

World watchman

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Japanese earthquake and tsunami

WHILE we believe God's promise in the rainbow (Gen. 9:11-17), video footage of the Japanese tsunami gave a new perspective on Matthew 24:39. When comparing the days of his return to the days of Noah, Jesus said they "knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." The unstoppable force of the water reminds us that there will be no stopping the events leading up to the establishment of God's Kingdom. There are several lessons to be considered when looking at the events in Japan.

This article was going to focus on the Middle East and North Africa. Then came the events of Friday 11 March 2011. The size of the earthquake, the fourth-largest since records began,¹ and subsequent tsunami and nuclear power plant explosions took over news headlines.

Lesson 1: *The world's media switched their focus overnight from the Middle East to Japan. Although most of this article is about Japan, we should never forget to watch the Middle East, which is always at the centre of the fulfilment of Bible prophecy.*

Japan has experienced earthquakes before, notably the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, when over 100,000 died and Tokyo was virtually destroyed, and the Southern Hyogo Earthquake of 1995, when Kobe and its surrounding area were badly affected, with 285,000 homes

destroyed or severely damaged and the loss of 6,000 lives.

There have been fifteen earthquakes in Japan of magnitude 7 or above since 2004.² This history has led Japan to have the world's most advanced earthquake-warning system, and has shaped architectural design to reduce the risk of damage. While the death toll will rise further as missing people are confirmed dead, there is no doubt that the damage and resulting deaths have been minimised in many areas. Tokyo is a prime example of this, where, despite the severity of the quake, only four people died. Consider that this earthquake was 100 times more powerful than the earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, where more than 200,000 died.

Lesson 2: *We too should learn from experience and change our behaviour accordingly. Time and again we see prophecy being fulfilled and the return of Jesus coming closer, but how are we preparing in our daily lives?*

The Pacific tectonic plate is pushing under the Japan plate at a rate of about 80mm per year, levering the Japan plate upwards. The movement is not uniform, though, and an earthquake occurs when pressure builds up. The plate then suddenly moves and (in this case) is thrust upwards.

This movement in turn displaces a huge volume of water upwards, causing the destructive tsunami. This water forms a wave or series of waves that in deep water may be only a foot high but travel at 500 miles per

hour, the speed of a passenger jet! This wave or tsunami can cross the Pacific Ocean in a day. As it approaches the shore, the sea bed slows it down, causing it to rise into a tidal surge with a height of up to thirty metres.

The rising water has another effect: it sucks the water away from the land as it approaches. Water drains away from rivers, harbours and other coastal features, leaving the river bed or sea bed visible before the tsunami sweeps in. This sign of an approaching tsunami can give five minutes' warning for those who recognise the signs. Rescue workers searching for survivors found evidence of drivers vainly trying to outpace the tsunami. By the time the wave came it was too late.

Lesson 3: *There are many signs in the world today and they are coming closer together. The waves of God's judgement are coming, but are we making the most of the time that remains?*

In spite of Japan's preparations, several commentators made the comment that "man stood against Mother Nature and has been thoroughly thrashed."³ This was illustrated by three examples. They said of the tsunami hitting Sendai, when the wave crashed against the city's protective concrete wall, that it tossed it aside like a matchstick. Then

1. http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/10_largest_world.php.
2. <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqarchives/significant/>.
3. <http://player.stv.tv/programmes/tonight/2011-03-17-1930/>.

there was the sign in a suburban area in the north of Japan assuring passers-by that they would be safe from a tsunami beyond that point. The house next to the sign was virtually demolished, and it was noted that the tsunami wreaked havoc for a further kilometre inland.

The crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is a particularly salient example. Much had been done to prevent earthquake damage, and by all accounts some of these preparations had been successful. However, problems arose because the water destroyed the backup generators that kept the cooling system running in the event of a power failure. The secondary back-up of large batteries then kicked in, but these ran out of charge before power could be restored. It took more than a week for power to be restored to the site, and, even as the cooling system was being started up, there was concern that it would not work due to the damage caused by the multiple explosions at the plant.

There are seven levels of atomic incident on the international scale. Eight days after the earthquake and tsunami, Japan raised the incident from 4 to 5 on this scale. This means that the incident is now regarded as having wider consequences and is no longer considered just a local problem. On the same day, food was found to have been contaminated by the radiation; more recently, the authorities have measured radiation levels more than twice the safe level in Tokyo's water, more than 100 miles from the plant.

Lesson 4: *Like the planners at Sendai, the writers of the sign and the designers of the Fukushima power plant, we*

may think we are in control. We are not. Do not think that because you have started preparing for Christ's return you have done all that you can.

Super-full moon

THE moon's orbit around the earth is elliptical; therefore sometimes it is close to the earth and sometimes it is further away. The distance between the farthest point (apogee) and the nearest point (perigee) is about 50,000 km. Perigee moons are fourteen per cent bigger and thirty per cent brighter than apogee moons. On 19 March 2011 there was a perigee moon, known as a 'super moon'. This had been anticipated before Japan's earthquake by rumours on the internet that "something BIG" was going to happen. The justification was that two weeks before the last near super moon (10 Jan. 2005) there was a massive tsunami that engulfed Indonesia.

NASA denied that super moons can cause natural disasters by pulling on the earth's crust, maintaining that the change in gravitational pull would increase the tide by only about 2–3 cm. In extreme situations, where local dynamics also play a part, it could rise by 15 cm (6 inches).⁴ Related to this are reports that the earth shifted four inches on its axis during the earthquake, causing the day to be shortened by about 1.8 microseconds. Other reports give satellite evidence for areas of Japan moving around 2.4 metres.

Lesson 5: *God is in control and, whether He is using the gravitational pull of a super moon or not, we can trust Him to send Jesus back at the appropriate time.*

Japanese Government "deplores" Israeli settlement building

LEAVING aside these discussions on the natural world, it is interesting to note that the Japanese Government issued the following two-part statement on 11 March 2010:

- 1 The Government of Japan deplores the decisions of the Government of Israel to give permission for the construction of 1,600 housing units in East Jerusalem in addition to 112 units in the West Bank just after the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships' acceptance of the start of indirect talks. The Government of Japan does not recognise any act that prejudices the final status of Jerusalem and the territories in the pre-1967 borders. Japan demands that the plans should not be implemented.
- 2 The Government of Japan continues to request strongly that both parties will act in a way that enhances mutual confidence. Japan sincerely hopes that the indirect talks in the peace process will swiftly develop into the resumption of direct talks between the two parties.⁵

Eleven months later, in February 2011, the Japanese Government re-affirmed their position and issued an official statement urging Israel "to refrain from any unilateral act that changes the current situation in East Jerusalem," thus

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4. http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2011/16mar_supermoon/.
 5. http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2010/3/0311_01.html.

consolidating their position from a year earlier.⁶

Exactly one year from the original declaration, Japan has been struck by its biggest earthquake since records began. Not only this, but a tsunami that was bigger than had previously been thought possible ravaged the northeastern coastal area. This has resulted in widespread destruction, loss of life and the Fukushima nuclear disaster, leading to a potential environmental disaster and national disruption to energy supplies. Half-a-million people are homeless, 2 million households without power and 1.4 million without water. Just one of these disasters would trouble the most sophisticated nations on earth, yet Japan has suffered multiple disasters simultaneously.⁷

During the first week after the main earthquake there were several aftershocks, some as big as 6 on the Richter Scale. It is no wonder that Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan stated, "This is the greatest emergency Japan has faced since the Second World War."

Lesson 6: *God is still fulfilling His promise to Abraham, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Gen. 12:3).*

An internet search for "Japan aftershock" brought some surprising results. Most of the articles focused on the effect of the earthquake on the global

economy. One of the UK Sunday papers declared, "Men's hearts failing them for fear . . ." as it discussed how the markets might react (*Sunday Times*, 13 Mar.). The markets fell by over sixteen per cent very quickly, but have since recovered to a degree, although volatility remains high.

Lesson 7: *There are many ways in which men's hearts will fail them. If our trust is in the Lord, we need not fear; no matter what befalls us now, our focus is on the coming Kingdom of God.*

PS: Turmoil in the Middle East continues

WHILE we have been looking at the 'big news,' Israel intercepted fifty tons of armaments bound for Gaza, and the UN passed a resolution on Libya, supported by the USA, Britain and France—with Germany and Russia, amongst others, abstaining. Following the UN resolution, Russian Prime Minister Putin condemned the military action, likening it to a "medieval call to a crusade" and an unacceptable intrusion into the internal affairs of a sovereign state.⁸ He went on to say that Russia viewed this type of action as a potential threat that vindicated the recent Kremlin decision to commence a \$650 billion rearmament programme.⁹

We must remember to keep watching, even while other 'big

news' seems to be taking over. We see the nations aligning as Scripture predicts, and the Lord Jesus Christ will come as a thief, so let us watch, pray and be ready and waiting.

Other sources:

- <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1365821/Japan-earthquake-tsunami-Earths-day-length-shortened-axis-tilted-25cm.html>
- <http://www.universetoday.com/84068/japan-quake-may-have-shortened-earth-days-moved-axis/>
- <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/124601/20110319/super-moon-march-19.htm>
- <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/122052/20110313/japan-earth-axis-shift-quake-supermoon-moon-gravitation-ring-of-fire-pacific.htm>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12725513>
- <http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/natural-disasters/tsunami-profile/>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_earthquakes_in_Japan

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6. <http://www.panorientnews.com/en/news.php?k=757>.
 7. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/isfree/2011/mar/18/editorial-japan-earthquake-many-aftershocks>.
 8. <http://themoscownews.com/policies/20110321/188512035.html>.
 9. AFP, 17.03.2011.

The purpose of prophecy

Fulfilled prophecy:

- establishes the existence of God
- establishes that the Bible is the God's Word
- enables us to believe that prophecies about God's Kingdom will be fulfilled
- demonstrates that God is at work in the world
- shows us where we are in God's plan.

Tony Benson, *The Pen of a Ready Writer*, p. 80