO LEADING SEISMOLOGISTS SAY ABOUT EARTHQUAKES TODAY AND IN THE PAST?

"There is no indication that seismic activity has increased or diminished appreciably throughout historic time." Seismologists J. Milne and A. W. Lee, *Earthquakes and Other Earth Movements*, seventh edition (London, 1939), p. 155.

"For earlier centuries we do not have the same reliable statistics, but there are no indications at all of any increase in the activity in the course of time." Professor Markus Both (private letter dated June 17, 1983).

"I certainly would agree with both Professors Both and Richter in their assessment that there has been no significant increase in the number of earthquakes during this or any other century." Wilbur A. Rinehart, seismologist at the World Data Center A, Boulder, Colorado (private letter dated August 8, 1985).

An expert on the seismicity of the Mediterranean area, one of the earth's major earthquake regions, says, *"Most certainly, there has been no increase in the seismic activity of the Mediterranean during this century. Quite the contrary, in the Eastern Mediterranean the activity of this century has been abnormally low when compared with that of the 10th-12th and 18th centuries."* Professor N. N. Ambraseys (private letter dated August 9, 1985).

"I feel strongly that the seismicity has been stationary for thousands of years. . . . Excellent geological evidence for the stationarity has been obtained by Prof. Kerry Sieh of Caltech, for the San Andreas fault." Seismologist Keiiti Aki, professor at the Department of Geological Sciences, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (private letter dated September 5, 1985).

"There are indications that worldwide seismic activity if expressed in terms of earthquakes with magnitude 7 or over-has decreased steadily in the time from the beginning of the 20th century until now." Seweryn J. Duda, Professor of Geophysics, University of Hamburg (private letter dated July 7, 1986).



These quotes are from chapter 3 of the book, *SIGN OF THE LAST DAYS - WHEN?* by Carl Olof Jonsson and Wolfgang Herbst, Commentary Press, P.O. Box 43532, Atlanta, Georgia 30336. 1987.

Consequently, there is no evidence whatsoever in support of the claim that earthquake activity is markedly different in our century compared with earlier centuries. All information available points to the contrary.

Now, let's look at what the Bible says about earthquakes. First of all, Jesus only spoke of "*earthquakes*" once, and this was in His Olivet discourse:

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. Matthew 24:7 NASB

[Mark 13:8](#) and [Luke 21:11](#) basically say the same thing. Tim LaHaye writes, "*The Bible tells us in Matthew 24 that one of the signs of the last days is an increase in earthquake activity and intensity.*" Hal Lindsey states, "*Jesus warned that earthquakes would increase in frequency and intensity as this old earth prepared for its final cataclysm.*"

This is the only place in Matthew 24 that talks about earthquakes and this is the only place where Jesus talks about earthquakes, so where do they get this "*increase in earthquake activity and intensity*". The text says nothing about an increase in earthquake activity and intensity. It simply says, "*...in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.*" Not only are earthquakes not increasing, but the biblical text never indicated that they would.

From this verse in Matthew 24, many have understood Jesus to be saying that earthquakes are a sign of the end of the world? That is not what Jesus said. Let's back up to the beginning of Matthew 24 and see if we can understand what Jesus is saying.

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." Matthew 24:1-2 NASB

Notice that the subject here is the Jewish Temple. Jesus points out the Temple to his disciples and says it is going to be totally destroyed.

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3 NASB

The disciples here ask Jesus a twofold question. **First**, they ask, "*When will these things happen?*" All three of the synoptic gospels ask, "*when.*" The "*these things*" refers to the temple's destruction in verse 2. In verse 1, the disciples point out the temple buildings to Jesus. In verse 2, Jesus says, "All 'these things' shall be destroyed." It should be clear that they are asking, "WHEN will the temple be destroyed? When will our house be left desolate?" After all Jesus had just spoken about the judgment coming upon Jerusalem, and then about not one stone being left upon another, the disciples' response is, "*When?*" That makes sense, doesn't it?

The **second** part of their question is, "*What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age.*" The disciples had one thing, and only one thing, on their mind, and that was the destruction of the temple. **With the destruction of the temple, they connected the coming of Messiah and the end of the age.**

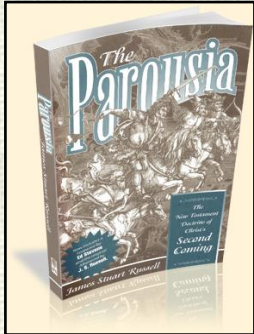
Now, again, the "*these things*"—the destruction of the temple, are connected with the end of the age. Some translations render this "end of the world." That is very confusing. The Greek word used here is [aion](#) which means, "*age.*" **It is not talking about the end of the physical world;** the word *aion* means: "*age, era, or a period of time.*" The expression "*end of the age*" refers to "the end of the Jewish age." The disciples knew that the fall of the temple and the destruction of the city meant the end of the Old Covenant age and the inauguration of a new age.

We could put the disciples' question this way, "*When will the temple be destroyed and what will be the sign of your presence in power and glory as Messiah and the end of the Jewish age?*" Amazingly, there is almost unanimity among commentators that the disciples associated the fall of Jerusalem with the Lord's [parousia](#) and the end of the age.

With these questions in mind, we move to Jesus' answer.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. Matthew 24:4-5 NASB

Who is the “**them**” in verse 4? It is the **disciples**. Please keep this in mind; Jesus is speaking to his disciples. Whatever Jesus’ answer means, it must have meaning to them. Any application that we make to ourselves from Scripture can only be made after we understand what it meant to the original audience. Keep in mind the principle of **original relevance**. Why do I belabor this point? Because most folks today miss it.



James Stuart Russell in his book, *[The Parousia](#)*, says this concerning [Matthew 24:4-14](#):

*It is impossible to read this section and fail to perceive its distinct reference to the period between our Lord's crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem. **Every word is spoken to the disciples, and to them alone.** To imagine that the 'ye' and 'you' in this address apply, not to the disciples to whom Christ was speaking, but to some unknown and yet non-existent persons in a far distant age, is so preposterous a supposition as not to deserve serious notice.*

So, Jesus tells his disciples that they will see **FALSE MESSIAHS**. Then in the next verse he tells them that “**THEY**” will hear of **WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS**:

"You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. Matthew 24:6 NASB

Wars are NOT a sign of the end, as the end of verse 6 clearly tells us. He will tell them later in this chapter that when they see a war, not hear of one, they are to flee.

Then Jesus tells **THEM** that they will see **NATION FIGHTING NATION, FAMINES, PESTILENCE, and EARTHQUAKES**:

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. Matthew 24:7 NASB

Did the disciple experience earthquakes in their life time? Yes, they did. [Tacitus](#) mentions earthquakes at Rome. He wrote, *"Frequent earthquakes occurred, by which many houses were thrown down,"* and, *"Twelve populous cities of Asia fell in ruins from an earthquake."*

In spite of Jesus words, *"The end is not yet,"* many today take this passage out of context and speak ignorantly about *"The signs of the times,"* trying to show that this or that battle, serious earthquake, or devastating famine is a sign of Christ's imminent return. **ALL** these things happened in the time prior to AD 70 and the fall of Jerusalem. **They are not signs!** As we look back over history, when has there been a time when there were not wars, famines, pestilence and earthquakes? These things are not signs. Jesus said to his disciples that these things are the *"beginning of birth pangs."*

"But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Matthew 24:8 NASB

Earthquakes were **not signs** to the disciples and they are **not signs** today. Earthquakes are earthquakes, nothing more.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. Matthew 24:9 NASB

Who will be delivered up and killed? **THE DISCIPLES!** Jesus said the disciples would be afflicted, beaten, imprisoned; they would be hated for his name's sake and some would be killed; they would be brought before councils, rulers, and kings, for a testimony; they would be given a mouth of wisdom which their adversaries could not dispute. The disciples experienced all of this before the [fall of Jerusalem in AD 70](#), just as the Lord said they would. It was unmistakably fulfilled in every detail!

The disciples asked Jesus for a sign of the end and the first sign he gives them is in verse 14:

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14 NASB

Remember the disciples' question? *"What shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"* What **end** is he talking about here? Unless we take this verse clear out of its setting, *"the end"* in view here is the end or destruction which was to come upon Jerusalem and the temple ending the Jewish age. Jerusalem would be destroyed, but "first" the gospel would be preached unto all nations.

Well, if all this happened in their day, and all was fulfilled before AD 70, was the gospel preached to all the world before Jerusalem fell? YES! Paul declares that the gospel was preached to every creature under heaven:

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; Colossians 1:5-6 NASB

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Colossians 1:23 NASB

In Matthew 24:14, the Greek word for preached is *kerusso*, (kay-roos'-so); it is in the future tense. But in [Colossians 1:23](#), the same word *kerusso* is in the aorist tense (past). Jesus said that it is to be preached, and Paul says in AD 62, that it has been preached to every creature.

Listen, people, we are not living in the "Last Days." The last days ended in AD 70 and they were the last days of Israel.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. Hebrews 1:1-2 NASB

Jesus was speaking in the last days. Last days of what? The last days of the Old Covenant age.

Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Hebrews 9:26 NASB

When was it that Jesus appeared? He was born not at the beginning, but at the end of the ages. Jesus was manifest at the end of the Jewish age. Peter says the same thing.

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 1 Peter 1:20 NASB

Jesus came during the last days of the age that was the Old Covenant age, the Jewish age. That age came to an end with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. All the things prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24 occurred at the end of that age. So, earthquakes are not a sign to us.

What about this great earthquake in Japan? What does the Bible tell us about earthquakes? Earthquakes in the Bible demonstrate God's presence and awesome power. At Mount Sinai the LORD's presence was indicated by smoke and the shaking of the mountain:

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. Exodus 19:18 NASB

When the New Testament church prayed *"the place where they had gathered together was shaken"* ([Acts 4:31](#)). Paul and Silas were freed from prison when God's power and presence was manifested in an earthquake ([Acts 16:26](#)). When Christ died on the cross, an earthquake shook the temple and rent the curtain of the temple from top to bottom ([Matt. 27:51](#)). At Christ's resurrection a severe earthquake took place:

And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. Matthew 28:2 NASB

So earthquakes in the Bible demonstrate God's presence and awesome power. No earthquakes in the Bible are attributed to Satan. Many are attributed to God. This is because God is Lord of heaven and earth.

He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold? He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow. Psalms 147:15-18 NASB

He looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke. Psalms 104:32 NASB

Who shakes the earth out of its place, And its pillars tremble; Job 9:6 NASB

John Wesley wrote of *"The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes"* in 1750: *"Of all the judgments which the righteous God inflicts on sinners here, the most dreadful and destructive is an earthquake."*

Could the earthquake in Japan have been a judgment from God? [Tokyo Govern](#) or [Shintaro Ishihara](#) said Monday that the calamity that hit his country was *"tenbatsu,"* or divine punishment, for the wickedness of the Japanese people. *"We need a tsunami to wipe out egoism, which has rusted onto the mentality of Japanese over a long period of time,"* he said. *"I think the disaster is a kind of divine punishment, although I feel sorry for disaster victims."* He later [apologized](#).



The Japanese earthquake could have been a judgment from God. But the truth is that, although we really don't know why it happened, we do know that earthquakes are ultimately from God. Nature does not have a will of its own. After the earthquake in Japan someone commented on the internet, *"If God did this than he is not a god I want anything to do with."* Nobody seems to want to believe in a God of wrath, or a God who is sovereign. We know that whatever God does is Holy and just and that God does nothing without an infinitely wise and good purpose.

Yet He also is wise and will bring disaster And does not retract His words, But will arise against the house of evildoers And against the help of the workers of iniquity. Isaiah 31:2 NASB

For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations. Psalms 100:5 NASB

Therefore, God had good and all-wise purposes for the heart-rending tragedy in Japan that took thousands of lives on March 11, 2011. Indeed, he had hundreds of thousands of purposes, most of which will remain hidden to us. When things like this earthquake take place, we must keep in mind:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! Romans 11:33 NASB

We cannot begin to understand His decisions, His decrees; they are way past being able to be searched out. The word *"unfathomable"* is a Greek hunting metaphor of hunters who would track animals and lose the path. If you try to follow what God is doing, you're going to lose the path. Because God's ways are unsearchable, we are shut up to faith.

For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? Romans 11:34-35 NASB

In verse 34 and 35, he asks three rhetorical questions:

1. *"Who has known the mind of the Lord?"* Do you think that you can understand God's thought process?

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. Isaiah 55:8 NASB

2. **"Who became His counselor?"** Who does God go to for advice? Should He have come to you? We sometimes act as if He should have. What arrogance! If you had the power to change some of your circumstances in life, would you? Why? Has God messed up, made a mistake? Do we know better than He does? His wisdom is infinite; we must learn to trust Him in everything.
3. **"Who has first given to Him that it shall be repaid to him?"** Who had God in debt to him? Who does God owe anything to? No one ever gave to God.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36 NASB

The three prepositions used here, "from," "through" and "to," indicate that God is the source; the constantly working cause and the end of all things. God is the source of everything, God controls everything, and He made and controls everything for his own glory.

"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." Revelation 4:11 NASB

The purpose, the final purpose, the all inclusive purpose of everything, is to display God's glory.

God's unilateral taking of thousands of lives in Japan is a loud declaration that **"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away"** (Job 1:21). The message for all the world is that life is a loan from God and belongs to him. He creates it, and gives it, and takes it according to his own will and owes us nothing. It is a great gift for believers to learn this truth and dedicate our lives to their true owner, rather than defraud him of what is rightfully His.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NASB



This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on February 20, 2011. Media #544.

Berean Bible Church provides this material free of charge for the edification of the Body of Christ.



You can help further this work by your prayer and by sending a contribution to:

[Berean Bible Church](#)
2000 Centerville Turnpike
Chesapeake, VA 23322