

When the Earth Moves: Pray for the People of Japan

Monday, March 14, 2011

There can be few more frightening experiences than an earthquake, and last Friday's quake that has devastated Japan will rank among the strongest ever recorded. Ranking 9.0 on the scale of magnitude, the Sendai, Japan quake ranks fifth among earthquakes in recorded history, coming after the 1960 quake in Chile (9.5), the 1964 quake at Prince William Sound, Alaska (9.2), the deadly Sumatra, Indonesia quake of 2004 (9.1), and the 1952 quake at Kamchatka, Russia (9.0).

But then, adding misery and terror to the devastating damage caused by the earthquake, a massive tsunami caused by the quake inundated countless miles of Japan's coastline, taking several villages completely out to sea. The loss of energy caused by the quake and tsunami then led to another looming disaster — at least a partial meltdown of the reactor cores at two, and possibly more, nearby nuclear power plants. As if all that was not enough, a volcano in southern Japan erupted on Sunday, underlining that fact that the island nation rests atop the Pacific's feared "Ring of Fire."



Japan is perched on the edge of the Tuscarora Deep, a cleft in the earth's crust five miles in depth that runs alongside the nation's coastline. The massive stresses that build up along the Tuscarora Deep produce the historic earthquakes that Japan has experienced throughout its history — but never before so severe as on Friday.

The death toll from the disaster is not yet known, but early on Monday the Japanese government warned that the loss of life would likely be far greater than first thought. The deaths are not likely to come even close to the 230,000 who died in the 2004 Indonesian earthquake and tsunami, but the suffering and grief will be incalculable. The economic devastation to Japan may exceed that of any previous natural disaster anywhere in the world.

Japan is the most disaster-ready nation on earth. Its building codes, warning systems, emergency services, and disaster response teams are the best in the world. But there was no amount of human planning that could have stopped this destruction. This disaster lies far outside the range of human control or preparedness.

We must pray for the people of Japan. We must pray for the lives that can be saved and for the grieving families who have lost loved ones. We must pray that this horrible disaster may be used to call the people of Japan to the Lord as their only hope and refuge. The nation is still shaped by its Shinto, Buddhist, and Animist roots.

Disasters like this often bring out the most reckless forms of theologizing. The earthquake and tsunami are indeed horrifying reminders that this world shows all the marks of God's judgment on sin, and that the whole creation groans under the weight of sin.

Nevertheless, Jesus warned his disciples about drawing the conclusion that a natural disaster can be traced to the sins of those who directly suffer its effects (Luke 13:1-5). God causes the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). We must remember that when we read the headlines and see the images of a disaster wherever it may happen.

In 1755, a great earthquake devastated Lisbon, Portugal, causing great loss of life throughout the Iberian Peninsula.

This tragedy caused many Europeans, recently shaken by the secularism of the early Enlightenment, to abandon their belief in God. This just compounds the tragedy. We must affirm both the sovereign power and the loving character of God, and that means that we must know that disasters like this will test both our faith and our faithfulness.

The people of Japan are now on our hearts. We must pray for them even as we do all within our power to help. And then, when the grieving turns to the hard work of recovery and rebuilding, the true test for American Christians will be whether our commitment to the Gospel of Christ will lead to a renewed effort to reach the nation of Japan with the message of Jesus Christ, the Solid Rock.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

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